The Bangru: The Lesser Known Tribe of Arunachal Pradesh

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Chapter 1
The Bangru: The Lesser Known Tribe of Arunachal Pradesh

☆ Tame Ramya

ABSTRACT

The present chapter reports the ethnographic profile of an unknown or unrecognised small sub-tribe of Nyishi namely Bangru living in Sarli circle of Kurung Kumey district in Indian State of Arunachal Pradesh. A total of 15 villages from the circle were selected for the study. The data were collected using a set of ethnographic techniques viz., observation, informal interviews with the villages and in-depth interviews with key informants the community. Within this study, I attempt to provide a general ethnographic outline of traditional Bangru society and culture as it existed a years ago when it was still relatively untouched by outside influences. My objective is to offer a systemic compilation of ethnographic data on traditional Bangru society, which may be helpful to those keen to know about Bangrus and to those interested in this region as any accounts of this land and its people are still not available.

Keywords: Ethnography, Bangru, Sub-tribe, Nyishi, Arunachal Pradesh, Kurung Kumey.

1.1 Introduction

The Bangru is one of the least-known sub-tribe of the larger Nyishi tribe of Arunachal Pradesh, with a population of about 2600 people. They inhabit mainly in the Sarli administrative circle of Kurung Kumey district (erstwhile Lower-Subansiri)
in northern fringe of central Arunachal Pradesh, bordering the Tibet (China). They are spread in Sarli town and in few villages *viz.*; Bala, Lee, Lower Lichila, Upper Lichila, Machane, Milli, Molo, Nade, Namju, Palo, Rerung, Sape, Sate, Wabia, and Walu.

Till date, the Bangru is considered the sub-tribes of the larger Nyishi tribe of Arunachal Pradesh, although they differ in their origin and dialect. However, it is evident that both have somewhat similar socio-cultural specialities due to long association over the years. The major clans of Bangru are Pisa, Milli, Sape, Mallo, Tagang besides some minor clans. The Pisa clan is considered more advanced than its counterpart. The origin of the Bangru is not clear but it is certain that its origin is unparalleled with the Nyishi. They are similar in their physical appearance and are well versed in Nyishi dialect. They believed that they were the descendants of the children borne out of the Ju (Sun).

This study presents a conceptual framework on the historical development of the Bangru community of Kurung Kumey district. It is intended to provide a critical perspective. It describes how the Bangru maintained the elements of traditional culture in their day to day life and also attempts to textualise the oral history by incorporating their past perspectives.

This study centred on the Bangru who inhabits the Sarli circle of Kurung Kumey district. They are economically and educationally backward and also are deprived of many facilities enjoyed by other ethnic groups. It also focuses on the impact of modernisation on their culture and how their indigenous culture is in danger of extinction. This study has selected all Bangru inhabited villages of Sarli circle as the area of study.

### 1.2 Objectives of the Study

This study is ethnographic in nature and the basic objectives are:

i. To know who are Bangru - their origin, migration from their oral tradition,

ii. To provide a basic ethnographic understanding of their social institutions-religion, marriage, village administrative organisation,

iii. To understand their village economy and other livelihood strategies.

### 1.3 Methodology

The study is purely exploratory and descriptive in nature following the ethnographic model. Both primary and secondary sources of data have been used in the interpretation. Primary sources of data are obtained using various tools and techniques like household survey, in-depth interviews in the form of informal and unstructured questionnaire with key-informants of the community such as village elders, leaders, etc. and also by participant observation. Pelto and Pelto (1978) standard guidelines have been followed during the collection of the ethnographic data. Random sampling based on gender and age of the population had been followed. The universe of the study area confines to Bangru inhabited villages of Sarli Circle, in Kurung Kumey district of Arunachal Pradesh.
Since, there is any specific literature available on Bangru, the official records, documents and literatures available on the Nyishi in district headquarter of Kurung Kumey i.e. Koloriang has been used as secondary sources of data.

1.4 Universe of the Study

The Bangru a sub-tribe of Nyishi, spread over fifteen (15) villages in Sarli circle of Kurung Kumey District of Arunachal Pradesh constitute the universe of the study. Since, the Bangru constitutes unit of study basic information was collected through a comprehensive household survey schedule and using multiple data gathering devices, in order to make an in-depth investigation of the issues concerning people’s participation and development of the target group. All the Bangru inhabited villages were selected because they all concentrated in these areas, although some populace have migrated outside the region of recently.

1.5 Bangru: An Ethnographic Profile

Bangru, an assumed sub-tribe of Nyishi inhabit the Sarli Circle, an administrative circle of former Lower Subansiri District, now part of Kurung Kumey District; live in what may be called as “Ultima Thule of Kurung Kumey District”. Since, time immemorial they have met their subsistence requirements through mixed economic activities like agriculture (Jhum and Settled), hunting, fishing, gathering and other subsistence activities. Isolated in their remote, inhospitable, and high-mountain environment the Bangrus have had to find practical solutions to such basic problems as dearth of arable land for cultivation, lack of sufficient water for irrigation, and escalating population pressure on resources. The construction of terraces and traditional irrigation channels, a ritual complex that ensured the optimal use of seasonal conditions and limited time and space, and a system of communal and private land ownership that applied to this high-altitude region are some of the Bangrus’ solution to their problems.

1.5.i Origin and Migration of the Bangru

Like most tribes of Arunachal Pradesh, the origin and migration of the Bangru is vague, since they have no written records. So far, no scholars or writers have ever made any earlier reference about Bangru even while documenting histories, customs and traditions of various tribes and sub-tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. This is probably due to the fact that no scholar have ever paid a visit to the land of Bangru inhabiting in one of the most remotest and inaccessible region of Arunachal Pradesh. What little is known about their origin and migration is based on their oral narration. However, it is believed that hundreds of years ago the Bangru migrated somewhere from Tibet and established their settlement around this place now called as Sarli and in its adjoining areas.

Mythological, the Bangru believes to have originated from a place called Neto-Nello Puko, meaning ‘a place where the people fall/ came down from Ludlu (Sky/ Heaven) sent by Aneya Ju (Mother Sun), located in the present Sarli circle of Kurung Kumey district. Bangru, unlike many tribes of Arunachal Pradesh traced their descendant directly from the Ju (Sun). It may be noted here that there are two factions
Figure 1.1: Map of Arunachal Pradesh Showing Bangru Inhabited Region.
among the Bangru divided on the basis of their versions of origin, i.e.; the general Bangru (Phujoju and Milliju and other minor groups), and the Sape who have a different version about their origin and migration.

According to the legend of the first group, over the years, Bangru had moved to areas nowadays called Sarli a place called Neto-Nello Puko. Some of the respondents claimed that earlier the word Ju, meaning ‘Mother Sun’ their ancestor name was used as suffixed in every of their clan’s name. Hence, each clan were identified as Phujoju for Pisa, Milliju for Milli, Malloju for Mallo, Tagangju for Tagani, etc. But nowadays this term ‘Ju’ have been commonly avoided by the people while identifying their clan’s name.

Most Bangru prefers to call themselves as ‘Taju-Bangru’, but till date all the Bangru are known as a sub-tribe of Nyishii to the outsiders. So far, it cannot be ascertained as to when Bangru have entered to the present habitats. Some of the informants claimed that there is another branch of Bangru which they call them as Wadu-Bangr whom they believed has moved towards the western route i.e. the present East and West-Kameng districts. So, they presumed that Aka and Miji (Sajolang) tribes are of common descendants under Wadu-Bangru branch. They substantiated their argument by comparing their Phojoju and Milliju with Miji’s (Sajolang), Rijiju and Khonjuju.

On the other hand, the second group i.e., Sape clan traced their origin of migration from a place called Jiila-Ralla. This group is considered the latter entrant to the present habitats who came to help the first group during warfare. These people assumed common descendants with Memba and Khamba who migrated towards east i.e. present Mechuka and Tuting regions of West and Upper-Siang respectively.

Thus, it is pertinent that the two groups are of different origin and from different place despite now speaking similar language, customs and tradition, since both have different versions of origin, migratory routes and different ancestral history. This assumed that in the past, when they migrated to the Sarli region either the earlier group or the latter group must have suppressed and dominated the other, thereby the weaker must have submit and assimilated with the dominant group under certain socio-economic and political conditions.

1.5.ii Population Composition

Bangru, numbering about 1,023 (39.35 per cent), out of approximately 2,600 persons in the Sarli circle is one of the least-known tribes of Arunachal Pradesh, located in Sarli Town of Kurung Kumey district. There are not more than 15 villages. Although there is no separate Census record on this community, however, according to the data gathered by the author, the Bangru accounts for about 1.14 per cent of the total population of Kurung Kumey district. The Bangru population of the Sarli Circle is given alphabetically according to their village.

1.5.iii Language

Bangru is an unclassified linguistic group which was earlier included in the Upper Assam language group of Tibeto-Burman language family, though no evidence
is available on it language affiliation. It is different from languages of Nyishi and Puroik. But the three groups have socially and culturally very close affinity among each other. However, it is worth noting that the Bangrulanguage has been largely influenced by Nyishi and as a result changes have occurred in the internal reconstruction of Bangru speech forms. But it would not be wrong to opine that the language of Bangru is remarkably pure. Due to intermingle of Nyishi, Bangru and Puroik languages there reflects some affinities in their verbal communication. There is no evidence as to put the Bangru language into some linguistic diverse group and subgroups since no specific study on linguistic affiliation of the Bangru language is done, so far. The language shift is observed among the people where they inclined more to Nyishi, a neighbouring tribe of the region.

1.5.iv The Settlement Pattern and Housing

The Bangru settlement is small in terms of its size and population. As per my field records, the total population of the Bangru villages varied between 6-306 persons, the highest being the population of 306 persons observed at Sarli Town, while the lowest is 6 persons in Walu village. This is because a person is living with his Nyishi relative in the village. It is also to mention here that each settlement is recognised as village by the state government but for administrative convenience 2-3 settlements are pooled together to make a complete single village where one representative in the form Anchal Samiti Member (ASM) is elected. However, a typical Bangru settlement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl.No.</th>
<th>Village</th>
<th>Total Population</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Bala</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Lee</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Lichila (Lower)</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Lichila (Upper)</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Machane</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Milli</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Molo</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Nade</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Namju</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Palo</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Sape</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Sarli Town</td>
<td>306</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>Sate</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>Wabia</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>Walu</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>1023</td>
<td>471</td>
<td>552</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: The Electoral Registration Office, Koloriang.
usually consists of 50 to 100 populations. Each of these small settlements inhabited by about 10-20 households is known as Ne Ye (village). It is also found that 5-10 hamlets on a particular hill are combined and given a village name.

The typical Bangru settlement is characterized by sparse distribution with little disorderliness. The houses are distributed unevenly in the settlement area. Many a time, the houses are constructed wherever a place is available. Traditional households in the Bangru settlement are thatched and uniform in their structure. However, with the passage of time, such traditional thatched houses are now being replaced with modern day’s CGI sheets (tin sheets) to whom people deem more comfortable and secure to use. When the sons separate from their parents usually after marriage, they construct another house adjacent to their parent’s house. If there is no space available, they may construct at some other place nearby.

1.6 Social Organisation of the Bangrus

Bangru society is patriarchal with a distinctive character of tribal endogamy and clan exogamy social system. We have already noted that the Bangru tribe is dividing into five clans and each clan few minor clans. The Bangrus’ tradition is unanimous in talking of five clans although the number of sub-clan differs. The Bangrus accept the rule of the clan system and the myths, which form its background, are a key to the understanding of almost everything that is distinctive in their way of life. Violation of tribal endogamy and clan exogamy are the crimes in the Bangru society and those who break these rules are deal with exemplary penalties. The fundamental and primary feature of social organisation is represented in every Bangru village. The presence of different clans in a village demonstrates obviously the democratic character of Bangru society.

The Bangrus constitute a well-defined and homogeneous group of people. Although their villages are scattered over a wide area, the Bangru people everywhere speak the same language and follow the same customs, have the same traditions, beliefs, rites, and ceremonies. Such small differences as they present from place to place are hardly greater than those obtaining between the villagers of adjoining regions. All are bound together by a common sentiment for the tribal name, reputation, tradition, and customs. At least five clans of Bangrus, each bearing a distinctive name, are recognised. The word Ne Ye, which appears in the names of each group, means village or settlement, and it seems probable that these five clans represent 15 original Bangru villages viz. Bala, Lee, Lichila (Lower), Lichila (Upper), Machane, Milli, Molo, Nade, Namju, Palo, Rerung, Sape, Sarli Town, Sate, Wabia and Walu which have contained the whole Bangru population.

1.6.1 Gyaiidya (Marriage) Among the Bangru

Marriage in Bangru society, as in all other societies is a turning point in the life history of an individual from where he branches off from the parental roof and establishes a new unit. A girl on her marriage abandons her parent’s home and goes to live with her husband. Traditionally, polygamy was prevalent in Bangru society where number of wives was the symbol of being wealthy in the society. However, in contemporary Bangru society monogamy is preferred because family problems arise
due to multiple wives. The cross-cousin marriage system that is marriage with mother brother’s daughter is preferred form.

It is worth mentioning here that the Bangru, Nyishi and Puroik inter-marry frequently and have developed close socio-cultural relations. These inter-marriages and close socio-cultural contacts have reduced much of their differences, although some dissimilarity prevailed. Marriage among the Bangrus generally involves the following considerations:

i. Enhancement of social and economic status in the society.
ii. Addition of working hand in the Wua (fields).
iii. Housekeeping partner.
iv. Meeting the biological and psychological needs.
v. Procreation.
vi. Financial gain to the bride’s in-laws.
vii. Increase in sphere of influence and cooperation through new relationships.

Among the above marriage considerations, priority is given for procreation, to meet the biological and psychological needs, for helping in domestic works and housekeeping.

Marriage in Bangru society is traditionally arranged by the parents preferably with the people of equal social status. The Bangru do not prefer marriages between specific kinsmen, for in olden days the alliance of the two families called for mutual support in fends and raids (Haimendorf 1982:64). Matrimonial alliances were a means to gather allies to defend itself against attack from enemies. Marriages are also arranged to obtain some valuables of fine quality and repute which the girl’s family may be having.

As in many tribal societies of Arunachal Pradesh, the concept of divorce in Bangru society did not have much significance. Usually, divorce is not sought by a man. When he does, it is not binding on him to return the gifts given to him in exchange for the bride price. In lieu, a fine may be imposed for deserting the wife. But, if it is initiated by a woman, her parents are obligatory to return the bride price, sometimes double of the actual amount. Customary law does not speak of any divorce alimony or compensation for a divorcee.

1.6.ii Family (Lameii)

The family is a universal institution and has existed throughout the history of human society. It is the smallest social unit consisting of parents and their unmarried children. It is the simplest and the most important primary group in society.

Lameii (Family) in the Bangru society is the outcome of marriage. Bangru has the tradition of joint family system but in present society nuclear type of family which is most commonly found. This is because married sons more often tends to live in different house by their own resulting in the nuclearisation of the family. With the passage of time, family has undergone changes gaining and losing valour shapes and characteristics. The present age of economic development and cultural revival
have posed some new challenges to the institution of family; leading to radical changes in the structures and functions of family. Unlike in the past, father does not have control over the whole family in many aspects. Sons who live separate from their parents make their own decisions on behalf of their families. However, the institution of family is surviving and will survive for the survival of the society itself.

With regard to family inheritance, only males are able to inherit real property on a permanent basis, although among the Bangrus, for example, a widow might be granted a temporary inheritance of her husband’s property (on her death it would pass to her sons), and a daughter(s) receives ornaments in the form of Tate (beads) and other such traditional ornaments. Similarly, property is often divided during a man’s lifetime, with each son receiving a portion of the property from his father upon his marriage. The property of any son dying without male children during his father’s lifetime reverted to the latter, and after the father’s death it went to the youngest son.

1.6.iii The Clan

The basic feature of social organisation depends on the division of the community. In Bangru there are two distinct endogamous groups; they are General Bangru and Sape. Within General Bangru exogamous is still prevailing, which means a man from a particular clan marries a woman from a different clan, although both of them belong to same group. For example, a member of Pisa clan can marry a girl from Milli clan though both the clans are from within General Bangru group. Each clan identifies a village or group of villages and takes the names of that place they presently inhabit. The General Bangru group is divided into four major clans like Pisa, Milli, Mallo (Mullo/ Mullong), Tagang, and few minor clans, while Sape group is considered to have only one clan with the same name of the group.

1.6.iv The Village

Anthropologists, from the very beginning have studied the village as an autonomous human institution from the view points of political institutions, social interactions, inter-personal and inter-family relationships, etc., and have come to the conclusion that the village, despite various influences and changes, has retained its particular traditional institution. The Bangru village, being the most traditional and ancient institution, crystallised a whole system of social, political, and ritual structures. The clan is the most important social unit in Bangru society. The traditional polity is based upon the village. The village is a territorial unit claiming an exclusive right to a tract of land with clear boundaries.

On certain occasions the village drew a strong spirit of cohesion from its members. There is considerable local patriotism based upon a host of legends and colourful history of the village’s past exploits. Another important aspect of the village is its function as a unit of defence. Most villages (or its member clans) are sometime in state of feud, so there is a need for perpetual alertness and vigilance, for a strong defences that would enable the villagers to resist attack without inordinate difficulty or great loss of lives. For this reason many villages are built on the hill tops, where a perennial source of water is available nearby the site. The villages are permanent and are
encased in extensive and impressive circumvallation, now represented by the efforts and innovations of many generations.

1.6.5 Kinship (Bangru Guii-Koro)

Kinship system is usually seen as a method of organising marriage relations between groups. Through marriage, members are recruited to kinship groups. The kinship is helpful to study the means of genealogies. The Bangrus are having a well planned kinship and which has got some interesting features also. The most important feature is the use of the same term Alo for grandfather on one hand but on the other for father-in-law (of both man and woman). Another feature may be found in the using of term Ako and Mesebya for all brothers and sisters (elder or younger) respectively. Mesebya is also used to refer to father's sister. The important features of the Bangru kinship are the system of existence of two well-marked groups of terms expressing bonds of kinship. Similarly, with regard to grandfather (Alo) and grandmother (Asse) respectively they used to refer to both paternal and maternal grandfather and grandmother. Further, the word 'Asse' is also used to mean either grandmother or mother-in-law or wife's mother too, which signify terminologies are limited.

Another interesting pointing is that the Bangru system has two set of kinship terms, those used in direct address and those used when speaking of relatives who do not correspond closely with one another. This system distinguishes widely between elder and younger member of the family and clan. The Bangrus never mention their kiti (mother's brother) and alo (wife's father). Similarly, a man is also prohibited in mentioning the name of the father-in-law and mother-in-law (asse). The Bangru terms of address and their equivalent words in Nyishi and English are given in the Table 1.2, I have included the Nyishi here only to find out the similarities and dissimilarities of wordings within them.

1.7 Political Organisation of the Bangru

In parallel with the other tribes of Arunachal Pradesh, Bangru also have certain legal system i.e. their customary law. Bangru customary law in its traditional manifestations is not embodied in any formal codes. There are no written laws, although many rules of conduct are epitomised in proverbs and kindred sayings. There is no well-defined corpus of legal maxims and principles. The laws of the Bangru are to a considerable extent inherent in their social systems. They exist as rights and duties developed through the course of time out of man's efforts to adjust his behaviour in relation to his fellows and to the physical environment he shares and exploits them. They have accepted from the very nature that if they can satisfy the fundamental and common needs of the society, the more it is binding and obligatory.

The traditional political system of the Bangru cannot be seen in segregation from its culture, tradition, economic and social life. The Bangru village is a unit of village-state having independent governance in many activities. In actual term, Bangru does not have specific political form rather it shows parallelism with Nyishi's Nyele, a form of council that performed the judicio-administrative functions of a village or community.
Table 1.2: Bangru Terms of Address and their Equivalent Words in Nyishi and English

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bangru Terms</th>
<th>English Equivalent Words</th>
<th>Nyishi Terms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Achowa</td>
<td>Mother’s Sisters (common)</td>
<td>Amu/Mu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aneya</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>Ane</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ako</td>
<td>Brother (common)</td>
<td>Achi/Abang/Buru</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alo</td>
<td>Father-in-law</td>
<td>Atu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asse</td>
<td>Mother-in-law</td>
<td>Ayu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juchobi</td>
<td>Sister’s Son and Father’s Sister’s Son</td>
<td>Ku</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juchobya</td>
<td>Sister’s Daughter and Father’s Sister’s Daughter</td>
<td>Ku</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kilin</td>
<td>Mother’s Brother</td>
<td>Akh/Kiigh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mechemya-Nyiib</td>
<td>Grandson</td>
<td>Ku-Nyaga Huiish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mechemya-Nyiilai</td>
<td>Granddaughter</td>
<td>Ku-Nyeme Huiish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melga</td>
<td>Husband</td>
<td>Nyulu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mesebya</td>
<td>Sister (common)</td>
<td>Anyl/Barme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mii</td>
<td>Wife</td>
<td>Nyahang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mibi</td>
<td>Father</td>
<td>Abu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miibo/ Miwo/Mibow</td>
<td>Daughter’s Husband and Son-in-law</td>
<td>Magbu/Magtay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minyii</td>
<td>Son’s Wife and Daughter-in-law</td>
<td>Nyaahang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muju-Nyiib</td>
<td>Son</td>
<td>Ku-Nyaga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muju-Nyiilai</td>
<td>Daughter</td>
<td>Ku-Nyeme</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Fieldwork (July 2011)/Bangru Villages.

The village council is usually comprises of Gaon Burahs (GBs) from some selected village elders who are expert in dealing with certain types of cases or disputes.\(^8\) The role of the council members is to settle all disputes amicably and impartially between both the parties. The council members enjoy a special status in the society. But they do not receive any remuneration for their status or rank except getting a share of the fine imposed to the accused. The most common punishment is the imposition of a fine, generally live stocks. The amount varies, according to the nature of offence and position of the offender, his previous record and his ability to pay by a single su (mithun) or his property that can be confiscated.

In the process, the role of Gingdung (mediator) is highly commendable. The Gingdung is a person who plays a very vital role in mediating between two parties to come into a consensus on any case or dispute. It is only because of his ability that the two parties accept for discussing the issue in front of the council and ordinary villagers.

In the house of council, the wrong doer or accused person is brought before the members of council to hear its decision. Almost all cases or disputes are settled in the council except some heinous crime like murder. Generally, the village council settled cases like marriage dispute, land dispute, adultery, theft, widow-remarriage, etc. by abiding their traditional customary law.
In contrast to the earliest norms of social justice dispensation in the Bangru society, the roles of village council and Gaon Burahs (GBs) are diminishing. The factors behind such changes are like the introduction of modern electoral political system in the form of Panchayati Raj system and the coming of Christianity. Nowadays, people approach directly the village panchayat as they have rights framed in rules and regulations for the welfare of the villagers. On the other hand, those Christian converts have neglected their customary law and did not approach the village council for settling any dispute.

However, there is no instance of influencing the functioning of the village council by any political parties. They are not able to influence the functioning, as the political parties are mostly seasonal. Government is taking steps to stimulate the village council by announcing allowances and honorarium for Gaon Burahs (GBs). This seems to be a kind of reorganisation of the village council. On India’s Independence Day (2012), the district administrator recognises the Gaon Burahs (GBs) by awarding red-coat and other honorarium.

1.8 Livelihood Strategies of Bangru

The socio-economic status of the inhabitants of these areas varies greatly due to a number of factors. For examples transportation and communication facilities, agricultural practice, access to various modern resources related to development, culture contact with other neighbouring communities, etc. In the past, the Bangru people live in the group, mostly residing in close proximity to forest and river fringe because their life is depended on the forests and rivers (as told by Mr. Milli Takang, a key informant). This was due to their dependency on forest products like firewood, access to wild medicinal plants for curing diseases and for fishery being their main source of livelihood. They have started practicing shifting cultivation. They practiced hunting wild animals and gathering wild fruits and herbs. The Bangrus are expert in capturing wild animals, perfected in hunting and fishing. They used various traps and tools and natural poisons while fishing in rivers and streams. They have generated enormous knowledge on a large number of plants species on which they have depended for centuries. Due to this, forests were the most important resources for them in terms of food, fibre, medicine, housing materials, fodder and various other needs.

Agriculture is the most important economy of the Bangru. They depend upon their plots not only for the major part of their sustenance, but also for a cash income since few years back. The staple crop cultivated by the Bangru is eay/ eaii (paddy). Other crops like maize, tamai (millet), finger-millet supplements rice at regular interval. There is a tree called Lazo known as ‘famine food’ which supplement their foods at very difficult times like during famine often occurred due to bamboo flowering. This tree is particularly predominant among the neighbouring Puroiks, for whom, it is serving as staple food.

The Bangru shifting cultivation is carried out in this way; a plot of land is planted with paddy, maize and other eatables for one year. In some of the villages, plot is allowed to lie fallow for 4-5 years, after which it is again put back into cultivation. In
theory, the cycle of fallow and carrying crops continues indefinitely. But the Bangru people conceived that some plots "tire" more quickly than others, therefore must be allowed to rest after few years of used.

1.9 Religious Beliefs and Ritual Practices

Belief system and ritual practices play an important role in the religious life of the Bangru. They strongly believed in certain supernatural beings able to influence the destinies of the living either for good or for evil. Their basic religious life is quite similar with those of their neighbouring tribes like Nyishi and Puroik. Like other tribes, they have also developed myths of creation; the Sun and the Moon; the origin of man and about death. The concept of soul which they called arey, is that moment it occurs when the spirit is separated from the body at the time ones death.

According to Bangru, their religion is polytheistic in nature meaning they believed and worship multiple deities, usually assembled into a pantheon of gods and goddesses. Their traditional religion is Donyi-Polo or Donyi-Poloism. They believe that some trees, stones and hills are the abodes of the spirits. Like all animistic religions, the Bangru belief consists of multitudes of benevolent and malevolent spirits. To some it is attributed to the creation of the world, to others the control of natural phenomena where the destinies of man from birth to death are governed by a host of divinities whose anger must be appeased by sacrifices through ritual ceremonies.

1.9.i The Bangru Religious Beliefs

The whole belief systems of Bangru religion may be confined to as:

2. Belief in the Supreme God.
5. Belief in Worship, Prayer and Sacrifice.
8. Belief in Tyameii (Dream).

1.9.ii The Bangru Religious Practices

The Bangru religious practices are inherent in their daily ritual performances such as:

i. Ritual to Vindicate the Truth.
ii. Ritual related to Agriculture.
iii. Ritual related to Evil Practices.
iv. Ritual on Human Death.
v. Ritual for Immediate Healing.
vi. Ritual related to Creation.
vii. Ritual related to Purification and Divine Favour.
1.10 Bangru Festivals

Like many tribal societies, the Bangru also have their festivals. The complexity of many clans and their interlocking nature are crucial aspects of their festivals, and is notable when found at the Bangrus’ technological level of development. The major agricultural festival of the Bangrus is similar to Nyishis of Koloriang area where they celebrated Longte-Yullo or simply Longte or Lungte as major festival. More interesting fact is that the myth behind this festival is entirely of Nyishis; and Bangrus have no independent myth of the origin of this festival though they are entirely a different ancestral group.

Literally, Longte means a large wooden barricade/fence, which is erected on community basis with a belief that it demarcates the domain of human beings and spirits from ill-intended trespasses. This festival is celebrated on the advent of spring season in the month of April (Lachar-Polu). The festivals, an aspect of Bangru religion in the broadest sense, are ceremonies that instill, especially in the young, profound feelings for and beliefs in the Bangru way of life. The festivals provide guidelines for acting out traditional roles, thereby sanctioning them, as well as social settings in which the individual can experience joy and express love. The festivals contribute in this way to the high social cohesion that is characteristic of the Bangru socio-cultural system.

1.11 Christianity among the Bangrus

The study of the Bangrus’ traditions and institutions would be incomplete without taking into account the influence of Christian missionaries. Christianity has a significant influence upon the Bangrus and apart from missionary activities they undertook many social welfare activities for the people. Actually, Bangrus conversion to Christianity started in the latter part of last the century when Baptists Christian Missionaries under the aegis of Kurung Kumey Baptist Mission Field (KKBMF) set their foot in Bangru inhabited regions whereby other missionaries began to work. The first people to encounter Christianity were those settled in Sarli town. Unlike in other part of Arunachal Pradesh, the Bangru people were not forbid to profess this eccentric religion. There was no any sort of prosecution against those who convert rather the people acclimatized themselves with their own will. This may be one reason why Christianity already flourished, especially among the neighbouring Nyishi tribe.

With the influence of Christianity, they have shifted from their old beliefs of Ju-Libaying (Donyi-Poloism) to Christianity but they mostly attend their basic traditions and social customs. The recent exposure to western and Christian ideas, especially education and religious practices, has resulted to a change in the Bangru way of life. This change caused a division into traditionalists and non-traditionalists. The traditionalists regarded themselves as the custodian of tribal customs while the non-Traditionalist view bringing about changes to their society by adopting Christianity or Westernisation. It is however, important to note that these groups are not geographically distinct, but lived side by side within their community and shared many social aspect of life. It is important to note that despite being Christians some are still interested in maintaining their typical Bangru traditional way of life.
1.12 Conclusion

Most tribal societies have their own distinctive characteristics, socio-cultural value-system, traditional norms and mores, religion, political, economic and kinship systems. It has its own approach to life and death, disease and sickness, individual and community, and above all a sense of identity. This sense of cultural identity or image always has positive and negative facets. It defines the traits of solidarity and uniqueness of the tribal group, and shows the differences from other groups from the perspective of the larger society.

The study on 'The Bangru' is immensely important from the sociological and anthropological points since no study has ever undertaken before into their social systems and other cultural aspects. This ethnographic piece of writing on Bangru is a humble attempt to highlight their earlier history and culture of the people which is not available as yet. Today much has changed from the past and is still changing, confronted with new social, political, and economic circumstances. Since, this is the first study on Bangru, there are difficulties in drawing conclusions despite the empirical data collected through various ethnographic methods and techniques. But, I have taken great care in recording the data of my participant and non-participant observations to be as accurate as possible.

1.13 Suggestions

Some suggestions may be made on the Bangru tribe of Arunachal Pradesh based on the field study. They are:

1. Expansion of Employment Opportunities

Some of the traditional occupations of Bangru are basket making, fishing, hunting, felling trees, etc. Now-a-days, these works have not much demand in the area as industries and modern equipments have replaced them. At this juncture the Government needs to take some necessary steps to provide employment opportunities for them. Now, some items which they produce have no market, besides there are also middle man's exploitations. In this regard, the Government and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) need to make certain schemes and plans for proper marketing to enable them to export their arts and handicraft products, thereby benefiting them economically and elevate their poverty.

2. Need Improvement for Better Transport and Communication Facility

Road transport and communication facility are the need of an hour if development is to be brought to Bangru's area, since most of their villages are located in the interior remote places. Lack of proper transport facilities has limited their knowledge about their rights, benefits, and chances for good job, education and medical care. They have to walk a long distance to the nearby small towns like Sarli and Koloriang for anything and everything like medical, educational and other governmental assistance purposes.

3. Need Improvement for Basic Amenities

Since, Bangru are located in far-flung remote villages they lack most of the basic amenities. Global issues or political issues are not their main concerned rather everyday
survival such as food, housing, health and clothing are their main worries. Though the Government provide certain schemes for their basic needs unfortunately these are not becoming reality anymore. Thus, the Government and NGOs should set up an agent in accessing and monitoring such schemes to avail to them.

4. Need Emphasis on Education

Since, most Bangru are living in remotes area and suffers from various kinds of depravities (social, economic and political), education is the only solution that will help them to overcome all of these depravations. Most of the schools in the villages are in myriad of problems like lack of infrastructures, textbooks, etc, qualified teachers. Many Bangru children are school dropouts, since their schools are located far and also their poor economic backwardness.

5. Need Improvement for Health Facilities

Since, most Bangru live below the poverty line they lack proper hygienic food, and thus suffer from various kinds of diseases and anaemic sicknesses. Though few organisations are working among them there is no satisfactory development with regards to their health related problems. Many villagers are addicted to the bad habits of alcoholism, smoking and chewing tobacco too. There is only one primary health centre located at Nade (New Sarli), that too, without sufficient medical facilities like medical staffs, medicines, etc. There is a great need to spread health awareness programmes by trained social workers and also to establish more health centres in the region.

6. Need Encouragement for Ethno-medicines, Arts and Handicraft Items

Traditionally, Bangru are rich in ethno-medicines, arts and handicraft knowledge but with the advent of Christianity and modernisation such traditional knowledge are vanishing each day. Some of their local products need a proper marketing. The Bangru are rich in their ethno-medicines plants which can be, identified, trapped and even commercialised.

7. Need for Empowerment of Women

In contemporary Bangru society women are treated as subordinate to men. The Bangru women are the most sufferers in their community, since most of the domestic works and other responsibilities are shouldered by them. They took care of their children, went to the field (wua) and gathers food items. In order to uplift the women status in society they may be empowered by providing education, job oriented training programs, employment, encouraged to form women’s society and also emphases on their rights related to equality, property, protection and other beneficiaries.

Thus, the researcher felt that if the Government and some NGO’s can make some committal intervention in the focus areas of socio-cultural, education, economic and political systems in lives of this little unknown Bangru tribe of Arunachal Pradesh, perhaps there could be much development in their society. Thereby, it is expected that there can be improvement in their living standards, income, literacy rate, health and lessen their socio-economic and political problems.
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Endnotes
1. There is no evidence on the relations of the first group with Aka and Miji and second group with Memba and Khamba. The information is entirely in accordance with the narrations of the informants.
2. This is in accordance with the recent revised electoral rolls carried out in the month of January, 2011. This is exclusively the population of persons having 18 years of age and above. No separate population statistic for Bangrus is available yet.
3. This was refers to the Nyishi society to whom Bangru society have basic similarities in their marriage customs.
4. Nyele, in actual sense of the term is the whole process of diplomacy in justice dispensation through a Gingdung (mediators).
5. Gaon Burahs here refers to those who have red-coat with modern judicio-magisterial powers.
6. Lavo is was the staple food of the Bangrus before they shift for contemporary modes of cultivation. The term is called as Tasse and Rangbang among Nyishis and Puroiks respectively.
7. These terms in Bangru language are known as Ju for Sun and Libaying for Moon respectively. Since Bangru does not have a religion with their terms; so the Donyi and Polo is being used.

References


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North-East India Tribal Studies
An Insiders’ View

The book is a collection of essays written exclusively by North-East Tribal Scholars related to various socio-economic, political, ethno-history, religion, culture, environment and linguistic issues and problems. It focuses on issues involved in understanding the complex concepts of culture, customs, worldviews and the contemporary aspects from insiders’ view points, which may be contradictory to earlier hypothetical writings by outsiders. The description also contains some invaluable data, insights and new information very useful for policy makers and academicians for further research.

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