Chapter I

Introduction

The status of women has been defined by the United Nations as the “conjunction of position a women occupies as worker, student, wife, mother…. of the power and prestige attached to these positions, and of the right and duties she is expected to exercise.”¹ The term status denotes the position of an individual in a social system and also encompasses in itself the notion of rights and obligation in terms of power, authority and grading.² The Oxford Dictionary has defined the term Status as the social, legal or professional position of somebody or something in relation to others. According to Merriam Webster dictionary, Status is the position or rank in relation to others or relative rank in a hierarchy of prestige or the condition of a person or thing in the eyes of the law or state or condition with respect to circumstances. It is widely accepted that the status of women in a society is the most important criteria for estimating the degree of civilization attained by a particular society in various periods of its history.³

It is difficult to conceptualize women as a group because women everywhere in the world do not enjoy the same status or position in the society. Women have always been a majority of the population yet their status has been that of the oppressed minority. The truth, however, was that History as written and perceived up to now was the history of a minority. Excluded from positions of power, both political

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¹Quoted in, K.S Chakraborty, Empowerment and Status of Women in Tripura, New Delhi, 2008, p.xiii.
³Kiran Devendra, Changing Status of Women in India, Delhi, 1994, p.32.
and economic, yet women as members of families, as wives and daughter, have often been closer to actual power than many a man. Thus, while making inquiry into the history of women, it is useful to deal with the status of women at any given time. A distinction must be made among their economic, family, political and legal status. Their class position may also be given consideration. These different categories of status, possessed by women thus make the subject ‘women’ complex. Hence, in the words of Gerda Lerner, ‘No single Methodology and conceptual framework can fit the complexities of the historical experience of all women.’ Women have been neglected for centuries for their lives have focused on bearing and rearing children thus isolating themselves within the confines of the family. Consequently, they have rarely been in positions of power and autonomy. Women have been accorded importance and recognition ‘only when women behaved in ways usually regarded as masculine…’ Similarly; they have had a history only when they enter the world of men. Only exceptional women make history for the fact that they have frequently been the objects of history rather than historical subjects. Women have always been disadvantaged compared to men in almost all spheres of life. They have been discriminated systematically in their access to food, work, education and healthcare and in opportunities to participate in development, to lead, think, dream and realize their dreams. They are and have remained through millennia, truly the world’s largest minority.

What women had done, experienced or their relations between men and women have gone unrecorded, neglected and most unfortunately ignored. History writing till very recent times and even today has seen women as being only in the

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peripheries of the making of human civilization. Thus as Gerda Lerner puts it, “The recorded and interpreted record of the past of the human race is only a partial record, in that it omits the past of half of humankind and it is distorted (because) it tells the story from the viewpoint of the male, half of humanity only.” Because, historians have traditionally used records left behind by formal institutions and organizations (and such organizations and institutions have been male dominated because of the patriarchal nature of society since written history began), the life of the women has obviously been wiped out of history writing.

Interest in women’s position in the past began to grow with the growth of the women’s movement because women themselves sought to know themselves as women and not as the patriarchal world defined them and projected them. This new found spirit of inquiry brought in a major revolution into the whole world of philosophy and ideas because the earlier existing fields and methods of enquiry came to be critiqued as being insufficient to understand social realities in their totality. It is absolutely impossible that progress in human society could have been achieved without the equal participation of the women who form about half the society.

Role refers to assigned tasks of an individual performed in a particular position in the social structure. Members of every society more or less perform certain tasks individually and collectively within the framework of its cultural system. Role, in a wider sense, refers to a pattern of behavior structured around specific rights and duties expected to be performed by a person in a particular position or situation within a group or social institution. H. Nimkoff defines role as “a set of socially expected

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7 Manorama Sharma, op.cit., pp. 403- 404.
and approved behavior pattern consisting of both duties and privileges, associated with a particular position in a group.” \(^8\) Thus, role is a behavior pattern expected by others of an individual in a given location of social structure because each member has duties to other members as they have the privilege of being a member of the social group. According to P. William Scott, a person’s role in any situation is defined by the set expectations for his behavior held by others and by the person himself. \(^9\) Hence, an individual in a particular position knows what tasks are to be accomplished by him or her and how they are to be performed; and that’s how individuals interact in terms of role with each other. Therefore, the social structure comprises of a network of such reciprocal role performance and each member of the society was expected to render duties and obligation to their fellow members. Thus, individuals perform certain functions associated with the occupations they hold, which are definable in a positional order. The whole social system is based on such positional divisions in which each individual is assigned a particular function to be performed in accordance with their position so as to meet their requirements in social life which are reflected in how people are expected to perform their duties and responsibilities in a particular position and how they accomplish them.

The term ‘status’ on the other hand, refers to a position. R.M MacIver opines status as the social position that determines for its possessor apart from his personal attributes or social services, a degree of respect, prestige and influence. \(^10\) Therefore, status determines the expectations of role performance of an individual. Status is often distinguished from and related to other positions through its assigned rights and obligations. Hence, it is explained in terms of superiority or inferiority and is

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associated with rank, class and profession. Status, in a sense, implies a location in the system of social relationship.

Role and Status are inseparably interwoven and the role of a person varies with change of his status. The Status of a person is high or low in accordance with the importance of the role played by the person. Ralph Linton who developed the classic idea of distinction between status and role through his ‘The Study of Man’ opined that role is the dynamic aspect of status. As such, role is the totality of the entire cultural pattern associated with a particular status. Therefore, status of an individual was generally determined by social evaluation on the basis of such attributes or qualities. When a person, for instance, possesses such attributes which are not possessed by other members of the same group, that individual is often accorded higher status than the others.

In every cultural group, roles are assigned to men and women differently and women are accorded lower status than men. The reasons for this discrimination have been explained by different thinkers from different theoretical perspectives but none of the theories is complete in itself to explain the causes of differentiation of roles and status between male and female. Both biological and cultural values appear to have work together in forming the causes of role and status differentiation between men and women during different stages of social development. It is, therefore, essential to study the different cultural groups for understanding the phenomenon in its true perspective.

**Arunachal Pradesh**

Arunachal Pradesh, the land of the rising sun, is situated in the North-Eastern tip of India. The state has about 1630 km long international border, bounded on the
North by China, on the East by Myanmar, on the South by the states of Assam and Nagaland and on the West by Bhutan. The State had to go through a series of constitutional process and development to acquire the present status. During the period of British Rule, the area was loosely administered as the North East Frontier Tract created in 1914 as an excluded area of the province of Assam because it was decided in 1914 that the Assam Frontier Tracts Regulation of 1880 would extend to some hill tracts inhabited by the tribes of what is now known as Arunachal Pradesh. The North East Frontier Tracts were separated from the then Darrang and Lakhimpur districts of Assam which comprised of three administrative units, namely the Central and Eastern Sections, the Lakhimpur Tract and the Western Section.

The Central and Eastern Sections was renamed as the Sadiya Frontier Tract and the Western Section as the Balipara Frontier Tract in 1919. However, in 1937, these three Frontier Tracts came to be known collectively as the Excluded Areas of the province of Assam under the provision of section 91(1) of the Government of India Act, 1935.11 A new administrative unit called the Tirap Frontier Tract comprising certain areas of the Lakhimpur Frontier Tract and the Sadiya Frontier Tract came into existence in 1943. From 1948, the North East Frontier Tract (NEFT) was placed under direct administration of the Union Government and was again divided into Sadiya Frontier Tract, Lakhimpur Frontier Tract, Tirap Frontier Tract, Sela Sub Agency, Subansiri Frontier Tract and Tuensang Frontier Tract. This territory was included in the Sixth Schedule in 1950.

In 1954, NEFT was renamed as North East Frontier Agency (NEFA) after the introduction of the North East Frontier (Administration) Regulation and brought

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11 State Gazetteer of Arunachal Pradesh, Volume 1, Itanagar, 2010, p.3.
under the administration of Ministry of External Affairs. However in 1957, the
Tuensang Frontier Division was excluded from NEFA to join Nagaland. In 1965, the
territory of NEFA was transferred to the Ministry of Home Affairs and the
nomenclature of the original Divisions was changed into 5 administrative districts,
namely: Kameng, Subansiri, Siang, Lohit and Tirap named after the major rivers
flowing through each district. In 1972, NEFA was renamed Arunachal Pradesh with
Union Territory Status. Since then the Territory has been reorganized under
Arunachal Pradesh Re-organisation of Districts Act 1980. Therefore, since attaining
Statehood on 20th February 1987 as the Twenty Fourth State of Union of India, the
original districts have been further divided into sixteen districts by bi-furcating the
areas of Kameng, Subansiri, Siang, Lohit and Tirap districts. These are Tawang, West
Kameng, East Kameng, Kurung Kume, Papumare, Lower Subansiri, Upper
Subansiri, West Siang, East Siang, Upper Siang, Dibang Valley, Lower Dibang
Valley, Lohit, Anjaw, Changlang and Tirap with the State’s capital town at Itanagar in
Papumare district. At present, there are twenty districts with the creation of four
new districts namely Kra Daadi, Siang, Namsai and Longding as shown in Table 1.1.
The state has sixty members in the State Legislative Assembly. And three elected
members to Indian Parliament; two in Lok Sabha and one in Rajya Sabha. There are
only two women elected representative in the 60 member house of Legislative
Assembly for a population in which female population is more than 6 lakhs.
Nationwide the entire North East has the lowest percentage of women in the political
representation.
TABLE 1.1

Districts in Arunachal Pradesh

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl.no</th>
<th>District</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Sex Ratio</th>
<th>Literacy Rate</th>
<th>Headquarter</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Anjaw</td>
<td>21,167</td>
<td>839</td>
<td>56.46</td>
<td>Hawai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Changlang</td>
<td>148226</td>
<td>926</td>
<td>59.80</td>
<td>Changlang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Dibang Valley</td>
<td>8004</td>
<td>813</td>
<td>64.10</td>
<td>Anini</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>East Siang</td>
<td>99214</td>
<td>979</td>
<td>72.54</td>
<td>Pasighat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>East Kameng</td>
<td>78690</td>
<td>1029</td>
<td>60.02</td>
<td>Seppa</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Kurung Kumey</td>
<td>92076</td>
<td>1031</td>
<td>48.75</td>
<td>Koloriang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Lohit</td>
<td>145726</td>
<td>912</td>
<td>68.18</td>
<td>Tezu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Lower Dibang Valley</td>
<td>54080</td>
<td>928</td>
<td>69.13</td>
<td>Roing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Lower Subansiri</td>
<td>83030</td>
<td>984</td>
<td>74.35</td>
<td>Ziro</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Papum Pare</td>
<td>176573</td>
<td>980</td>
<td>79.95</td>
<td>Yupia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District</td>
<td>Population</td>
<td>Density</td>
<td>Population Growth</td>
<td>District</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tawang</td>
<td>49977</td>
<td>714</td>
<td>59.00</td>
<td>Tawang</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tirap</td>
<td>111975</td>
<td>944</td>
<td>52.19</td>
<td>Khonsa</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper Siang</td>
<td>35320</td>
<td>889</td>
<td>59.99</td>
<td>Yingkiong</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper Subansiri</td>
<td>83448</td>
<td>998</td>
<td>63.80</td>
<td>Daporijo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Kameng</td>
<td>83947</td>
<td>836</td>
<td>67.07</td>
<td>Bomdila</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Siang</td>
<td>112274</td>
<td>930</td>
<td>66.46</td>
<td>Aalo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Longding*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Longding</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Siang*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Nyobo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Namsai*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Namsai</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kra Daadi*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Jamin</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Based on Statistical Abstract of Arunachal Pradesh 2014

*Indicates new districts compiled by the researcher

Arunachal Pradesh occupies an area of approximately 83,743 sq. km inhabited by 138,3727 persons of whom 713912 are males and 669815 are females.\textsuperscript{12} The state is thinly populated; the density of population per sq. km being 17 persons is quite low as compared to the country’s population density of 382 persons per sq. km. The state

has achieved a literacy rate of 65.38 percent in 2011, that is, 766005 persons being literate. Out of which 439868 are males, i.e 72.55 percent and 326137 are females i.e 57.70 percent. \(^{13}\) Literacy in the state is disappointing with only 60 percent of literate citizens; it is one of the states in India having lowest literacy. On the positive side, the literacy has increased since 2001 by more than 10 percent which was 54.34 percent in 2001, male literacy rate was 63.83 percent and female literacy rate was 43.53 percent. Moreover, the increase in female literacy is greater than that of males. Majority of the population, that is, 77.06 percent live in rural areas. The urban population of the state is 317369 and the rural population is 1066358. The decennial growth of population from 2001 to 2011 is 26.03 percent. \(^{14}\) For the first time since independence, the absolute increase in population was more in urban areas than in rural areas according to Census Report of 2011. The Gender Ratio of the state is 938 per 1000 males. In the urban areas, the Sex Ratio was dissatisfactory as compared to the rural areas. Compared to the Sex Ratios of other North Eastern States, Meghalaya-989, Manipur-985, Mizoram-976, Tripura-960, Assam-958, Nagaland-931, Sikkim-890 (lowest Sex Ratio), Arunachal Pradesh has the third lowest Sex Ratio among these states despite marginal increase from Census Report of 2001 but it is still below the National average of 943. The Child Sex Ratio of the State is 972 females per 1000 males according to Census Report of 2011 which is a positive sign.

The State has one Central University, one National Institute of Technology and one Deemed University. There are 18 Degree colleges, 12 of them are Government colleges and 6 of them are privately managed. There are 9 professional or technical colleges out of which 1 are run by the Government and 9 are managed by the Private

\(^{13}\) Ibid.
\(^{14}\) Ibid.
institutions. Out of two polytechnics in the State, 1 is run by the Government and the other is privately managed. There are 138 Higher Secondary Schools out of which 90 are Government schools and 48 are Private run schools, out of 227 Secondary schools, 142 are run by the Government and 85 are Private schools. Out of 1121 Middle schools, 889 are Government Schools and 232 are Private Schools and out of 2226 Primary Schools, 2025 are Government Schools and 201 are Private schools. The total number of recognized Educational Institutions in the State is given below in Table 1.2.

**TABLE 1.2**

**Recognized Educational Institutions in Arunachal Pradesh**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Institutions</th>
<th>Government</th>
<th>Others</th>
<th>Total Number of Institutions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>University</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Institute of Technology</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deemed University</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree Colleges</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>06</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional/Technical Colleges</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>08</td>
<td>09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polytechnic Colleges</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher Secondary Schools</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classification</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arunachal State Hospital</td>
<td>01</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service Type</td>
<td>Number</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Hospital</td>
<td>06</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District Hospital</td>
<td>07</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Health Centre</td>
<td>63</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary Health Centre</td>
<td>143</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub Centre</td>
<td>584</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dispensaries</td>
<td>02</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ayurvedic Institutions</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homoeopathic Institutions</td>
<td>96</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Welfare Centres</td>
<td>306</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The State of Arunachal Pradesh is a land of rivers and forest, deep gorges and mountains. It is remarkable for its wide altitudinal range rising from the swampy riverine tracts to temperate forests and high alpine pastures and Snow Mountains. It is considered as one of the 12 mega diversity (Hot Spots) in the world. The pristine beauty of the land and the culture of a tribal world hidden deep in these hills have lured explorers and travellers since the area began to open up late at the turn of the last century. The State is a home for as many as 26 different tribes of Indo Mongoloid stock with sub tribes and minor tribes totalling more than a 100 different communities, speaking as many as 42 different dialects.\textsuperscript{15} Some of the Principal

\textsuperscript{15} State Gazetteer, \textit{op.cit.}
Inhabitants are Adi, Galo, Memba, Khamba inhabiting in West, East and Upper Siang Districts, Monpa, Miji, Aka, Khowa or Bugun, Sherdukpen in Tawang, West Kameng and East Kameng districts, Nyish, Tagin, Apatani in Lower and Upper Subansiri districts, Tangsa, Wancho, Nocte in Tirap, Longding and Changlang districts. Singpho, Khampti, Mishmi (Digaru, Miju and Idu) in Lohit, Dibang Valley and Lower Dibang Valley districts. The population is sparse and scattered even though the State is the largest of the Eight North Eastern Sister States. Human habitation is grouped into three main areas: the Northern, the Central and the Southern or foothills belt adjacent to the plains of Assam. In the Northern belt, the influence is predominantly Mahayana Buddhist among the Monpa, Sherdukpen, Khamba and Memba tribes of the districts bordering Bhutan and Tibet. The Hinayana sect holds sway among the Khampti and Singpho communities of Lohit and Bordumsa-Miao circle of Changlang district. In the Central belt, the tribes primarily practice the Donyi- Polo faith and claim common descent from Abo Tani, the legendary ancestor of mankind. The Population density is also the highest in the Central belt.

The Traditional society in Arunachal Pradesh had regulated their social, cultural and political affairs through their traditional form of village self government. Every tribe in the state had its own pattern of village local self government that has been functioning as effective village government and these traditional institutions are still alive. It is known differently among the different tribes and differs considerably in its working from tribe to tribe. It is known as Kebang among the Adi, Buliang among the Apatani, Mangmajom or Mangjombana among the Monpa, Mokchup among the Khampti, Raiz or Melley among the Aka, Jung among the Sherdukpen, Nyeele among the Nyish, Ngothun among the Nocte, Nimiyang among the Bugun or Khowa, Abbala, Kabaya and Pharai among the Mishmi and Tra-Tungdai among the
Singpho and so on. They used to follow the constitution of their traditional village self government which was not written but passed on orally from one generation to next. The administration of the traditional village self governments sustained the coherence and the solidarity of the villages. The justice used to be delivered to the people on time and in an inexpensive way. Because of the village local self governance the autonomy of a village was maintained. The customary or traditional laws framed and practised by the village councils are held in high esteem even today.

The Society in Arunachal Pradesh is patriarchal and patrilineal. Each tribe has their own distinctive culture, customs, language and traditions. The tribes of Arunachal Pradesh are endogamous and strictly follow the rule of clan exogamy for marriage purposes. Marriage was virtually dependent upon the payment of *bride price* to the bride’s parents.\(^\text{16}\) It was usually paid in kind in the form of cattle, clothes and utensils. In return, the bride’s parents offered some movable properties in the form of marriage gifts keeping in view the amount of bride price to balance it. Among the Miji, the marriage gift should not be more than the bride price otherwise it would lose the prestige of the groom’s family.\(^\text{17}\) Amongst the Monpa, if the groom was unable to pay the bride price during the marriage ceremony, the couple themselves paid the bride price when they were in a position to make the payment but if they failed in doing so; their son had to pay the bride price. This indicates that the payment of bride price was transferable to another generation in the Monpa society.\(^\text{18}\)

\(^{16}\) The term bride price is contentious among various scholars. Some prefer to refer it as bride asset, bride wealth etc.


Due to the existence of patriarchal and patrilineal system in the state, women were subordinated to men in customary laws particularly in terms of property rights as well as inheritance of property which was similar among the various tribes with minor variations. Moreover, there was a difference in the customary law governing inheritance between male and female. It did not give any privileged position to women. Women have very limited right to own property amongst the various tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. Normally women were not entitled to the share of immovable family property such as land and house. They were given share of only movable property in the form of ornaments such as beads, rings, lockets and necklaces, clothing, utensils, valuable brass plates and in some cases, livestock and other household articles were also given. Most of the tribes respect women’s exclusive right over gifts received from parents in marriage particularly ornaments. Women generally had complete freedom to spend the income earned by them through supplementary activities such as weaving, knitting, raising poultry, cattle, pigs, selling vegetables and rice beer. The right of a widow having children over her husband’s property was only usufructuary. However, a widow without any child was not allowed to inherit her husband’s property. In most of the cases, she was allowed to marry the younger brother of her deceased husband in order to retain or inherit her husband’s property, if they were willing to do so. In that case, the ownership of property would automatically go to the younger brother who married the widow and took care of her. Among the Nyishi, a widow could also marry her elder step-son to retain her husband’s property. In case a widow was married to a person outside her deceased husband’s family or relatives, she loses all rights and privileges as she could not claim any right over her husband’s property. In that case, the property would go to her son, if any or if there was no son, the property would go to her deceased husband’s
relatives. If a widow had no male issue, the property would go to the other male heirs of the clan. A widow having a female child and remains unmarried in the deceased husband’s house had no right over her deceased husband’s landed property but she could use the property till her death or as long as she stayed with the family to maintain herself and her child but she could not sell it according to her own will, without the prior approval of male members of the deceased husband’s clan. For instance, among the Tagin, a widow could not sell her husband’s property to anyone except the relatives of the deceased husband.\(^{19}\) A divorced woman had no right to inherit her divorced husband’s property. However, in most of the tribes such as Tangsa, Nocte, Singpho, the husband was liable to pay the bride price to the parents of the woman. In most of the cases, a woman had the right to claim equal shares of properties that have been earned during their conjugal life. When a wife initiated a divorce, she could neither put any claim on her husband’s property nor ask for or demand any compensation. In case of mutual divorce, no compensation or fine was required to be paid. Among the Khowa/Bugun, if the divorce was by mutual consent then all their movable personal belongings was divided equally between them but if it was initiated by the wife and then she remarried, her new husband would have to pay double the amount of the original bride price to the divorced husband.\(^{20}\) An unmarried woman had absolute right over her own earnings and personal belongings in all the tribes.

Women were generally free to take part in social, cultural and religious functions. There were well known women priests and practitioners of traditional medicine. In some of the tribes, the active participation of women in the religious

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\(^{19}\) Sindhu Phadke, *Women’s Status in North-Eastern India*, New Delhi, 2008, p.151.
performance was restricted and the priestly functions were performed by men only. But amongst the Buddhist tribes, there was no hard and fast restriction in participation. Women could become nuns by taking an oath of celibacy. They could perform religious services like the monks but they were debarred from having the vision of certain images of wrathful deities who were kept covered with linen.21

There were also a few gompas run by the nuns. In religious rituals and ceremonies, women’s role was generally confined to brewing rice-beer, supply and distribution of food stuffs and entertaining the participants. However, among the Khowa (Bugun), strict prohibition was imposed upon women during the preparation of home brewed liquor that was required for the celebration of their annual festival kashyat sowai. Such drinks were prepared by young boys or girls who have not attained puberty.22

Cutting of big trees, touching of dead bodies and digging graves were also strictly prohibited for women in the Khowa society. Women could freely participate in the singing and dancing associated with the festivals except purely religious dance as amongst the Monpa and Sherdukpen. In the monastic dance or Aje Lhamu dance, the participants were only men. Even the Dhormjih dance which was solemnized for the welfare of the Miji community, women were not allowed to participate in it. Religion played almost no role with regard to food habits except among the Buddhist tribes. Although during pregnancy and child birth, some restriction were prescribed on women such as she could not touch the hunting gear of men or anything associated with neither ritual purpose nor cook food for others. Besides, her movement was restricted to certain areas of the house and the meat of certain animals such as squirrel, wild boar or animals killed by poison arrows were avoided. The period of

22 R.K Deuri, *op.cit.*, p.82.
taboo varied from tribe to tribe. In Idu society, women did not eat fish, onions, wild animals and birds when a person died in the same village. Women in Idu society were also restricted from eating meat of four footed animals like pig, goat, mithun, buffalo, or deer until they became mothers.

During community festivals which occurred almost every month in the state such as Mopin of the Galo tribe, Solung of Adi, Losar of Monpa, Si-Donyi of Tagin, Nyokum Yullo of Nyishi, Dree of Apatani, Chalo Loku of Nocte, Sangken of Khampti, Tamladu, Reh of Mishmi, Mol-Moh of the Tangsa, Chindang of the Miji and Nyetshidow of the Aka/Hrusso. Women actively and freely participated in the celebration. Women were also the backbone of the traditional economy as agricultural activities like sowing of seeds; transplanting and weeding were done by women. Women had to work in the irrigated paddy field throughout the day among the Apatani and their young girls generally work in the paddy fields in rotation in form of a group of eight to ten girls of the same age group. This practice was known as Patang. Other secondary means of traditional livelihood such as weaving, rearing of livestock and poultry were solely dependent on women. Weaving was an exclusively household craft of women amongst all the tribes of the state. They had their own distinctive dresses. Each tribe had a distinct pattern or design which reflected the social and religious systems. Motifs were drawn from everyday life and from the world around them and from myths and legends. Women were skillful weavers and their weaving designs displayed excellence of high order. They wove beautiful multi colored shawls, bags and skirts in different colours, jackets and blankets. Carpet making was also a traditional craft of the Monpa women.
In the Political organization, the traditional village councils were composed of male members only. Women were generally deprived of active participation in the decision making process as their participation in the proceedings of the village council was very much restricted. Though they were allowed to participate, they had no part or say in important matters. They could grace the council’s meeting and could express their grievances when they were asked for. B.B Pandey in his book, The Buguns, a tribe in Transition had pointed out that women were allowed to participate in the village council proceedings in the absence of the head male member of the family in some cases. But they were not allowed to participate in the capacity of Thap-Bukhaw or head of the village council.\footnote{B.B Pandey, \textit{The Buguns, a Tribe in Transition}, Itanagar, 1996, p.75.} There was notable exception among the Aka tribe where the Aka Rani could attend and actively participate in the village council known as Mele and the views expressed by her had much importance. However, the actual role of the Aka Rani in the political and administrative sphere was very formal.\footnote{Raghuvir Sinha, \textit{The Aka}, Department of Research, Itanagar, 1988, p.83.}

The Women’s Movement in the State has been initiated by the enlightened and educated women. The State level organization of women is known as All Arunachal Pradesh Women Welfare Society (APWWS) which was formed on 10 October 1979 with representatives of all the tribe of the state.\footnote{Interview with Yapi Kaye Taggu, Chief Co-ordinator, Central Executive Committee, APWWS at Naharlagun on 20/12/2012} It was officially registered under the Societies Act in 1981. Its Headquarter is at the state capital, Itanagar. Since its inception, APWWS has taken up various measures for the upliftment of Women. They have given special emphasis on eradication of the social evils such as forced marriage, child marriage, polygamy and for better educational opportunities for women. They have undertaken projects such as water and sanitation awareness project
known as WATSAN and also organized legal awareness programme on social justice and women empowerment. The struggle of APWWS for equality of opportunities and empowerment in the field of economic, political and social to some extent has been achieved in the form of establishment of APSCW in 2005, Gender Budgeting from 2011, inclusion of 33 percent reservation in Panchayat Raj Institutions, establishment of Women Police Station in the capital city, Itanagar and district headquarters, appointment of women member in the State Civil Service Commission and State Information Commission were some of the landmark achievements which APWWS has been able to highlight and enable the policy makers to implement and achieve gender equality. At present, there are more than 30 branches of APWWS and affiliated bodies which are working under the banner of APWWS. The State Commission for Women is known as Arunachal Pradesh State Commission for Women (APSCW). It was constituted by the Government of Arunachal Pradesh under the Arunachal Pradesh State Act 2005 in accordance with the purpose of protecting the interest of women and to guarantee their progress and development. It is a Statutory Commission which had commenced work from 17th of January 2005. The APSCW had organized a series of activities such as Awareness programme; Capacity Building and Workshops. They have organized legal awareness programme at various districts of the state on Domestic Violence Act 2005, Posco Act 2012, Trafficking of women and children, bonded and child labour, child marriage and forced marriage, polygamy, compulsory marriage registration, maternity benefit act 1961, importance of nutrition for women and children, importance of education, health and hygiene, livelihood, free legal aid and rights of women, women helpline and short stay home provisions, opium cultivation and its impact on women and children. Workshops were also conducted on status of customary laws on marriage, divorce and inheritance and
its implication on status of women, sexual harassment at workplace and strategizing advocacy for effective implementation of women friendly laws. There are also a number of NGOs working for the welfare of women in the State such as The Arunachal Pradesh Social Welfare Advisory Board and Oju Welfare Association are some of them.

**East Siang District: A Profile**

The erstwhile Siang District was bi-furcated into two separate districts namely East Siang and West Siang in 1980. Thus, East Siang district came into being. The District derives its present name from the mighty Siang River which is the principal river of this region. It is known as Tsangpo in Tibet and Brahmaputra in the plains of Assam. Pasighat, the oldest town of the state is the head quarter of East Siang District. It was the first administrative circle which was opened in the year 1911. The beginning of administrative development of the area is traced back to the Government of India’s Notification of 1914 wherein the area became a part of Central Section of North East Frontier Tract. In 1919, Central Section along with Eastern Section of the same tract was re-designated as the Sadiya Frontier Tract, which was, in 1948, bifurcated into two separate administrative charges namely the Abor hills district and the Mishmi hills district. Under the regulation of 1954, the Abor hills district was renamed as the Siang frontier division, which in turn was renamed as the Siang district in 1965. Further through Arunachal Pradesh (re-organization of districts) Act, 1980 (Act no. 3 of 1980), Siang district was bi-furcated into East Siang and West Siang district with it’s headquarter at Pasighat and Along respectively. Again, East Siang district was bifurcated into two districts East Siang and Upper Siang with its headquarters at Pasighat and Yingkiong respectively. Siang district was again created
by curving out from East Siang District in 2015. The District is bounded by Upper Siang on the North, Assam in the South, Lower Dibang Valley in the East and West Siang in the West. It presents a remarkable topographical variety and is bestowed with abundant natural resources.

**Population**

The total geographical area of the district is 3603 sq. km. As per the Census Report of 2011, the district has a population of 99214 persons of which 50116 are males and 49098 are females of the total population of the district. The total figure of population living in the rural areas of the district is 71579 out of which 36147 are males while remaining 35432 are females. The urban population comprised of 27635 out of which 13969 are males and 13666 are females. The percentage of urban population in the district is 27.85 percent as compared to 22.94 percent of the state. The population growth rate recorded for the decade 2001 to 2011 was 13.52 percent. The population growth rate of the males was 10.72 percent, that is, 4851 whereas for females it was recorded at 16.53 percent, that is, 6966.

**Density and sex ratio**

According to the Census Report of 2011, the density of the population of the district was 28 persons per sq. km. whereas it was recorded as 24 persons per sq. km in 2001. The Sex Ratio of the district is 980 per 1000 males compared to 2001 Census figure of 931. The Rural Sex Ratio of the district is 980 and the Urban Sex Ratio is 978. The average National Sex Ratio in India is 940 per 1000 males according to census report of 2011.
**Literacy rate**

The literacy rate of the district is 72.54 percent as compared to 60.73 percent of 2001. Of the 72.54 percent literates, the male holds 78.47 percent while female holds 66.49 percent literacy rate. In 2001 census, the male literacy rate stood at 68.42 percent and females at 52.42 percent. Therefore, the total literates in East Siang District stood at 62576 persons of which males comprised of 34210 and females at 28366 respectively. The Educational Institutions of the district are given in Table 1.3. It shows that there are 265 Educational Institutions in the district out of which 228 are run by the Government and 37 by other agencies.

**Table 1.4**

**Educational Institutions in East Siang District**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Institutions</th>
<th>Government</th>
<th>Others</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary School</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>08</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle School</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary School</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher Secondary School</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colleges</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>04</td>
<td>06</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Adi and Galo are the principal inhabitants of the district. The Adi are a lively people famed for their love of dance and song. They excel in the art of dance. The ponung dances of the Adi are delightful performances and these may be classified as ritual, festive and recreational. The dancers usually do not get any formal training but the young ones learn dancing by imitation of their elders. Agriculture is the main occupation of the people and the district is almost self-sufficient in the production of paddy. Rice is the staple food. Both wet-rice and terrace rice cultivation is practiced. They also practice shifting cultivation called jhum on rain fed slopes of the hills. A large quantity of oranges is also produced in the district. There is one Agricultural Training Institute known as the Gram Sevak Training Centre in the district which provides training on agriculture and rural development. A school of veterinary and animal science has also been established. According to Census Report of 2011, the district is ranked 12<sup>th</sup> in the State in respect of total area and it is placed Sixth in respect of Population. The district is also ranked third with 72.5 percent in respect to literacy. Jawaharlal Nehru College in Pasighat was the first college of the State. Almost all the villages are covered under primary education. At present, there are five assembly constituencies in the district.

In this chapter, an attempt has been made to unearth and examine the Status of women in Arunachal Pradesh with special reference to the Adi of East Siang District in historical perspective, basing on the indices viz; Share in Household Duties, Choice of Occupation, Marriage, Divorce, Traditional Social Institutions, Religion and Rituals, Property Rights and Inheritance, Health and Hygiene.

| Total | 228 | 37 | 265 |
The Traditional society of Arunachal Pradesh was mainly organized on the basis of tribe, clan or villages and the social relations were determined on the basis of kinship or locality. The role of women in different aspects of their traditional lifestyle was immense. Women of Arunachal Pradesh have been an important factor as men for the development of the society yet her status in the society was not treated equally as men. There is no society where a woman does not play any role. No society would grow or develop without the participation of women. The traditional status of women in Arunachal Pradesh particularly the Adi women of East Siang district are very difficult to ascertain due to lack of historical data.

The Early history of the Adi totally lies in obscurity mainly due to the absence of script. Therefore, the lack of script and paucity of written documents among the Adi are the major bottlenecks to understand their early history and cultural transformation which is shrouded in mystery. Though they do not have their own script, they have myths telling that they had lost it in some remote past in the course of migration from place to place. There is a lack of historical evidence about the origin and development of the Adi tribe. Nevertheless, the Adi have a keen sense of history as noted by Verrier Elwin that the Adi were great orators and have unusual powers of memory, being able to recite interminable genealogies tracing their race back to the beginning of the world. They have a sense of history and the ability not only to look into the past but forward to the future.\textsuperscript{26} Therefore, in absence of any standard historical documentation which has been traditionally considered as sources of history, one has to increasingly rely on the oral traditions of the Adis, embedded in their custom, culture, beliefs and practices while reconstructing their past.

\textsuperscript{26} Verrier Elwin, \textit{A Philosophy for NEFA}, Shillong, 1957, p.18.
The Adi possess rich oral tradition in the form of myths, legends, folklores, proverbs and sayings transmitted from generation to generation which can be used as a source material to reconstruct their early history. The oral traditions of the Adis are indeed very rich in mythology called *Abang*, which is the traditional repository of creation myth. It traces the origin of human evolution to Keyum, Yumkang, Kasi, Siang, Abo, Bomuk, Mukseng, Sedi-Melo, Diling, Dimem, Dikong, Litung, Tuye, Yepe, Pedong-Nane and finally Tani, the man. The most popular theme of the *Abang* is the origin of man and his struggle for survival. The Adi legends and folklore trace the course of their migration to their present settlements originally from the North, across the Himalayas. The real cause of their immigration cannot be ascertained. Views of various scholars differ on the subject of their migration.

In order to know the past history of the Adi better, *abang* is used as an important source material for reconstructing the history of the Adi provided it has to be interpreted correctly. Since the *abang* play a great influence on the Adi and so great importance is given to it as the socio-cultural aspirations of the Adi are attached to it. During the introductory speeches i.e *Aabe* of the Kebang-Abu or the Elders of the village council when the Kebang or village council was in session, the Kebang Abu narrated the history of the Adi at the beginning of the Kebang Session. They were gifted orators and their narratives gave a description about their first settlement, subsequent migration towards south, fight against enemies and temporary settlements and so on. Tamo Mibang had noted that during olden days, an orator with oratory skill used to provoke the whole community in order to raise arms against enemies or he

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27 Interview with Mukge Tayeng, Miri and Head priest, Golgi Bote Donyi-Polo Gangging, Itanagar on 06/06/2012.
could even hypnotise them to give up their plan for expedition. The folklores of the Adi are also a treasure of wisdom and knowledge of evolution of universe, plants and animals as well as socio-cultural life of the Adi which may be considered as a valuable wealth of oral tradition of the Adi. The folklores such as Nibo vs. Robo narrate the unseen world and the origin of the universe. Boum Kakkir narrates the story of an orphan and promotes moral teaching. The folklores of the Adi are diversified and are a replica of their socio-cultural life.

There are a large number of songs related to rituals, agriculture, festivals, lullaby and recreation. Delong song and dances are performed during Solung Etor festival by the young men. The origin of Eso or Mithun is narrated by the Delong Miri or rhapsodist and also about the creation myths. Yakjong is sung during the Unnying/Aran festival by the children. Bari is special kind of abang sung during Dorung and Unnying/Aran festivals or during the time of construction of a house by the male members. It tells us how men came on earth first and built houses and lived together. The origin of house and household activities is the theme of Bari. Yoyo Gaga is a popular lullaby among the Adi womenfolk. Nero-Aming is a song related to agriculture. Padam Nyanyi is an interesting song which gives a vivid description about the busy routine of an Adi woman. Pasi Kongki tells us about the trade relations of the Adi with Tibet. Besung Nayi depicts the relationship of monkey with humans.

Nunu-Pipi, Boying Nero gives us an idea about how cultivation was started by man by clearing the jungles, sowing seeds, weeding and harvesting. Oge ge, a popular love song mentioned about the prevailing social conditions as well as the matrimonial

\[\text{\cite{Mibang, Adi Language and Literature, Resarun, Vol.26, Department of Research, Itanagar, 2000, p.24.}}\]
relations between the Adi and Tibetan during olden days.\textsuperscript{29} Besides these, \textit{Tapu} is a war dance performed by the men whereby they narrate the history of war and victory in war. Recreational songs, \textit{Luman ponung} are also an important source to understand the contemporary society as well as history of a particular event or period. There are also many proverbs and sayings which are an integral part of the Adi oral traditions and impart moral values. They are replete with stories and proverbs on the consequences of false oath or pretensions and incestuous relations.

The Adi were known as ‘Abor’ in the past but now have discarded the appellation ‘Abor’ and its usage is now obsolete. The state administration in compliance with the popular demand accepted the nomenclature Adi denoting ‘hill people’. The Adi inhabit the Districts of East Siang, Upper Siang and Siang. They are also settled in the Districts of West Siang, Lower Dibang Valley and in some areas of Lohit District. They are structured into various ethnic sub-groups such as Minyong, Padam, Pasi, Millang, Panggi, Komkar, Karko, Shimong, Ashing, Tangam, Bori, Bokar, Ramo and Pailibo. The Minyong and Padam are, however the major sub-groups constituting the Adi tribe. Efforts are being made by the apex body of the Adi community, the Adi Baane Kebang to do away with the sub-group culture. The Galo tribe were also considered as a sub-group of the Adi earlier but now they are no longer counted as a sub-group of the Adi after assertion of their identity as an independent tribe of Arunachal Pradesh. Since the Galo were considered different in terms of traditional costumes, festivals, dialect, marriage and social institutions. Broadly speaking, the various sub-groups of the Adi tribe are bound together by similar physical features, customs, faith and beliefs, and language that in spite of dialectical

\textsuperscript{29} \textit{Ibid}, “Interpreting History through Ponung”, \textit{Proceedings of Neiha}, Eleventh Session, Imphal, 1990, p.34.
variations are fundamentally the same. There exist minor regional variations in certain aspects of customs and rules. However, the basic traditional rules are similar among the various sub-groups.

**Share in Household Duties**

Women largely performed all the household duties like cooking, pounding rice, collection of firewood, fetching water, feeding infants, rearing children, caring for the aged and sick which was prescribed by the society since time immemorial. They performed economic and non-economic activities within families. No help was rendered by the men folk in the normal household work. Household chores stretch from dawn to dusk and consist of back-breaking toil. But most time their hands remain invisible and their work was taken for granted. They had to rise early in the morning and start pounding rice, feed the birds and animals, wash the utensils, fetch water, clean the fireplaces and the house, took care of the children and performed the other household works. After that, they had to run to the fields to cultivate along with their men. On returning from the fields, they had to collect vegetables and firewood from the forest which they carried on their back. On reaching home, they had to feed the domestic animals and take care of their children. Besides they had to brew homemade rice beer, apong, receive guests, if any and cook the meal for the family. Therefore, women remained busy till every member of the family completed dinner. She was the first to leave bed and the last person to go to bed. A woman worked day and night but was often rebuked, insulted, not praised and honored for her services. Brewing of local drink, apong (rice-beer) and weaving were exclusively women’s jobs which they perform effortlessly. Brewing of apong, alcoholic beverage from rice played an important role in traditional society and its origin and usage was closely
associated with ritual and myth. It was prepared using rice, water and si-ye, that is, yeast. Two types of *apon* were prepared, one with burnt paddy husk mixed into the rice that gave the brew its characteristic black colour, taste and flavor. This was called *ennok* or black *apon*. Another common preparation was the fermentation of grain without the use of rice husk known as *noggin apong*. *Apong* or rice beer was generally prepared in large quantities and packed into baskets. Once the fermentation process was complete, the required amount was scooped out and filtered. The Adi women were good weavers. Sachin Roy in his book, Aspects of Padam Minyong Culture had noted that they were good at weaving and their taste in colour scheme and artistic designs was excellent. They wove variety of clothes like jackets, called *galuk*, skirts called *gale*, and blankets called *Gadu* or *Badu* and bags called *nyogon*. Their handicrafts, products and textile bear ample testimony to their heritage. Weaving, knitting and spinning were a household activity.\(^\text{30}\) During olden days, they used to weave war coats of different size and style out of coarse cotton yarns as well as loin cloth which was called *ugon*. The traditional female *gale* or skirt had a vertical band running down the centre which accommodated a variety of designs. They were with free ends with a number of horizontal lines running across the middle. There was vertical ornamentation in zigzag and triangular patterns at the centre by bands embroidered across the breadth of the cloth at right angles to the horizontal woven pattern. The loom that was traditionally used was the loin loom and the colours used were organic colours, prepared largely from the plants that grew in the forests. Weaving required a wealth of ecological knowledge and women were the custodians of this knowledge and to the elaborate process of spinning, dyeing and weaving. The girls were trained up in weaving during their teens which was handed down from

\(^\text{30}\) See Plate No.1, p.285.
generation to generation. Every Adi girl was expected to be an expert weaver. In the past, weaving skill was an important qualification for a girl for marriage. The society was thus, characterized by an unequal division of labour and responsibilities within the household based on unequal power relations.

**Choice of occupation**

Hunting and gathering constituted the earliest occupation of the Adi and an important part of their livelihood. Their traditional economy was primarily based on hunting, trapping, food gathering, fishing and shifting cultivation. Hunting has always been a part of the tribal tradition and was practiced by most of the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. According to one of the myth of the Adi, there was a long struggle between Nibo, the man and Robo, the spirit, who were brothers for the possession of fertile land as well as other good lands which was suitable for human habitation. Nibo emerged victorious in this struggle and occupied all the fertile lands as well as the hunting grounds.\(^{31}\) The abang which is the traditional repository of creation myth of the Adi also tells us that Kari and Toro, the two sons of Sedi-Melo were the first good hunters. Nui and Gambo were the other two great hunters who lived in the underworld and came to help Karduk in hunting and killing a wild boar.\(^{32}\) Hunting had a great social significance amongst the Adi for it stood second only to war and was considered a man’s occupation. A good hunter enjoyed special status in the society. Hence, they displayed their trophies in their houses. Besides their contribution to the collection of trophies in the Dere/Mushup, Boys’ Dormitory or Community hall was honored by the society. Their trophies also decorated their

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graves after death as it was believed that it would enhance their status in the next world.\textsuperscript{33}

There was clear cut division of labour and occupation among all the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. The Adis were not an exception. The heavier work that required more physical strength such as felling trees, collecting building materials, construction of houses and hunting were done by men. Women played a decisive role as well as performed most of the agricultural operations. Women took up agricultural activities like sowing of seeds, transplantation, weeding, harvesting and threshing. Cultivation was the chief occupation of the Adi and their economy was agrarian characterized mainly by shifting cultivation which provided just a subsistence level of economy. The main feature of shifting cultivation was the rotation of fields rather than crops. In this system, a plot of land was used only periodically, generally for two years and then abandoned to allow the natural recuperation of fertility of the soil so as to use it again after a gap of few years. Women may be called as the backbone of the traditional economy as they played a very significant role in the traditional economy which was agro-based and practiced shifting cultivation extensively. Therefore, it would not be wrong to suggest that the wife was regarded as an economic asset of the family. They practiced shifting cultivation wherein vast tracts of forest were cleared in cyclical pattern that, in time, became inextricably linked with many of the socio-cultural rituals of the Adi. A day was chosen when the Miri or priest would assemble the villagers and the rites of divination would be carried out to select an auspicious day for clearing a patch of forest. Once a day was fixed all were duty bound to take up their respective work. The implements or tools used by them in agricultural works were very simple such as yeek which was made of bamboo and cane. It was a

\textsuperscript{33} \textit{Ibid.}, p.182.
sharpened strip of bamboo of 12-16 inches in length which was folded in such a way that one end crossed over the other and made a loop at the head. The two ends were to be gripped in hand. The sharpened end was called yeek le or yeek ale which was used for sowing and the upper portion was used for weeding. It was used by both men and women. Generally they cut down the trees of the forest, burnt them when they got dried and cultivated the area by sowing the seeds. The sowing was done by a method of simple dibbling and the use of chemical fertilizer was unknown.

There were no visible fences or boundaries of land ownership yet undocumented forms of land holdings like clan, community land, joint and private holdings and hunting and fishing rights along tracts of forests and rivers existed and it was recognized by the Adi community. Other secondary means of traditional livelihood such as weaving, rearing of pigs and poultry were solely dependent upon the women folk. Livestock and poultry was reared to augment the meat supply that was dependent on laying traps and snares and catching fish, as also for the purposes of work and dairy produce. The hunting and fishing tradition did not provide for meat at all times of the year and generally rural people were treated to meat in community feasts during festivals. The meat of animals killed in a hunt was also divided amongst them and these were smoked dried and preserved to help tide over lean periods. The task performed by women was, no doubt lighter but never ending. The life of rural Adi women revolved around primitive method of agriculture, routine household chores as well as feeding the family. Despite putting in relentless work, agriculture output was low. Women set out for the fields at the break of day so the village was almost deserted after sunrise. The children were left with old people. The fields were often many hours away from the village and in order to return home before nightfall,
one had to hurry. Most of the women carried their babies on their backs and spin
cotton as they made their way to the fields and home. In the remote past, women also
played an important role in the traditional economy and they took active role in barter
exchange at the village level since barter was the usual form of exchange during olden
days as they had no contact with the cash economy that was prevalent in other parts of
the country. Initially, barter was confined mainly to the members of a community;
inter-tribe transactions were limited but not uncommon. The traditional view often
praised the role of women as wives and mothers but as individuals they were assigned
a low social position. In fact, they were seen as just adjuncts to men. For instance, a
man was permitted to have more than one wife. Moreover, they were socially and
economically dependent on men. Thus, in the traditional setting, the occupational
avenues for women were limited and hence the question of choosing occupation of
one’s choice was not relevant as there was no option for them to take up any
occupation of their choice.

**Marriage**

Monogamy was the general rule of marriage but instances of polygyny were
not rare. Marriage was not legitimate within a clan. Therefore, clans were exogamous.
A breach of the clan rules was a major offence. The rule of clan exogamy was
common to all the sub-groups of the Adi. It was strictly followed by all. Love
marriage and elopements were not uncommon. Marriage by abduction was also
known to have taken place.\(^{35}\) Levirate, Sororate and cross cousin types of marriages
were very rare in the Adi society. There was another kind of marriage, that is,
marriage by exchange in which a boy wanting to marry a girl undertook to fill the gap

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\(^{35}\) Sachin Roy, *Aspects of Padam-Minyong Culture*, Itanagar, 1960, Third reprint,
1997, p.204.
in her family by giving a suitable girl for a marriageable boy in exchange. By this method, the difficulty sometimes felt in paying the bride price was also solved. It was common in the Adi society especially in Padam-Minyong groups but now it is no longer in vogue. The Adi society was liberal enough to allow the young girls to choose their partners in life. But there are also instances where marriages were settled by the parents through negotiations among the well-to-do families. Thus, women did not enjoy absolute freedom in selection of mate. However, child marriage was not common in the Adi society. Among the Minyongs, when a couple desired to unite in matrimony, the boy made it known to his parents. In case the parents agreed, they consulted the elders of their clan and if the elders agreed, negotiation for marriage was initiated and a formal proposal was made with presents of *apong* (rice beer), meat, squirrels and other edibles. If the marriage proposal was accepted by the girl’s side, they were engaged and the boy started visiting the girl’s house. This was known as *Makbo Ginam*. For formally declaring them as a married couple, a day was fixed for the final decision, wherein the boy’s mother take plentiful of *mithun* meat, pig, fish, squirrels and *apong* to the house of the girl and a feast was given which was known as *‘Reying-Apong’* which literally meant *‘the apong that cooled the heart’*, that is, they were satisfied with the decision. The economic aspect of matrimony had a very important role to play in marriage relations. A girl was considered as an asset of the family. Hence, it implied a loss to the family when she was given in marriage. This was compensated by payment of *‘Aare’* or bride-price, commensurate with the status of the family and the personal belongings of the girl, which she may carry to her husband’s house. The bride-price was not a fixed lump sum payment settled at the time of marriage to be made either in cash, household property or domestic animals. But it took the form of a continued supply of meat by the husband and his
relatives to the parents of the wife. A girl after marriage may continue to stay with her parents but the husband was expected to take his wife to his own house with the birth of the first child. The maximum period allowed for keeping a wife at her parent’s was generally up to the birth of the third child.  

**Divorce**

Divorce or Dissolution of Marriage was permitted depending upon the cause and situation but in practice, such cases were not common. Women had a right to seek divorce due to infidelity, cruelty and ill-treatment on part of the husband. No compensation or fine was required to be paid in case of mutual divorce. So far, the social status of the divorced woman was concerned; it was not affected much as re-marriage was permissible. A husband could divorce his wife, if he so desired, before there was any issue born of their union, but he forfeited thereby his claim to the personal ornaments belonging to the wife. In cases other than this, the husband would have to pay a heavy compensation in cash or in kind which was known as *Aning-Mitek*/*Annyi-Nyitak* for the disgrace he was supposed to have brought on her by his act but if a wife desired to dissolve her marriage, she may separate from her husband without any right for future claim on the husband and need not pay any compensation to the husband until and unless she took a second husband, who, before he claimed her as his wife, had to pay to the divorced husband - *Adum* - equal in value to the bride-price already paid by the divorced husband. *Adum* was usually heavier than *Aning Mitek*. In some cases, *Adum* was paid by the parents of the women seeking divorce instead of the second husband.  

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Traditional Social Institutions

Social institutions were an important aspect of the traditional Adi society which controlled and regulated the socio- cultural life. The dormitory institution played an important part in the socio-cultural life of the Adi because they were used as centers of various socio- cultural activities and functions of the village. Apart from being a place for merry making and sleeping house for the youth, it played a very important function of traditional educational institution where boys and girls were imparted practical training in the traditional mode of life. The Boys’ Dormitory was called by different names by the various sub-groups of the Adi such as Dere, Mushup, Ngaptek and Bange. The Girls’ Dormitory was known as Raaseng or Riseng. The various myths regarding their origin show that they were the most ancient institutions of the Adi. The early visitors to the Adi region such as Lt. R. Wilcox, Capt. Neufville, Dr. John M’cosh, Father Nicholas Michael Krick, E.T Dalton, J.F Needham, G.D.S Dunbar and Capt. W.B Hore have given their accounts of the Dormitory system of the Adi.

The Boys’ Dormitory was built in a prominent part of the village and was far larger than the dwelling houses. It also acted as an outpost from where the different approaches to the village could be watched. It was a single rectangular hall divided into a number of fireplaces or meroms. Its length or the number of fireplaces varied according to the size and population of the village. The mythology behind the origin of Dere/Mushup is a part of the Taktor or Ekhop abang which is the concluding part of Solung abang. The Solung abang comprises of three parts, the first part of the abang is known as Limir-Libom wherein the Miri or the rhapsodist tell about the

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creation and the birth of Eso or mithun (Bos frontalis) on earth. The Binnyat abang which is the second part of Solung abang deals with the introduction of foodgrains like paddy, maize and millet on the earth ushering in an era of economic development of the Adi community. The Taktor abang is the third part of the solung abang which is divided into three parts; it narrates the creation of the world, birth, growth and achievement of man and the establishment of his supremacy over all living beings on earth as well as man’s struggle for existence and survival on earth and his struggle and triumph over evils, it also deal with the progress of human race and development of agriculture and war. The third part of the Taktor abang recounts how the Dere/Mushup came into existence and stressed on its importance in the Adi Social Structure. B.S Guha had given the reasons behind its construction that there were two underlying principles on which the institution was built, to create the habit of discipline among children during their formative stage and to develop a spirit of co-operation and collaboration so that the tribe could act as a unit and the fissiparous tendencies within the body politic of the tribe may have very little room for growth. Moreover, it develop among the youth a spirit of responsibility, alertness and habit of taking risks in the face of danger which were essential for the existence of the tribe. Although emphasis was laid on the training for the groups to work together and face a common danger, there was also a provision for showing respect and consideration to the elders of the tribe, especially those who were old and infirm and dependent on the younger members for their living.\(^{39}\)

There was no formal initiation ceremony to mark the admission of boys into the dormitory. As soon as a boy put on his loin cloth for the first time, he

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\(^{39}\) B.S Guha, *op.cit.*
automatically became its regular member.\textsuperscript{40} It was used as a sleeping house by all young men. Any men of the village or stranger could sleep there. The membership of the \textit{Mushup} had three distinct divisions on the basis of their age. \textit{Mushup Ko} or \textit{Dere Ko} mainly comprised of teenagers. Their job was to carry out the orders of the \textit{Mushup Abiyana} or Elders. After dinner, they were supposed to go to the \textit{Mushup} carrying firewood and light the fire in the fireplace before the elders arrived. \textit{Mushup Abiyana} or \textit{Yameng} or Elders may comprise of married members too but generally after marriage, they slept at home. The duty of \textit{Mushup Abiyana} or Elders was to train the \textit{Mushup Ko} or \textit{Aniyan}, that is, the younger boys in hunting, warfare, discipline, traditions and the values cherished by the Adis and so on. Besides, at the time of festivals like Unnying or Aran, Solung and Etor, ponung was performed by the \textit{Mushup Yameng} as well as recitation of the \textit{Abangs} or mythological songs of the Adis. During warfare, they had to guard the village at night. At the time of the session of the kebang or village council, the \textit{Mushup Ko} and \textit{Yameng} provided all the facilities for the kebang and after the kebang, they had to announce the decisions of the kebang to the villagers. Where there were several \textit{meroms} or fireplaces in a \textit{Mushup}, each \textit{merom} was in charge of a senior who was responsible for the maintenance of the discipline of his \textit{merom} and he was also empowered to punish any defaulter.\textsuperscript{41}

\textit{Mushup Mijing} was the advisory board comprising of old and well experienced individuals. They were given minor works which did not require any physical labour. They advised the young members of the Mushup and their experiences in war,

\textsuperscript{40} L.R.N Srivastava, \textit{Social organization of the Minyongs}, Itanagar, 1990, p.118.
\textsuperscript{41} Tai Nyori, \textit{op.cit.}, p.234.
hunting and community life were always welcomed. The Mushup also functioned as the centre of village political life as it was used for holding different types of Kebang or village councils where all important matters pertaining to the community were discussed. Cases of civil and criminal nature were also conducted and tried in the Mushup/Dere. Traditional oath was also administered by the Kebang on an individual or group of persons in the Mushup/Dere. Besides, decisions on traditional community hunting, fencing, seasonal cultivation, observance of various festivals and taboos, village development etc were arrived at the Kebang.

During the earlier times, Kebang were held relating to war and community hunting. Therefore, Mushup/Dere was the nerve-centre of activities of the young people who were directly responsible for the security of the village against any attack or any kind of natural calamities. Poisoned arrows and other weapons were prepared at the Dere/ Mushup. After the warfare was over, the warriors used to return to the Mushup and celebrate the victory. A warrior was also required to stay in the Mushup and observe certain rituals instead of one’s own house in order to repulse the possible attack of the malevolent spirit behind such killings. In case of killing a tiger the same practice was followed but with lesser formalities as compared to human killing. The skulls and horns of animals hunted during community hunting were generally arranged on the walls of the Mushup with a simple ceremony. It was a sort of invocation to Gumin-Soyin, the presiding spirit of the Mushup in order to ensure successful hunting in future. But with the change of time, the martial character of the Mushup has become extinct. As the inter-tribal feuds and warfare came to an end, the activities of the Kebang or village councils are now confined to village affairs only.

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Moreover, it was from the Mushup/Dere that Nibo, the man started the performance of *Kimu Roja* and *Tapu Gatnam*, that is war dance of the Adi, inorder to drive away the evil spirits.\(^{43}\) All the ritualistic offerings and performances of the Adi were done in the Dere/ Mushup; people could get justice only in the Dere/Mushup where they could ventilate their grievances without any distinction, the consensus of village community was crystallized on the floor of the Dere/Mushup on any socio-cultural and political issue. Thus the ethos of harmony and unified social bond had been maintained through this social institution over the passage of time.

The Dormitory for the girls was called *Raaseng or Riseng*, literally a meeting place or rest-house. It was a place where the adolescent girls of the village became members mandatorily. *Mushup* or Boys’ Dormitory was considered sacred as an abode of the benevolent God, *Gumin Soyin* who was also believed to be the spiritual protector of the souls of the village. On the contrary, *Raaseng or Riseng* was purely of secular character and had no sanctity or spiritual significance behind it like the *Mushup or Dere*. The *Abang* gives the reason for its construction as the need for gaiety, amusement and the art and regulation of love- making.\(^{44}\) L.R.N Srivastava had noted that Raaseng came into existence in order to have separate sleeping place for the girls after incestuous relation between one of their mythical ancestor, Karduk and his sister Karpung.\(^{45}\)

*Raaseng* was built in each village purely on the basis of clan organization. A small village had one *Raaseng* but a big village with a number of clans had several *Raaseng*. The *Raaseng* was a small simple structure having only one square room with a fireplace at the centre. The walls of the Raaseng were well protected with

\(^{43}\) See Plate No. 3, p.286.
\(^{44}\) B.S Guha, *op.cit.*, p.34.
\(^{45}\) L.R.N Srivastava, *op.cit.*, p.113.
wooden planks as well as the entrance which was secured and strong inorder to prevent forcible entry and undue liberty being taken by young men. It was constructed by experienced old men who in return were supplied with rice and apong (rice beer). It was generally situated in a secluded corner of the village and its whereabouts was not publicized but was known to the villagers.\footnote{Quoted in, Tai Nyori, \textit{op.cit.}, p.235.}

The Raaseng remained unoccupied during the day. Every night after their night meals, the young and unmarried girls of the village would go to the Raaseng and spent the night there where they carried on with their spinning and weaving if there was no Moman Ponung (merry-making) until they retired to bed. They also engaged themselves in singing, dancing and various other merry-making. The gossip covered various household affairs, love songs and dances. The younger girls learnt the art of spinning, weaving, singing and dancing from the senior girls. Though the younger girls learnt spinning and weaving from their mothers and sisters but they got more training from the senior girls of the Raaseng. They returned to their respective houses in the next morning.

Although the Raaseng was not so well organized as the Mushup or Dere, it had its own system which was strictly followed. Each Raaseng was under the supervision and control of a senior and experienced girl called Ponung Abiyana\footnote{Oshong Ering,“Dere-Raaseng system of the Adis”, \textit{NEFA Information}, Volume III, No.12, Shillong, 1969, p.18.} under whose guidance they organized Ponung dance during various social programmes, reception of important guests and festivals. Seniority, however, was not the only criterion but intelligence and personality to inspire confidence in the ponung was also an important factor. There was considerable rivalry between the different ponungs regarding their dancing performances because those who could dance well
had a great demand during festive occasions. The ponung of each Raaseng was an independent unit with separate organization and had their own ponung Miri or priest to lead the ponung dance. Although, a woman was permitted to lead the ponung dance on special occasions as a miri, only a man could be selected as the recognized miri of a ponung, as he was expected to know the Abangs and rituals of dances.⁴⁸ The elders among the Raaseng girls were also responsible for the conduct and discipline of the inmates of Raaseng. They could impose disciplinary punishment on any member for infringement of Raaseng discipline or disclosure of secrecy to undesirable persons.⁴⁹

Sachin Roy had noted that the Raaseng was a training institution for the girls in discipline, comradeship, responsibility and leadership.⁵⁰ The young girls had to obey the instructions of the elders. Fetching firewood and water, lighting the fire, cleaning the Raaseng have always been the duties of the younger girls. It was their duty to light the fire so that when the older girls came after their night meals, they should find everything in order. They were also supposed to do the other work assigned to them; the Raaseng also gave opportunity to its inmates to develop finer aspects of life. Older girls taught the younger ones different types of dances and songs and mythological stories.

Raaseng Mimum or older girls usually start their courtship in the Raaseng which lead them to choose their life partner. Such affairs of the boys and girls of marriageable age in the Raaseng generally led to marriage. The younger girls generally slept on one side of the Raaseng away from the older girls. Moreover, they were required to maintain a strict secrecy with regard to the activities inside the Raaseng.

⁴⁸ B.S Guha, op.cit., p.40.
⁴⁹ Ibid.
⁵⁰ Sachin Roy, op.cit., p.197.
During community festivals, members of the *Raaseng* had to contribute generously as they had their own funds. They also engaged themselves in collecting firewood and other necessary requirements for its celebration. Whenever, any family needed the services of the *Raaseng* girls, the leader of the *Raaseng* was sought for help which was readily performed and a nominal payment was made in kind for their services. In most cases, traditional ornaments of semi-precious stones known as *tadok* were given.

After marriage, the *Raaseng* girls had to retire from the *Raaseng*. Another reason for leaving the *Raaseng* was the absence of girls of one’s own age group as it sometimes happened that all the girls’ of one’s own group were married off and only one or two remained unmarried. By that time, girls of younger age groups start visiting and sleeping in the *Raaseng* and the older girls felt ashamed of sleeping along with the younger girls.\(^{51}\)

In contemporary Adi society, the institution of *Raaseng* has gradually disappeared from the Adi villages with an exception to Likor village of Tuting Circle, Upper Siang District of Arunachal Pradesh. Here, the structure of *Raaseng* is still in existence and it is repaired by the villagers from time to time but it is used only to convene village council meetings of rarest of rare cases that are not allowed to be held in the *Mushup* or *Dere* such as killing of a person.\(^{52}\) Establishment of schools and the spread of educational system had a great impact on the decline of traditional institutions such as *Raaseng*. Contact with the outside world was another important factor for its abolishment.

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\(^{52}\) Interview with Takong Peyang of Angging village, Tuting Circle, Upper Siang District at Siang Halls of Residence, Rajiv Gandhi University, Rono Hills on 09/02/2012
Religion and Rituals

The religion practiced by the Adi incorporated all forms of the indigenous faiths, beliefs and practices which existed among them. Their religious concepts, which have developed in the process of their psychological and intellectual interactions with the environment and subsequent adjustments and reconciliation with it, have essentially two distinct aspects- a belief in existence of a lot of spirits-good or evil and generally known as uyu or wiju, and a belief in the existence of a supreme being, personifying eternal truth.\(^{53}\) It is through the abang, the traditional faith and belief, of the Adi has been handed down from generation to generation. In recent years, there has been a tendency among the writers, both Adi and non-Adi to call the religion of the tribe as Donyi-Poloism or Donyi-Polo religion, a name which has been derived from the recognition of the combined divine figure of Donyi (the Sun) and Polo (the Moon) as their popular Gods.\(^ {54}\) An oath taken in the name of Donyi-Polo was considered the most binding of all and the name of Donyi- Polo was invoked on every ritual occasion. The supernatural world of the Adi comprised of both supernatural beings and malevolent as well as benevolent spirits. According to their belief, a malevolent spirit would turn into a benevolent one provided it has to be properly propitiated and offered sacrifice on time.

There were some people who possessed certain spiritual quality and who were capable of combating the evil spirits and performing religious rites and sacrifices according to their traditional beliefs and customs. They were known as Miri or priest. The institution of Miri played a very important role in the Adi society. The word

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\(^{53}\) Gazetteer of Arunachal Pradesh, East and West Siang Districts, Shillong, 1994, p.76.

\(^{54}\) Tai Nyori, \textit{op.cit.}, p.266.
'Miri' has got a larger connotation. *Miri* may refer to a priest, song, singer or rhapsodist who sing traditional ballad during festivals and may also refer to a medicine man that heal the sick. It may be mentioned that the women among the Adi also functioned as *Miri*. Verrier Elwin had also noted that the shamans were of great importance to Adi society, and the fact that so many of them were women raised the position of their gender in public estimation.  

A *Miri* performed all sorts of religious rites and ceremonies and was the mouth piece of the people to communicate their grievances and sufferings to the spirits as they were well conversant with the language of the spirits and to request them for redress- a sort of intermediary between the human and the spiritual world. A *miri* led the ceremonial dances, performed divination related to matters such as allocation of fields for cultivation, the auspicious moment for sowing seed, recovery of strayed or stolen animals and valuables. They determined the type and cause of sickness and prescribed particular offerings as well as sacrifices to appease the spirits and invoked the blessing of the spirits on behalf of the people.

The institution of the *Miri* was not hereditary. There was no separate class of *Miri* in the Adi society. Election or selection does not come into consideration in the choice for appointment of a *Miri*. One who gets divine inspiration develops a special aptitude to foretell things and periodically fell into trance during childhood, usually became a *Miri* at later age. They are born and not made or created by rendering any training. Dreams also play a significant role in the life of a *Miri*. It is believed that a person can acquire the qualities of a particular type of *Miri* such as *Ayit Miri*, *Ipak miri* or *Etilik miri* and so on depending upon the kind of dream a person had dreamt of. A *Miri* is addressed to by different names according to his/ her function.

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The *Miri* performed rituals known as *Limey Kanam* with the help of the liver of a chicken, or *Tagil* (a kind of bamboo) or *ambin* (rice) or *Eling* (pebbles) in order to determine the causes of sickness and the kind of ceremony needed to be performed and the sacrifices to be offered. Male *Miri* were generally associated with acts of divination and female *Miri* with the healing of sick people. When a female possessed the qualities needed, she was acclaimed as such and enjoyed equal status with male *miris*. She also commanded equal respect from the people. It was believed that if a person was suffering or sick for many days, the soul of the person was wandering in the land of spirits. Therefore, the patient or the family members of the patient consult the *Ayit Miri* and request the *Ayit Miri* to call back the soul of the ailing person. This ritual is known as ‘*Ayit Gokkunam*’. Each *Ayit Miri* has a guardian spirit. The *Ayit Miri* perform a dance near the bed of the patient during the night, inside the house and sing an invocatory song soliciting the guardian spirit to help in identifying the evil spirit responsible for the sickness of the patient, brandishing a *yoksa* (a kind of sword). After few minutes, the *Miri* fall into trance, during which the evil spirit speak through the mouth of the *Miri* and demand what the spirit wanted or required. Thus the evil spirit, found to be responsible for the sickness was propitiated by appropriate rites on the following day for the recovery of the patient.\(^5^6\)

There were many well-known *Miri* who were much sought after especially for the treatment of sprains, fractures and bone setting. The *Etlik Miri* played an important role in the case of sprain or dislocation of bones. *Ngutkion Miri* was an expert in joining broken bones. A *yektum Miri* was another category of *Miri* who performed castration of domesticated animals especially of the pigs known as *Yektum*.

\(^{56}\) Gazetteer of Arunachal Pradesh, *op.cit.*, p.129.
Therefore, in the absence of medical facilities; it was the *Miri* and the rituals that he or she performed which became the treatment for almost all kinds of afflictions. Even in contemporary society, there are many who prefer the services of a *Miri* along with the diagnosis and treatment by doctors. The *Miri* or medicine man prescribe ceremonies and offerings and list the taboos to be observed. Traditional herbal remedies of roots and herbs were also prescribed.

The Ponung *Miri* and the Delong *Miri* sang *abang* (traditional ballad) during the *solung* festival. They were the active leaders and singers of *Ponung* and *Delong* dance respectively. They were considered to be the most learned and also the guardians and exponents of the historical traditions of the Adi tribe. They sang the *abangs* and narrated the origin of man, *mithun*, paddy and fowl together with the struggle and achievement of man and his superiority over all living beings on earth. In the chanting of the priest and the singing and dancing that accompanied the celebration, all aspects of the daily life of man since the beginning of time was revived in the *abang*. Therefore, the festivals were a way of recounting the old myths that told of the creation of man, the birth of rocks and trees, how man learnt to hunt and made fire and how women learnt to weave cloth and prepare rice beer. Hence, the *Ponung Miri* and the *Delong Miri* were the central figures during the *solung* festival.

Though the *Miri* was respected by all, the Adi *Miri* did not enjoy any special privilege in the society except during invocation and performance of rituals and sacrifices and while singing the *abang*, or traditional ballads or mythical songs during the *solung* festival. The *Miri* led the life of a common man, in no way distinguishable from the other villagers. Sachin Roy had pointed out that a Minyong-Padam *Miri*

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57 Interview with Mukge Tayeng, *Miri* and Head Priest of Golgi Bote Donyi Polo Gangging, Itanagar on 6/6/2012
wore special types of beads called Rogum in his/ her hair on special occasions. He or she normally decked himself or herself in an ornament called lakjin which was a string of two to five beads worn round the right wrist or on the butt-end of the yoksha.\(^58\)

The Miri were usually rewarded for their services largely in kind though now cash is preferred. Ambin (rice), aadin (meat), apong (rice beer), traditional ornaments of semi-precious stones called tadok were also gifted. The Miris usually employ their powers for the benefit of mankind. But they could also misuse their gifts. They could send their wiya-tutelaries to inquire or kill the enemy and they could also destroy by their curses.\(^59\)

The Adi performed a number of rituals and socio-religious festivals. Some of these were performed individually, while others were performed on community basis. Solung, Etor, Unnying or Aran is some of their community festivals. These festivals and all the rituals associated with forest clearing, planting, fencing, harvesting had their origin in the cyclical pattern of shifting cultivation. All these festivals are associated with agriculture though the religious aspect is also present. Solung, the most important festival of the Adi, though primarily a festival connected with the agricultural activities of the people is a socio-religious festival. It is performed on two occasions, that is, during the construction of village fencing when Dadi somi or Agam, the god of animals was worshipped. The purpose of this festival called Solung Etor was to ensure that the cattles, that is, mithuns and cows kept inside the fenced area be free from disease and death and that they give birth to many calves. Hangings of gampa or ritual offerings consisting of gingers, fermented rice and smoked squirrels

\(^59\) Verrier Elwin, *op. cit.*, p.36.
made in individual homes for Agam or the deity of cattles were done by the women of respective houses.\textsuperscript{60} It was done for the good health and prosperity of animals of respective families. On this occasion Delong (dance and song) was performed by young men though men of other age groups also join in the dance. Women joined it if there were not enough male dancers. The Delong dance was led by a male Miri who did not carry a sword in his hand but a fan made of hornbill feathers in his right hand.

On completion of weeding and before harvesting, the Adi perform the second solung called Solung Lune. The purpose of this festival was to ensure a good harvest as well as the welfare of the villagers. They perform the ponung dance. It was a dance for women though young men also sometimes join. They invite the Miri of their choice to lead them in their dancing. Girls who are to dance deck him in a red gale (a woman skirt) over his usual dress. The girls also adorn the back of the Miri’s head with Dumling, a bunch of sacred fibres made of ridin, a kind of creeper with beads. The Miri held an open sword, a Yoksa in his right hand and sang the Abang. A small metal disc was loosely fitted at the handle of the yoksa which produced sound when the yoksa was occasionally jerked to tune with the Abang. The Ponung Miri also put two bunches of small bells known as Kiring which hanged over the neck.\textsuperscript{61}

The Kiring and Dumling are sacred ornaments which were prepared by the women. The Kirings were prepared by the women for encouraging the Miri as well as the Ponung singers and dancers. The women also prepared Dumlings and fastened such objects to the hair of the Miri of Solung Ponung for protection against the influences of evil spirits. However, women could not prepare the Kiring and Dumling during menstruation period as it was believed to cause ill effects on the Miri.

\textsuperscript{61} See Plate No. 4, p.287.
The first day of the Solung festival is called *Dogin Yume* (preparation/arrangement evening), the second day is *Dorep or Ardo-Bado Longe*, third day is observed as *Binnyat* where rituals relating to Goddess of crops and prosperity, Kiine-Naane are performed. Fourth day is known as *Taktor/Ekopf*, that is, preparation of bows, arrows and war weapons take place and arrows and bows are fastened above the door of every house and the last day is called *Miri Yamlik* or ‘send off ceremonial’ to *Miri Abu*. During *solung*, women perform the *Binnyat* offerings, a ritual offering in granaries and paddy fields to propitiate *Kiine-Naane* (the goddess of food grains or fertility) seeking for rich harvest and good health of the people. The *Binnyat* offering was the most important and central rituals of the solung festival. They go to the fields and a fowl was sacrificed. *Etting* or rice cake and *apong* (rice beer) was generally offered along with the sacrifice. However, the *Binnyat* offering was not compulsory for every family. It was a private performance where a family may plan the *Binnyat* offering due to failure of crops in the preceding season or if a family member was sick.

Women also equally participate in the activities of modern common celebration of *Solung* festival such as performance of *Solung ponung* and merry making. There is also no restriction on women in ritual offerings at the shrines of *Solung* festivals. During New Year festival of the Adis known as *Aran* or *Unnying*, housewives offer *apong*, ginger, eggs and dried squirrels for the pleasure of *Agung-Agam* (god of animals) and chant incantations on the evening of fourth or fifth day. It was also the time when *Eso* or mithun returned to the villages with new calves that were branded by their proud owners. In Adi society, *Eso* or mithun was a symbol of wealth and status. They are highly prized though they are kept neither as pack animals or dairy cattle. Their status is linked to mythology and they were used mainly as
barter exchange and also to fulfill socio-cultural and religious obligations of betrothal and sacrificial rituals in offerings to gods and spirits. During festivals, Eso or mithun meat was the traditional gift offering that was sent to relatives and friends. Apart from these festivals, there were numerous other rituals that families had to perform on the advice of the Miri or priest such as construction of new house, success in hunting expedition, to guard against illness or to seek peace for a departed soul.

When a person encountered a serious accident in the forest and was dead or half-dead, it was the custom of the village women to dress in red gale taking sumpa\textsuperscript{62} at hands and dance around the victim with great shouts. Such ritual dance was performed by a group of women or girls on the way when the body was taken towards the village. It was meant to chase back the evil spirits that might accompany the victim.\textsuperscript{63}

Moreover, the work of preparing food during religious performances or socio-religious festivals were carried out by women, for instance, the preparation of rice and the brewing of apong. They also took care of the participants who participated in the rituals and ceremonies. Women also actively participate in the dances associated with socio-religious festivals. Therefore, women played a significant role in the religious matters. The Adi communities also observe a number of taboos which is known as Nyonam in order to prevent bad luck, sickness, epidemic, anger of the spirits and natural calamities. It had socio-religious sanction. In case of sickness, taboo was observed which varied according to various ailments with regards to food, drink and work. The traditional belief that disease and death are caused by evil spirits though primitive, persist even today. Hence, they propitiate the spirit responsible for the

\textsuperscript{62} It is a straight flat piece of wood with tapering ends. It is used in weaving to regulate and compress the threads.

ailment by sacrificing birds and animals and observe rituals performed by the Miri or priest. In case of death, Nyonam was observed for a few days from the day of death and they abstain from certain items of food which differed from place to place. It was also observed in order to promote agriculture, hunting, and fishing as well as socio-religious ceremonies. Nyonam was followed strictly in the Adi society and they did not take upon itself to punish the offenders because it was considered that a breach of taboo would bring supernatural punishment. Various kinds of diseases were also attributed to the breaking of different taboos.

Tai Nyori in his book, ‘History and Culture of the Adi’ had pointed out that the Adi observed three types of taboo after their ritual ceremonies. The first was the taboo on movement when they kept themselves confined indoors. The period of confinement varied according to the occasion. Secondly, there was taboo on works. Restriction were imposed on physical labour such as cutting of big trees, digging of big holes and damming of big rivers. Third was the taboo on eating. The individual and the members of his family who had performed a ritual were not allowed to take any meal from the utensils of others for certain days or months.\footnote{Tai Nyori, \textit{op.cit.}, p.281.} A very strict taboo was observed throughout the period when the poison was prepared for the arrowheads. They believed that if the taboo was violated, the poison would be rendered ineffective. Therefore, the person engaged in the preparation of poison did not take bath or changed their clothes nor ate meat, pulses or vegetables except boiled rice with salt because it was believed that the violation of taboo would render the shooter blind. Every married man was also required to sleep in the Dere/Mushup,
Boys’ Dormitory, during the night throughout the preparation period and they were strictly prohibited to sleep with their wives.65

Sachin Roy had pointed out that women were not allowed to touch the implements of war and chase, swords, spear, bow and arrow and arrow case during menstruation and war time. It was believed that the touch of women who spin and brew may cause entanglement and loss of self control during fights. If a woman had touched the weapons, the male had to sacrifice one fowl to Piang deity in order to avoid disaster during war. Moreover, the female also had to perform Takuk. In order to test the result of their sacrifice, they went out on a hunt and if they were successful in killing an animal easily, it was believed that their sacrifice had been answered and if not, they had to again perform sacrifices of fowls with gam mang, mabat, piang rituals and ceremonies.66 During community hunting or kiruk, girls and women had to observe Nyonam and they were not allowed to go to the fields, take bath and wash clothes. Even in case of individual hunting, the women of the family observed Nyonam. In cases of a person killing a tiger, he had to observe certain rite and rituals otherwise it was believed that the spirit of the tiger might harm the hunter and his family. Therefore, he was required to sleep in the Dere/Mushup and observe certain rituals and he had to abstain from taking meat for a long period of time as advised by the Miri or priest. He was allowed to enter his home only after a scheduled time period. In most of the tribe of Arunachal Pradesh, the killing of a tiger was considered equivalent to that of killing a man because there is a story that man and tiger were born brothers but they went their different ways, one to live in the forest eating raw flesh and the other to dwell in home eating cooked meat. Therefore, the rituals

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65 Mukge Tayeng, *op.cit.*

associated with the killing of a tiger were very rigid and the one who had killed a tiger had to observe many taboos to bargain with the spirit of the tiger.

Women were excluded from certain ritual observances such as during the work of preparations of poison for *Kiruk*, the organized community hunting or going for a war. It was maintained and continued more or less on a ritual pattern and basis. No women were allowed to enter or even go near the *Dere*, Boys’ Dormitory or peep through it while the poison was being prepared there. It was also considered a taboo to go near a woman, accept food from her or sleep with her after returning back from a war. The warrior was required to sleep in the *Dere* as his association with the women might not be auspicious for her and the entire family.\(^6\) The idea appeared to be very generous and caring towards the women and not treating them as “dreaded” as mentioned by Srivastava.\(^7\) However, in contemporary society these practices are no longer in vogue because of the prevalence of firearms as well as the decline of the internal and external strife.

Women have thus traditionally enjoyed a position of equality in the sphere of religious matters. They not only participate in all religious activities but also there are certain important rituals, associated especially with agricultural practices that women alone perform.

**Property Rights and Inheritance**

The Adi society without any exception is basically patriarchal. The father, as in every patriarchal society, is the head of the family as well as owner of the house and landed property. The Adi society is also patrilineal whereby descent is traced

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\(^6\) Mukge Tayeng, *op.cit.*

\(^7\) L.R.N Srivastava, *op.cit.*, p.61.
through the males. The children take after the father’s clan. The patrilineal nature of
descent necessitates a societal preference for male progeny. However, the girl child is
not unwelcome. Nevertheless, a family without a male child is considered incomplete.
The inclination in favor of a boy child is rooted in the belief that the girl is a guest in
her parental house which she will leave after her marriage. There is a saying among
the Adi that the women do not belong to any particular clan. They are born in their
father’s clan but married off to another clan and become members of that clan.69 So,
the boy is the one who perpetuates the family lineage and inherits the family property.

The father is the de-facto owner of his property even when he is old. His
authority can be gauged from the fact that the father has the right to alienate his own
son from inheriting the property after consultation with the clansmen, if the son goes
against his will or becomes irresponsible. There are instances where the father has
devolved all his property to a person other than his own son. The only condition
required under such circumstances was that the person concerned must be clansmen
of the father.

Under normal circumstances, the property is equally divided amongst the sons
when they grow up and get married. As per custom, the son who looks after the
parents would inherit the house. Usually it is the youngest son who inherits the house
of the parents because the older sons get married before him and build their own
separate houses. Hence it has become a convention among the Adi that the youngest
son should look after the parents. However, the parents could stay with anyone of
their sons. If the couple does not have a male child, they generally adopt a boy child
from the husband’s clan. Even if they do not adopt any child, their property would go

69 Putoli Langkam, “Property Rights of Adi Women in Arunachal Pradesh”,
to one of the husband’s clansmen who would eventually look after them during their old age.

The Adi women do not have rights to inherit property. The daughters do not have any right to claim patrimony even if she was the only child. It is the maxim of the land that the daughters could not claim a share in her father’s property. Nevertheless, the father could give less valuable movable property to his daughters after consultation with the son, if there was any. Otherwise the son had the right to raise objection if it was not to his liking. In the absence of a son, the clansmen had to be consulted. There are instances where the son or the clansmen have asked for the return of valuable property which the father had gifted to his daughter without the knowledge of the son or the clansmen. In such cases, it was obligatory for the daughter to return the property as per the custom.\textsuperscript{70}

Adi women, married or unmarried were so restricted in the share of properties that they were almost excluded from its rights. In fact they could not inherit immovable properties such as land, residential buildings, granaries, plantations and ornaments of father’s parental properties or father’s properties, though such properties could be spent for the marriage and welfare of the daughters.\textsuperscript{71} In the traditional Adi society, the daughters, as a rule, were not entitled to the share of any immovable property even as a gift as it was not sanctioned by the society at all because as per custom, it was the sons who looked after the parents and performed the funeral rites of the parents. The daughters were married off to another clan and the child borne to her belonged to another clan. So, if the daughters inherited the immovable property, it would pass on to another clan since landed property was of vital importance in the

\textsuperscript{70} Ibid., p.86.

\textsuperscript{71} Interview with Nompok Mitkong, Retired District Research Officer at Pasighat on 5/1/2015
Adi society and their economy mostly depended upon agriculture. Moreover, landed property was also a means for old age security. Another reason was that the parents especially the father was not supposed to stay with her daughter even if she was the only child because there was a possibility that the clansmen of the son-in-law might claim compensation from the father in the event of a family feud. Further, the compensation could be claimed by the son-in-laws’ people from the father’s clansmen also. It was so, because the father and the son-in-law belonged to different clans.\textsuperscript{72}

Another reason was that after marriage, generally, the daughter’s go to her husband’s house situated in another village and she was in charge of her marital house and her duty was to look after her parents-in-law. So, it would be difficult for her to take care of her own parents who were residing in another village.

Among the Minyongs, no share in the landed property was given to the woman of the family even when the head of the family died without any male issue. In that event, the land was tilled by the person who buried him or in his absence, by the members of his clan.\textsuperscript{73} Women had no claim over the landed property even on the land purchased by her but she could use it as long as she was alive. After her death, the landed properties go to her son or sons, if any or to her husband or to the next close male relatives of her husband. They were given share of only movable property in the form of traditional ornaments of semi-precious stones called \textit{tadok}, valuable brass plates and clothing. In some cases, domestic animals and household articles were also given. The Adi respect women’s exclusive right over gifts received from parents in marriage particularly ornaments. The ornaments were the only properties

\textsuperscript{72} Putoli Langkam, \textit{op.cit.}, p.87.
\textsuperscript{73} L.R.N Srivastava, \textit{op.cit.}, p.54.
inherited as heirloom. The ornaments according to custom were handed down from mother to daughter and therefore, they were always imbued with sentiment and love. The value of a particular ornament was based on certain socio-religious significance. Verrier Elwin had rightly pointed that it was a symbol whereby a man’s social status could be determined. The symbolic value of the ornaments was much more important than its material cost. Whatever a bride got as a gift or otherwise from her husband, his family and relatives also became her property. The husband could not claim any right over them.

Weaving instruments were also regarded as women’s personal possessions. Women generally had complete freedom to spend the income earned by them through supplementary activities such as weaving, knitting, raising poultry, cattle, pigs, selling vegetables and rice-beer. An unmarried woman had absolute right over her own personal belongings and earnings. Personal belongings of the daughter which she had acquired at her parental house also became a part of her property. She could also inherit her mother’s personal belongings. Normally, the mother’s property was divided among the daughters. However, it was not compulsory on the part of the mother to give her chattel to her daughters whom she may or she may not give. In practice, the daughters who cared more for her parents earned more affection from her parents and consequently, she get a bigger share from her mother’s property.

When a woman died, her personal property was to be passed over to the daughter or daughters. But in the absence of a female issue, it has been observed in a number of cases that the youngest son was allowed to inherit his mother’s property including her valuable ornaments as a reward for looking after his mother.

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74 See Plate No. 5, p.288.
76 Verrier Elwin, A Philosophy for NEFA, op.cit., p.32.
Sometimes, women prefer to give their personal belongings to their niece in the absence of a daughter. There are also instances where the most valuable ornaments of the mother were divided amongst her sons and daughters.\textsuperscript{77} Therefore; it is a matter of concern on a woman’s property rights. Moreover, a woman could not inherit the valuable traditional ornaments meant for the male heirs which were handed down from generation to generation.\textsuperscript{78} Thus, a woman had a disadvantaged position with respect to ownership and inheritance of valuable ornaments.

As far as the share of husband’s property was concerned, widows in traditional Adi society have got only usufructuary rights. A widow having children remained a custodian of the property of her husband provided she remained unmarried and in her deceased husband’s house. But she had no absolute right to transact the properties according to her will. When her son attained maturity, she had to hand over all her property to her son because the son was to inherit dead father’s properties on attaining the age and he was to maintain such widowed mother. The son who inherited his father’s land may allot a plot of land to his widowed mother, but she could not claim it as a right. After her death, the land was taken back by her son or sons to be divided amongst them.\textsuperscript{79} Moreover, a widow could never handover the landed property to her daughter. If the widow had no male issue, the properties go to other male heirs of the clan. A widow without any child was not allowed to inherit her husband’s property but she was entitled to possess her husband’s property until her death provided she remained unmarried and in her deceased husband’s house. If she married in accordance with the laws governing re-marriage, it go to the next-of-kin and in absence of any such blood relation, to the members of the sub-clan of the deceased

\textsuperscript{77} Interview with Osor Perme Ratan, Kiyit village, East Siang District on 6/11/2013
\textsuperscript{78} See Plate No.6, p.289.
\textsuperscript{79} Interview with Tagom Talom, Jomlo- Mongku, Siang District on 28/10/2013.
husband. Thus a widow could inherit and possess all types of properties of the deceased husband under the approval and guidance of male heirs of the dead husband even if a widow had no child.

A widow was allowed to marry the younger brother of her deceased husband in order to retain or inherit her deceased husband’s property, if they were willing to do so. In that event, the ownership of property would automatically go to the younger brother, who married the widow and took care of her. But in case, a widow was married to a person outside her deceased husband’s family or clan, she lose even the limited right to use any of her deceased husband’s property. In that case, the properties go to her son, if any or if there was no son, the properties would go to her deceased husband’s relatives. Practically, a widow having adult children did not go for re-marriage. A widow having only female child and remained unmarried in her deceased husband’s house had no right over her deceased husband’s landed property but she could use the property until her death or as long as she stayed with the family to maintain herself and her child but she could not sell it according to her own will, without the prior approval of male members of her deceased husband’s clan. A widow also had the right to receive the bride-price of the daughters on marriage.

Divorce was not uncommon though the Adi considered marriage as a sacred institution. Often, a divorce case was settled by giving compensation to the victim. Though earlier the compensation was paid in kind, at present, it is settled by cash. The compensation paid to the woman as a divorce settlement also constituted her personal property. Whenever a woman left her husband’s house due to ill treatment or for some other reason like divorce, she took all her personal belongings with her. The woman

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81 Nompok Mitkong, *op.cit.*
was the sole owner of her personal belongings. She could alienate her property in the
way she wanted. A divorced woman had no right to claim share of lands, cattle, beads
and other metal properties of divorced husband even if the divorce was not caused by
her.\textsuperscript{82} But in such cases of divorce, a woman had right to claim equal share in
properties that had been earned during their conjugal life. A divorced woman had
right to claim a considerable amount of money in cases involving children from the
divorced husband for the maintenance of children, if any. A divorced woman also had
the right to claim compensation from such husband if she was divorced during mid-
age without any children.\textsuperscript{83} But when a wife initiated divorce, she could neither make
any claim on her husband’s property nor ask for or demand any compensation. In case
of mutual divorce, no compensation or fine was required to be paid.

The customary law regarding inheritance of property which was an important
aspect of the traditional Adi society does not give equal position to woman. The
traditional Adi society being patriarchal and patrilineal, inheritance was traced
through the male line and therefore, the female issue was always secondary and sub-
ordinate to that of the male issue. As per customary law, the one who performed the
funeral rites of a person inherited his property as such it was not possible for a father
to bestow property right to his daughter because daughters were not allowed to
perform the funeral rites of their father in any case even in the absence of a male
issue. In such a situation, the funeral rites were performed by a member of the father
or husband’s clansmen. Adi women folk have very limited right to own property and
there was difference in the customary law governing inheritance between male and
female. Women were excluded in inheriting the properties of a man but the male had

\textsuperscript{82} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{83} Interview with Taying Pangkak, Komkar, District Upper Siang on 31/10/2013.
rights to inherit all the female properties of a woman even in the non-availability of female heirs. Hence, the customary law does not give any privileged position to women. The deprivation in landed property have given women a disadvantaged position with respect to inheritance of property and thus, made her social status inferior to men.

**Health and Hygiene**

In the traditional Adi society, there was absence of health infrastructure such as hospitals, dispensaries and they did not have any modern healthcare system and diagnostic technique as well as technology. The diseases known by them were also limited such as epilepsy, headache, diarrhoea, stomach ache, blindness, back pain, toothache and so on because the expansion of health services in the state was a post independence development. They took utmost care to prevent any disease as good health was the key to a productive life in the primarily agrarian Adi society because a healthy individual could perform arduous and demanding tasks, defend his village, work hard in the fields as well as at home. They were dependent on their traditional ways and cures for any kind of disease. The Traditional medicine was an age old health care system. They were also dependent on the Miri or medicine man who were much sought after for the treatment of almost all kinds of diseases. The Miri used a variety of plants and herbs to cure common ailments coupled with chanting and prayers to cure the afflicted.

In absence of medical services, untimely death was a frequent occurrence in the villages, many of which could have been avoided through access to medical facilities. During field study, the researcher during discussion with elderly people of different villages heard numerous narratives that due to inadequate medical services,
death due to diarrhoea, typhoid, malaria and women dying of simple complications resulting from pregnancy were common in the traditional society of the Adi. The women were also not aware about the sanitation practices such as hygiene, nutrition, health of pregnant women, immunization and family planning.

The traditional medicines used a variety of plants and herbs to cure common ailments. Almost all the fruits and vegetables consumed by the Adi had medicinal properties. They consumed a variety of herbs, green leafy vegetables and plants, preferably boiled which possessed curative properties as well as protected them from illness. For instance, bamboo shoots were considered to be rich in a host of vitamins and minerals and it had been reported to have anti-carcinogenic properties and was considered beneficial for asthma patients. *Kopi* or *byako* (*solanum indicum*) helped cure ailments like indigestion when taken in small quantities and blood pressure. It was also considered active against the bacteria responsible for urinary tract and nasal infections. *Apong* that is local rice beer when consumed in moderation was helpful in digestion. *Rayil* (*Litsea Cubeba*) has been reported to cure headache, dizziness, hysteria, paralysis and loss of memory. The oil obtained from the dried fruit was used for making anti- hypertension medicines, to reduce cardiac arrhythmia and anti fungal activity. *Taakeng* (ginger) was an important ingredient in the traditional food preparations which was believed to possess healing powers. The dried rhizome called *Kay-kir* was often tied around the necks of children to ward off evil spirits and it was also used in ritual offerings. *Onngin* (*clerodendrum colebrookiana*) was believed to lower blood pressure and *marsang* flowers (*spilanthes paniculate*) had anti gum infection properties. A number of roots and leaves which were heated, shredded or grounded to a paste were used for treating cuts, bites, infection, poison and wounds. Therefore, in the traditional society, in absence of modern medical and health care
facilities, they were totally dependent as well as relied on the traditional medicine and practices which proved inadequate to cure the various kinds of diseases.

**Review of Literature**

Studies on Women and Women’s issues had received immense attention across the globe during recent times and many studies had been conducted on women dealing with their role and status. A vast literature has been developed dealing with this aspect. However, in India, studies devoted to women were started by a small number of scholars in the middle of the last century and it has been on the increase during recent times. Many books and articles have been published on the issue. To mention some of these studies are those of Chandrakala A.Hate’s (1948), *Hindu Women and Her Future, Concept of Equality; The Nineteenth Century Indian Debate* by B.N Ganguli (1975), *Divorced Hindu Women* by Rama Mehta (1975), *Indian Women: From Purdah to Modernity* edited by B.R Nanda (1976), *Indian Women* by Devaki Jain (1976), Kamala Bhasin’s (1977) *The Position of Women in India, Changing Position of Indian Women* by M.N Srinivas (1978), *Women in Indian Society* by Rehana Ghadiany (1988), *Status of Hindu Women in India* by Inderjeet Kaur (1983), Renuka Singh’s *Oppression of Women by Women* (1980), *Indian Women* by Hansa Mehta (1981), *Revolution and Status of Women in India* by Sushila Mehta (1982), *Indian Women; The Power Trapped* by Indu Prakash Singh (1991) *Women in Indian Society* by Neera Desai & Usha Thakkar (2001) and others.

But these studies were concerned with Indian Women in general and it did not deal specifically with a cultural group such as a tribe. Some scholars have conducted studies on tribal women. Mention may be made of an edited book, *Tribal Women and Development* (1988) by J.P Singh and others whereby the role of tribal women has

An attempt has also been made to review and investigate the available literature related to the present research work. The Status of women has attracted the interest of the scholars and though there are many published works on the subject but in the context of Arunachal Pradesh, no analytical study has been conducted so far. An edited Volume by B.B Pandey, N.Sarkar and D.K Duarah (1997) had been brought out by the Research Department, Government of Arunachal Pradesh on *The
Status of Women in Tribal Society. However, it was a generalized work by different scholars on the Status of women of the various tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. Moreover, it did not take into account all the sub-groups of the Adi. There has been a dearth of data on the subject matter. The Status of Adi women of East Siang District have not been researched thoroughly by social scientists although a number of literatures have been produced, the early works being written by the British administrators and explorers. They left behind reports and accounts of the Adi. However these studies were the result of political and economic needs of the colonial state. Therefore, even though, the Adi has been studied as compared to other tribes of the state due to their early and close contact with the Britishers and establishment of educational institutions, the Status of Women has not been studied in a comprehensive and systematic manner. Some of the works on the tribe has been reviewed.

The earliest mention of the area under study was recorded in the writings of R.Wilcox in his ‘Memoirs of a Survey of Assam and its neighborhood’ when he visited Mebo in 1825-1826. Alexander Mackenzie (1884) in North East Frontier of India dealt with the political relation of the British Government with different hill tribes of North East India during the colonial period. It also threw light on the socio-economic life of the Adi, erstwhile, Abor, and their relations with the Miri as well as Ahom to some extent. A. Hamilton’s (1912), ‘In Abor Jungles of North East India’ is a diary of events that took place in the aftermath of the murder of Noel Williamson, the then Assistant Political Officer of Sadiya, wherein, he gave a vivid description about the topography of the land and its people. Verrier Elwin’s book, ‘A philosophy for NEFA’ (1959) provides an extensive account about the political institutions, socio-economic feature and geographical location of the five frontier division of NEFA
naturally Kameng, Subansiri, Siang, Lohit and Tirap. He had described Siang division as inhabited by the Adi who he described as independent and classified them into two main divisions. He also described the Kebang of the Adi as democratic and had specifically mentioned about the flourishing little town of Pasighat. Sachin Roy (1960) in his book, *Aspects of Padam- Minyong Culture*, had described in detail about their socio-cultural life. It threw light on the social customs, rituals, festivals, religion and economic activities of the people. It is indeed, a very interesting work on the Adi based on extensive field works. However, he has not covered the status of women in detail.

Verrier Elwin (1965) in his book, *Democracy in NEFA* was an attempt to highlight the role and importance of the indigenous institutions of the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh and their relevance in tribal administration. L.R.N. Srivastava (1990) in ‘Social Organization of the Minyong’ provides an exhaustive account of the Minyong, their customs, laws and institutions but only a scanty work has been done on the position of women in the family. J.N Chowdhury (1990) in ‘The Tribal Culture and History of Arunachal Pradesh’ has dealt with pre-history and early migration of the tribes, religion and customary law of Arunachal Pradesh. He had given a general view on the status of women among some tribes of the state. B.B Pandey (1991) in his book, ‘Leadership pattern in a Tribal Society’ covered the Adi and their political, constitutional and administrative settings, indigenous pattern of political and economic structure and also the emergence of new leadership, however he had not dealt with women in detail in the Panchayat Raj Institutions. Sanjay Dubey (1991) in *Dynamics of Tribal Local Polity and Panchayat Raj in Arunachal Pradesh* has dealt with the institutional framework of the PRI and had focused on the history of PRI from Daying Ering Committee to present Arunachal Pradesh Panchayat Raj Act 1997
in the state. Attempt has been made to study the impact of PRI on the tribal societies of Arunachal Pradesh but the participation of women in decision-making has been neglected. Tai Nyori (1993) in his book, the History and Culture of the Adi has attempted to bring out almost all the socio-cultural background of the Adi society dealing with their origin and migration, British relations, administration, economic life, socio-cultural and religious life but he has given only a brief and general description about the status of the Adi women. Tamo Mibang (2003) in his book on Arunachal Women and Education has discussed about women’s education in Arunachal Pradesh and about the constraints faced by women. Mention has been made about empowerment of women through education but it is silent on the role of women in politics. Bani Danggen (2003) in his book, The Kebang: a unique indigenous political institution of the Adi has discussed in detail the village council of the Adi and it also dealt with the changing context of women in Kebang by their active participation.

Besides, some of the significant works on the tribe are, Moshup Abang by B.S Guha (1964), A comparative Study of Adi Religion by J.N Chaudhary (1971), Alluring Frontier by Tarun Kumar Bhattacharjee (1988), British Relation with the Adi by N.N Osik (1992), Social change in Arunachal Pradesh by Tamo Mibang (1994). These studies provide us some information about the indigenous faith and belief systems of the Adis, their dormitory system, arts and crafts, political life, material culture, social organization and British relations with the Adis but women as a distinct aspect of study has been left out. So far as the literature work on Adi women is concerned, very few works on the Adi women have been done by different scholars. Infact, written document on women is almost absent. The only writings on Adi
women that sometimes emerged were those which described the dress and ornaments of the women.

Therefore, the status of Adi women has not been investigated thoroughly by these writers. So far, no detail and serious work has ever been attempted particularly on the status of women in Adi society by any scholar. There is hardly any work dealing with the status of Adi women. It is a least researched area. Hence, in order to bridge this gap, the present work is a modest attempt and in-depth study covering various dimensions of Adi women in all its aspects and to fill the long felt gap of knowledge in this regard.

**Objectives of the study**

The present study has been carried out with the following objectives;

1. To review the Status of Adi women in a patriarchal, patrilineal and patrilocal Adi society.
2. To analyze the Socio-Economic Status of Adi women.
3. To analyze the issues of representation and participation of women in political activities and decision making processes and to find out the causes and constraints that limit their participation.
4. To assess the Status and analyze the impact of Self-Help Groups on empowerment of Adi women.
5. To study the impact of modernity and the emerging trends on the Status of Adi women.
Area of the study

The focus of the area of the proposed study was confined to East Siang District of Arunachal Pradesh. The present study included the undivided East Siang and Siang districts. It comprises of 15 (fifteen) administrative circles with a population of 99,214 persons of whom 50,116 are males and 49,098 are females according to 2011 Census Report. Pasighat, Mebo, Namsing, Nari, Koyu, New Seren, Kora, Ruksin, Sille-Oyan, Bilat, Pangin, Boleng, Rebo-Perging, Kebang and Riga are the administrative circles of the district. There are 6 Community Blocks namely Pasighat, Mebo, Ramle Banggo, Ruksin, Pangin and Riga which is put under the charge of a Block Development Officer who looks into the developmental activities of the Block. The lowest unit of administration is at the circle level under the control of respective circle officers. The District comprises of 151 villages of which only 150 are inhabited and 2 towns namely Pasighat and Boleng according to Census Report of 2011. The present research work was concerned only with the Adi dominated Administrative Circles or villages of East Siang District, out of 15 administrative circles only 12 Adi dominated circles were taken as sample area of studies. These were Pasighat, Mebo, Namsing, Ruksin, Sille-Oyan, Bilat, Pangin, Boleng, Rebo-Perging, Kebang, Riga and Nari were taken as sample area. In Nari circle, only two Adi Dominated Villages, that is, Depi and Detak were taken into consideration.

Research Questions

The main focus of the present study is to find out answers to certain research questions which were generated regarding the Status of women in Arunachal Pradesh with special reference to the Adi of East Siang District.

1. What was the Status of women in traditional Adi society?
2. What is the Socio-Economic Status of the Adi women?

3. What are the present Status of Adi women in the Decision-Making Process?
   Why are there so few women in the Decision Making Process?

4. What is the Status and Impact of Selp Help Groups on Economic Empowerment of Adi women?

5. What is the Impact of Modernity on the Emerging Trends of the Adi women?

Research Methodology

The present study is mainly empirical and analytical in nature through field works in order to address the above mentioned research questions. Since, the present study is the first of its kind and deals with the status of women in Adi society, there is a dearth of historical source materials such as archival sources pertaining to the reconstruction of the status of Adi women. Hence the research work was mainly based on extensive field study, oral traditions and observations covering the twelve administrative circles i.e Pasighat, Mebo, Namsing, Nari, Ruksin, Sille-Oyan, Bilat, Pangin, Boleng, Rebo-Perging, Kebang and Riga. Since, the researcher belongs to the same community, it was not difficult to talk with the people and the respondents in their own dialect and stay in the villages. Moreover, the use of Participant observation method by joining in important social occasions, community gatherings, festivals and individual interaction has provided valuable and authentic inputs to the study. Data for the present study has been mainly collected from field study. Data for the study has been drawn from both primary and secondary sources. Primary Data have been collected mainly through administration of Interview Schedule, Questionnaire and Personal Observation. For secondary sources, the study included various official records and documents, articles of journals, newspapers, magazines,
and both published and unpublished works were used. Data for second chapter were
mainly gathered from government records and documents and available published
works. Relevant data from the internet such as on DAY-NRLM were also taken for
the present study. Information was also collected by conducting face to face
interview with women self help groups, intellectuals, officials, rural women with the
help of partially structured interview schedule. Case study method was also employed
as a conventional technique of data collection and to focus on women empowerment
through SHGs and also to analyze the Emerging trends of women.

Inorder to provide an attitudinal explanation for the low representation of Adi
women in public elected office, an attitudinal survey was carried out through an
interview schedule from two places of the district. The study was carried out at
Debing village, a rural area and Pasighat town, an urban area through random
sampling. At Debing village, 100 respondents which included both adult male and
female of a family were alternately interviewed to see whether there was any
significant similarity or variance in the perception of the male and female. At Pasighat
town, 100 respondents, both male and female were selected from the various offices
situated at Pasighat town. The interview schedule cum questionnaire was divided into
two parts. The first part was designed to know about the personal data of the
respondents. The second part was designed to study their perception towards the
participation of women in politics. Inorder to fulfill the answer of the questionnaire,
the relevant data was collected using participant interview process. Respondents of
both male and female were taken into account while collecting the data inorder to
have a wider outlook of the responses.

Inorder to fulfill the objectives of the study on Empowerment of Adi women
through Self Help Groups, Structured Questionnaires were administered to randomly
select 100 women SHG members from five different administrative blocks of Nari, Ruksin, Bilat, Mebo and Pasighat on the basis of Random Sampling to tap a variation of views inorder to find out their Status and analyze the impact of SHGs on economic empowerment of Adi Women. The questionnaire cum interview schedule was classified into four parts. First part was fixed to know personal data of the women SHG members, second part was earmarked to identify the socio-economic condition of the family of women SHG members and the third part was designed to study their status and the last part was to find out the impact of SHGs on the rural women. The questionnaire cum interview schedule has been designed in English for the sake of convenience but was translated into local dialect wherever needed. Extensive field notes of the discussion with the respondents and interview have been maintained to supplement the data generated for the study. The data collected through questionnaire and face to face interview have been tabulated and analyzed using simple method of calculation. Formats such as tables were used for organization of data for clear and easy understanding. The fractions above .50 were taken as 1. Percentage was also shown to complement the data.

**Plan of the Thesis**

The present study is organized into 6 (six) Chapters including the Introduction and Conclusion.

The introduction as discussed is the Chapter one wherein the status of women in Arunachal Pradesh with special reference to the Adi of East Siang district has been dealt in historical perspective in respect to Share in Household Duties, Choice of Occupation, Marriage, Dissolution of Marriage or Divorce, Traditional Social
Institutions, Religion and Rituals, Property Rights and Inheritance, Health and Hygiene.

Chapter two would review the socio-economic status of the Adi women and in order to draw a comprehensive picture of the situation, variables like Sex Ratio, Life Expectancy, Infant Mortality, Level of Education, Work Participation of women and Crime against Women would be analyzed.

Chapter three will focus upon the representation of women in the political set up of the District, State Legislative Assembly, Elected Local Bodies and its impact on the traditional polity. An attempt will be made to elucidate the status of women in politics and examine the reasons for the unsatisfactory participation of women in active politics.

Chapter four would assess the status of women SHGs members and analyze the impact of SHGs on empowerment of Adi women in East Siang.

Chapter fifth proposes to examine the impact of modernity and the emerging trends of women in the Adi society due to the influence of various factors such as education, urbanization, employment, health and hygiene in the form of case studies.

Chapter six is the concluding chapter and summarizes the main research findings of the study. The analysis of the different chapters of the work would form the basis of postulates in the last chapter on conclusion. It would also propose to make certain suggestions to the policy- makers regarding future developmental scheme related to empowerment of women in Adi society.