

Progress Report

Title of project:

Documentation and archiving of Traditional dormitory system in Arunachal Pradesh as a means of imparting value-based education in tribal society

Name of Principle Investigator: Dr Tuisem Shimrah

Address: E-1, Ground Floor, MalkaGanj, Delhi 110007

Mob: 9968967234, E-mail: tsshimrah@gmail.com

Introduction

An important feature of traditional tribal society was the absence of reading and writing. It was only during colonial rule that this tradition of reading and writing was established in tribal society. In this, the Christian missionaries played a pioneering role. The advent of Christianity was always accompanied by introduction of so called modern system of education which are driven and loaded with European culture and tradition. This formal modern education, although opened up avenues of new knowledge, skill and employment in tribal society, but most of its values and content are often diluted with half-baked western civilization. Prior to this, knowledge, skills, roles, norms, values, traditions, and customs at work in society were passed on to children through the process of socialization. Knowledge, norms, values and traditions that were passed on, pertained to different spheres of life and activity. This included among other things, reproductive health practices, ways to nurture and raise children and the role of the husband, the wife, other family members and the community at large in this activity. In this process of socialization, the agency known as youth dormitory played a critical role.

The English word 'dormitory' is derived from the Latin word *dormitorium*, meaning a communal or collective sleeping quarter. Dormitories are youth houses facilitating young people to come and live together and is common among tribal communities. In India dormitories have played an important role in the cultural, social and religious evolution of many tribes. The formal education is comparatively a new institution to the tribal communities in India. The tribal children of all traditional economic groups have been acquiring their traditional knowledge through the socialization process in family, relatives, playmates and society in day to day life. Many tribal societies have their traditional youth dormitories from where the children learn all the aspects of life through informal training.

The dormitory provides a community life for the youths and inculcates a strong sense of unity, discipline and corporate life. They also acted as guard house and the members of the dormitory look after various affairs of the village such as cleaning, protecting and maintenance of sanitation of the village. The members of the dormitory render joint communal service to individual families during marriage, sacrificial rituals, construction of house, harvesting or cutting jhum fields for cultivation or the village community works. The dormitory sometimes settles small cases mostly among its member even before referring to the village council.

Another important function of the dormitory in early times was the protection of the village from enemies and wild animals. Thus all weapons, dao, spear, bow and arrows are kept in the dormitory. The few leaders of the dormitory consisting of elder and more experienced members of the youth train younger members to be an ideal and responsible citizen of the community. These seniors also train the juniors in handicraft specially basketry and warfare and in handling of weapons. Even moral instruction covering marriage affairs are also imparted. The dormitory also acts as a recreational centre for the youths of the village.

It may be mentioned that though the origin of the dormitory is obscure it can be safely summarized that the need to impart traditional education to young man and provide protection to the village from hostile enemies must have been the basic factors leading to the emergence of the dormitory which is a fundamental social institution of the tribal communities

It is also acceptable fact that the Christian missionaries were pioneer in the field of tribal development and formal education. In an earlier study on youth dormitory 'Dhumkuria' of Oraon tribe of Chotanagpur by S.C. Roy have stated that "It was an effective economic

organization for purposes of food quest, a useful seminary for the training of young men in their social and other duties and an institution for magico-religious observance calculated to secure success in hunting and to augment the protective power of the young men so as to increase the number of hunters in the tribe” (1915:211-212). The other studies on youth dormitory have reported that the tribal youth meet in evening at the dormitory where they recite age-old traditional folklore, folk tale, solve puzzles, training in dance, drama, music, organization, leadership, discipline, agricultural work, handicraft, games, sports and education of sexual life for young unmarried boys and girls. But presently many of the youth dormitories are in dying condition or have become obsolete and in some places it is abolished due to impact of modernization and educational development. So, it remains only in name but its concept and functions are absolutely changed (Duary, 2010).

Although, institution of dormitory in tribal communities are praised and appreciated by many workers, they are not free from negative representations. That the tribals marry early may be true but it needs to be placed in the context of history and tradition. Early marriage in tribal society has been more due to contact with the outside world, especially the larger Hindu society, where early marriage has been perceived as a value addition and status symbol. To stretch it to a phase when they had not been socially and culturally drawn to the larger society may be farfetched. There is separate dormitory for boys and girls. Dormitory played an important role in socialization from adolescent to adulthood. Although boys and girls had the freedom of meeting and knowing each other, there were norms and values in terms of which they were guided in their behaviour, including that pertaining to their sexual life. Even in some cases where both the sexes assemble, such as dormitories of Ghotuls, sexual congress is a sacrilege. In tribal dormitories the youth is not only made aware of the cultural aspects, but also of his physiology as an important part of learning. One of the prime features this Ashrams Zawlbuk and Nokpante achieved by segregating the youth was the practice of Brahmacharya or celibacy. The channelization of sexual energy of the youth thus achieved was always directed towards village welfare in similar way when Ram and Lakshman could protect the heritage of their Guru Vishwamitra from being plundered by aliens. The dormitory youths were a force, which protects the village from wild predators, and enemy attacks. Besides helping the villagers with maintenance of road, houses and take the responsibility of arranging annual feasts and other communal get together

Further, there was less likelihood of an early marriage in the traditional set up. Although marriage by love and elopement did have a place in tribal society too, arranged marriage was the normal and dominant practice. In arranged marriages, processes could be initiated only after it had been ascertained whether the boy and the girl were in a position to meaningfully contribute towards the maintenance of the family in terms of their work and labour. Further, arranged marriages had to go through a procedure of various customary practices, which was more often than not, a protracted process. All this protracted the marriageable age of both boys and girls in the traditional setting.

Review of literature

Shibani Roy (2006) located the existing of tribal youth dormitories at the Pan Indian level and found out that these are confined to remote eastern tribal belt of Indian states such as Kerala, Chattisgarh, Orissa, Jharkhand, Meghalaya, Assam, Tripura, Mizoram, Manipur, Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh and Andaman & Nicobar Islands.

The morung (dormitory) was an important educational institution for the boys in Nagaland. There were regular ranks through which boys passed until they attained adulthood and were admitted to full membership.

According to Nanjunda (2008), in Paniya, the dormitory system is there to orient boys and girls to acquire skill and knowledge that is required to be a full phased member of their society. There are separate dormitories for boys and girls in each village. After returning from fields, they stay together in the dormitory and in an informal ways i.e. through songs, dance, riddles, proverbs, gossip, etc. which are transmitted orally from generation to generation. The whole night is spent amidst dancing and singing, travelling to other dormitories and interacting with boys and girls over there. By the time they turn to adulthood they master their arts, traditions and customs and command respect as a bonafide member of their community. Therefore sending children to school is a worthless investment for parents. Because, not only he/she is deprived of helping their parents in sibling care and household works and learning basic skills of their society but also the family loses an able hand from the household and by thus a lot of income.

Nayak (2014) reported that dormitory system was prevalent in Kandha society for unmarried girls right from the age of ten and above. They were permitted to sleep in the dormitory and boys from other villages could visit dormitory and the girls would entertain the boys with country cigar and then they performed Dhangada Dhangidi dance with the boys. Such activity was a platform for choosing one's life partner. He further stated that dormitory was the cultural centre of the Kandhas; the birth place of folk literature like songs, tales, riddles, apart from place to learn social behaviour and social laws.

Ngalengnam (2013) reported that Nagas have affinities with many tribes of the Southern seas of the globe mainly Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia, Taiwan etc, in terms of institution of dormitory. Since ancient time compulsory training in warfare and physical training were imparted to all the young men in their dormitory (called *Morung*). The *Morung* was a key institution in Naga society of the past. It was a large building decorated with elaborate carvings. But its function went far beyond providing separate shelters for adolescent boys and girls who lived and slept in it until marriage. It was also used as a guard-house during times of war when warriors stayed in it. That was why the *Morung* was built next to the village gate or at the strategically most advantageous place. But more important is that it was in the *Morung* that traditional knowledge skills and customs were transmitted from generation to generation.

In the study of dormitory in Juang tribe, Behera and Pfeffer (2008) noted traditional education and youth dormitory in Juang community has a vital role to play in the personality development of a child. Through centuries of wisdom Juang have built up a recognized reward and privileges alongside of obligations and this reward motivate them to perform their duties. They observed that co-operation of the group members and their common interests find full expression in two situations in dormitory, i.e. dancing visits exchanged between *bandhu* boys and girls, and their common economic pursuits like cultivating common patches of forest land, working as hired labour for wages, collecting oil-seeds from the jungle, etc. The Juang culture clearly captures their attitude to knowledge and education. Knowledge like the land and the air and water is common property-everyone must share it.

In the study of status of tribal Children and education in India, Virginius Xaxa reported, that modern education in tribal society was not only a new but also an alien phenomenon. Not only was the language of reading and writing alien, but what came to be taught too, was alien in tribal society. Even those engaged in imparting such instruction were strangers to tribal society. This partly explains why tribal children found education far from attractive. The high drop-out rate in tribal society is to a great extent linked with this phenomenon. In fact, the percentage of tribal children crossing such barriers has been small and those who have been able to, have moved to occupation other than agriculture and have been the pillar of the new

middle class in tribal society. Much of the tribal population engaged in white collar jobs belongs to the section of the first generation literate, which in spite of being exposed to modern education and occupation, represented a very strong sense of tribal identity. The same cannot be said of the second generation school-going tribal children. Their aspiration, outlook and attitude have been quite contrary to their parents. They have an aspiration to rise socially but this has much to do with their attraction towards material well being and not so much with the well being of their community. In terms of attitudes, however, they display an easy attitude and a liking for short cut methods, quite contrary to the attitudes of their parents”.

In the study of tribal schools in Koraput District, prior to the schools and formal system of education, tribal societies had their own formal system of imparting education to their children (Panda, 1996). In that system, learning from the habitat, family and group was dominant through enculturation and socialization. Youth dormitories like the “Ghotul” of Muria, “Rangbang” of Bhotia, “Moruang” of Oraon and “Dhangarbassa” of Bhuiya played important role in shaping one’s mental and physical responsibilities towards their communities.

Objectives

1. To understand, document and conserve intangible rich cultural significance of institution of dormitory
2. To find out consequences of replacement of traditional dormitory system by formal modern institution
3. To analyse and inculcate rich cultural values of dormitory into modern education system
4. Archiving of traditional literatures and instruments associated with dormitory in Arunachal Pradesh

Method

Preliminary surveys have been carried out in districts of West Siang, East Siang, Central Siang and Upper Siang in Arunachal Pradesh. Traditional villages representing all these districts were visited and data were collected through public discussion, questionnaire based interviews and focussed discussion with local knowledgeable persons.

Following observations were discerned from data:

Dormitory System in Adi Community

The social institution that forms an important part of Adi tribes in Arunachal Pradesh in Northeast India is Dormitory system. The Adi is one of the major tribes living in the districts of West Siang, East Siang, Upper Siang, Dibang Valley and recently created Siang District. Some of them are found in Southern Tibet, around areas near the Indian border. The literal meaning of Adi is “hill” or “mountain top”.

The dormitory system in tribal areas has been known by several names. In Adi community, it is commonly known as ‘Dere’. (for boys) and Rasheng (for girls). The construction of Dere is such that the walls and floors with bamboos, pillars and posts with woods and thatch with leaves of fan palm (locally known as toko palm). The approximate size of the Dere is 30 m by breadth and 60 m by length. The height of Dere is about 4-10 ft above the ground. There is only one main door/entrance and window is absent in all compartment/rooms. In each of the compartment, there is a fireplace around which every one sits. The basic idea behind these institutions is to create a habit of discipline amongst the children, to educate younger members of the community about customs, tradition, rituals and ceremonies of the

community and also to create a feeling of community cooperation and thereby strengthen unity among the members.

The Dere is normally situated in the centre of the village and is constructed at a place from which different approaches to the village can be seen. These dormitories are used as the sleeping houses by all the young men of the village from the age of puberty (adolescent) till marriage. Normally all the elders (male members about sixty years of age and above) act as advisors to the Dere. They advise young members of the community on matters related to community life, arts and handicraft, agriculture, hunting, etc. Although Dere is meant for young unmarried bachelors, sometimes, the old and frail members of the village visit during day time to share their leisure and also share their experiences, amusement and teaching.

The Rasheng or the girls' dormitory is meant for the amusement and learning centre for the art and regulation of various tenets of life including love-making. Unlike Dere, Rasheng is constructed in such a way that there are as many compartments as clans in the village. Each compartment is meant for members of each clan. All unmarried female members of the village from the age of puberty to oldest member/s sleep in their respective clan Rashengs. During the day time, Rasheng looks deserted as all members are busy in their agricultural fields; generally shifting agriculture. At night, several activities such as singing, gossiping and other handicraft works such as spinning and weaving is carried out here. All these activities are being carried out along with drinking of local rice beer known as 'Apong'. Among them, some senior experience members normally supervise the function of Rasheng. It is a training institution for the girls in discipline, comradeship, responsibility and leadership.

This dormitory is purely secular in nature and has no religious significance. It is not only a place of education and training but is a platform for initiation of choosing life partner. The romantic life of a youth starts here. Every night, young boys from their dormitory have to visit girls' dormitory to have fun, chat and drinks. It is the place of observation for the boys on the girls on which basis they have to choose their prospective future life partners. Boys would diligently observe girls on their behavior, actions and talents. It is taboo for boys to visit girls of the same clan as they should not have incestuous love affairs. Such activities usually lead to affairs of the boys and girls of marriageable clans which subsequently lead to marriage. Thus the Dere and Rasheng of the Adis are the central institution where the boys and girls received practical training in traditional mode of life.

Dormitories play an important role in development of one's personalities and shaping a discipline life among the people of the Adi tribe. Here certain rules and regulations are to be strictly observed. At any circumstances a male cannot stay overnight in girls' dormitory. His visit is restricted to certain period of night. Secondly a boy and a girl shall not meet in isolation. They have to be in the dormitory itself in the presence of all members of the girls. At times, guardians or/and advisors will have to be around to guide the youngsters. Some children are allowed to visit dormitory, but only for specific purpose, i.e., for supply of fuel/fire wood in the dormitory.

Thus it shows that significant part of the formative ages of the people was imbibed and influenced by the rules and teachings of dormitory life.

The costume of both girls and boys are different in the dormitory. There are separate dresses for women and men which are woven by women of the tribes. Helmets made from cane, bear and deer skin are sometimes worn by the men, depending on the region. While the older women wear yellow necklaces and spiral earrings, unmarried girls wear a *beyop*, an ornament

that consists of five to six brass plates fixed under their petticoats. Tattooing was popular among the older women.

Changes in Dormitory system in Adi community

Rapid urbanisation, development activities, education etc., has played influential role in changing the functioning of traditional youth dormitory in all traditional communities. With introduction of formal education system in every village; the dormitory system is not in operation today. In all villages Rasheng is abolished and the male dormitory (Dere) is now converted to village 'Kebang' (village council).

Dormitories are now serving as community halls. Village level meetings (kebangs), social gatherings and festivals etc. are held in these places. At times young people, sometimes the elders also attend to gossip in the community hall during day time. Every Adi village locally known as 'Dulung', is run by a council called Kebang. All the adult members of the village are its members. The elders of the Kebang are called as Kebang-abus or Gaoburas. Thus the Kebang has collective leadership.

Utilization of Dere in contemporary society

Hunting

Among the Padam-Minyongs the collective hunting is called ampi. This is an annual affair, and it is planned and organised in the Dere. The games in the hunting are distributed among the participants and the catches ampi-kiruk, are deposited in the moshupDere, of the village. In return the mijings throw a feast called dorung. Fish is taken on all occasions with rice and rice beer. Any surplus catch is smoked and dried and are taken in the lean period. Fish is also given to the parents-in-law as a part of the bride price.

Clan Organisation:

The Adis maintain a strong clan identity and a lot of socio-cultural observances are regularised by clan identity only. The clan or the exogamous group of the Adis are known as opins or ali. Each clan and its sub-clans trace their descent from one common ancestor. The Minyongs are divided into two moieties the kumuung and the kuri. The former has 15 sub-clans and the later has 16 sub-clans. All clan related activities are performed in Dere.

Ceremonies and Festivals

Solung is one of the main festivals of the Padam-Minyong groups of the Adis. It is the manifestation of Adi's fertility cult. Such ceremonies and festivals are being held in Dere.

Community service played by Dere

Dormitory system or Dere acts as the enforcer for community works. If the Kebang or elderly people fix time and date of any developmental or community work such as hunting and fishing, festivals, rituals or any taboo for the coming days, it is to be announced in Dere. In the events of deaths or any misfortune happenings in the village, all necessary rituals are to be performed in Dere. It is also a place for settlement of any disputes arising among the community. It is also the place to collect fines and indemnity, etc, from those villagers who remain absent from the Kebang or community work such as community hunting and fishing, festivals, rituals or any taboo.

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Works to be done:

- More field work to cover interior traditional villages to documentation

PLATES

Typical Adi Village (Left) and a Dere (Right)



Adi dance in dormitory (Dere) and Adi girl weaving a shawl



Typical Adi house



Male dormitory (left) and its members (right)

