

AGRICULTURE LABOUR MANEGEMENT SYSTEM IN APATANI / APA TANII

Dr Punyo Yarang,

Assistant Professor,
Department of Political Science,
Rajiv Gandhi University, Doimukh, India.

ABSTRACT

Apatanis traditional economy is fully depends on agriculture works. The Apatani practice intensive wet rice cultivation manually without the help of modern tools and traction. For the operation of Apa Tanii agricultural works needs a group labour. It is done through Patang. Every Apatani tries to owe suitable land for rice cultivation as rice is their staple food. It is not an easy task to cultivate the land manually, that too in a limited cultivable land in compared to the plain area of neighbouring state. Earlier, labour was not available, except few servants who worked for their master. In this context, the Apatani felt the necessity of cooperative work. Hence, they formed the group called 'Patang'. It is a peer group which constitute for the purpose of labour exchange related to agricultural work. The work of the Patang is reciprocating service among the members. The wage of the Patang labour is only a day meal and rice wine or tea and expected the same service from the members. The Patang system is not affected by modern market forces. It is still prevailing among the Apa Taniis for the purpose of agricultural work. The paper is based on participant observation.

Keywords: Agricultur, labour, Patang, traditional, tribal.

INTRODUCTION:

The Apa Tani is one of the tribe in Arunachal Pradesh. The Apa Tani society is patriarchal and patrilineal. They follow the marriage system of tribe endogamy and clan exogamy. Their religion is animism but at recent time many of them become Christian and Hindu as well. Ziro valley, land of the Apa Tani is the headquarter of Lower Subansiri district. The area covers 1015 Sq Km (approx). It is located at an altitude of 1564 meters above sea level. The Apa Tani settlement of Ziro valley originally consisted of 7 (seven) large villages. They are (1) Hari, (2) Biila (3) Hiija (4) Hangu, (5) Bamin-Michi, (6) Miidang-Tage and (7) Dutta, but new villages have been established and extended outside the village due to the rapid growth of population and influence of modern life style. Traditionally they are divided into three groups and they celebrate the Myoko festival in rotation among the three. Viz, Niichi-Niitii group represented by lone Hangu village, Tiini-Diibo group comprising Hiija, Dutta, Miidang-Tage and Bamin-Michi. Talyang Hao group are Hari, Talyang-Kalung, Reru and Tajang.

Apa Tani's traditional economy is fully depends on agriculture works. The Apa Tani practice intensive wet rice cultivation manually without the help of modern tools and traction. For the operation of Apa Tani agricultural works needs a group labour. It is done through Patang. Every Apa Tani tries to owe suitable land for rice cultivation as rice is their staple food. It is not an easy task to cultivate the land manually, that too in a limited cultivable land in compared to the plain area of neighbouring state. Earlier, labour was not available, except few servants who worked for their master. In this context, the Apa Tani felt the necessity of cooperative work. Hence, they formed the group called 'Patang'. The work of the Patang is reciprocating service among the members. The wage of the Patang labour is only a day meal and rice wine or tea and expected the same service from the members. The Patang system is not affected by modern market forces. It is still prevailing among the Apa Tani for the purpose of agricultural work.

LITERATURE REVIEW:

There have been few literatures written by the Anthropologists and travelogues on the Apatani tribe have consulted. Haimendorf (1945) was the first scholar to study the Apa Tani and their way of life systematically. His exploration of Eastern Himalayas, diaries of travels in Subansiri Region and Ethnographic notes on the tribes, he encountered in his maiden exploration of the area in 1944-45. His notes contain economic, political and social life of the Apa Tani. He mentioned some of the social institutions like Buliang (village council), Patang (labour gang) and Dapo (covenant of the Apa Tani). His book 'Himalayan Barbary' (1955) gives an account of a tribal peace conference through council of Buliang (Apa Tani village council) and Mel (Nyisi village council) for conflict resolution between both tribes. In his book 'The Apatanis and their neighbours' (1962) he describes about the functions of the Buliang. His other two books 'A Himalayan Tribe: from cattle to cash' (1980) and 'The Highlanders of Arunachal Pradesh' (1982) describes the impact of rationalized administration, opening up of education etc on the social and economic life of the Apa Tani. His latest work 'Himalayan Adventure: Early Travels in North East India' (1983) is the revised and expanded version of his earlier book titled 'The Himalayan Barbary' (1955) has short description about the organisation and function of the Buliang of Apa Tani.

Chowdhary (1982) has made an attempt to present a profile of traditional culture of tribes of Arunachal. He mentioned Buliang and Patang of the Apa Tani as a social institution.

Kani (1996) gives a good account of the Apa Tani Socio-Political Institutions. Such as Buliang, Patang, Nyibu, Buniing Ajing etc. His book is very informative and first kind of work done by the insider.

METHODOLOGY:

The study is based on historical-analytical. It is also based on participant observation. It has been supplemented by gathering both primary and secondary sources. The primary data have been collected from the seven original villages of the Apa Tani by undertaking of field study through direct interview method.

Meaning of Patang:

Patang is a peer group for agricultural works. It is constituted by same age for mutual help and reciprocity in service among the members. It is a system of labour management. A friends working

together for agricultural activities or any economic operation done in group for reciprocity is known as Patang. In other word, it is a labour exchange. Prof. Haimendorf writes, 'the most important institution for the organization of reciprocal assistance in agricultural work was the labour gang (Patang) composed of members of several households.'¹ It is a peer group which constitute for the purpose of labour exchange related to agricultural work.

Origin of Patang:

In tribal culture everything that exists in this universe has its origin in mythical age. It is same as the Patang originated in Donii (mythical age). The Donii age was the period when the human started to cultivate the land. It is believed that Anii Donii (mother Donii) and Aba Liibo (father Liibo) started the sedentary agricultural cultivation. Apa Tanii saying goes like "anii donii nentu tutu gii, aba liibo riingo patu gii; which means agricultural works started by mother Donii and father Liibo. "riimin riito miter anii donii la aba liibo nyi miitu rigii" (Narrated by Punyo Nyikang, Priest) means construction of house and granary also started by mother Donii and father Liibo. With the passage of time it was impossible to work alone in the field to complete the works. Each individual could not find time to attend the other activities. It was also felt that there was a requirement of additional assistance in the agricultural activities. Out of necessity of labour, the group formed which is called patang. 'First kind of labour group called Donii Khallo was formed in Donii age (distant past)'.

Structure or organisation of Patang:

Patang is usually constituted by a group of individuals of same age. Number of the group is not fixed. Usually it consists from four to twenty Members. There are no strict rules and regulations to form the Patang. It is formed by mutual understanding among the peer group of same age. A person becomes member of a Patang at the age of seven or eight. Prof. Haimendorf writes on Patang, 'from the age of seven or eight every Apa Tanii belongs to a Patang or labour gang, which consists of the boys and girls living in a particular quarter of a village. Until they marry the young people spend most of their working days with their own Patang and those boys and girls who are not of the same clan may become lovers or even marriage partners when they grow old.'¹¹ To form a Patang sometime the parents may ask their sons or daughters friends "patang ingya siito miilang ja", means, to form Patang or group for reciprocating labour. But most of the time young boys and girls make a group by themselves. They ask each other "kiije patang ingya siisa"- let us make Patang to work in each other's field. Young boys and girls are very excited to become a member of Patang or to have their own Patang. It is a shame or humiliation for a person, if already formed group reject him or her to become a Patang member. In such case sometime the parents may request the group to include their child as a member of Patang. The parents ensure the group that his or her child would not make any trouble in the group and also to be very kiirang (diligent) in field work. Apa Taniis says "asu mi patang ingii nii tey nyima nyang" which means nobody likes to add the lazy person as Patang member. In Apa Taniis the work is regarded as an important social value. They inculcate the work ethics at early age through Patang. The process of internalization of works ethics may be a strong mechanism of control.

Once the person became a member of Patang, each one has to maintain solidarity and fidelity among themselves. The person may remain a member of one Patang till old age. But the girls change the Patang after marriage; because she cannot contact her friends easily if she married to a distance village or clan. There is no strict rule that the member cannot change the Patang. But the sudden change of membership from one Patang to another without any reason creates a bitterness and disturbance in the group. If member leaves the Patang and joins with a new Patang is considered as betrayal or disloyal to his/her old friends. The defector of Patang may get criticisms and comments from his or her old Patang friends while they cross each other at aji ahger (bund of rice field) and subhu (narrow path between the houses or bamboo groves).

The collective opinions of majority of members of a group influence the social behaviour of people. The comment of other members in the group is also a kind of informal application of social sanctions to the individual. Bad comments or criticism is a gesture of disapproval to rejection by the group member influences the social behaviour of a person. A person gets recognition and respectability in the group

when they behave according to accepted social expectations. The opinion of the group members helps us to know what type of behaviour is acceptable and what is not. A member in the Patang is always aware that his or her displeasing behaviour may jeopardize their friendship or place him or herself in the unpopular position, and become a social outcast among the group. Therefore, the members always try to remain loyal and solidarity until the situation compels him or her to defect the patang.

The Patang group can disqualify or expel to any member; if he or she does not behave according to social norms. A person can be disqualified on following grounds- asu-ale (lazy person), paya-gaya miiga nii (a quarrelsome person), diipyo-talla nii (habitual thief), amu paka lunii, niikhu-niiche bo (a liar and conspirator). The members unanimously decide to expel the person who has the above mentioned characters. Whenever they found those displeasing characters in any one of their member, they take actions of 'patang nindu ku or nimpa du' (expulsion of the person from the Patang). However, little mistakes do not lead to the extreme action of expulsion from the group. Rather the group gives a chance and advises him or her not to do so again in future. If a person do not hearken their advice then it compels them to take action against him or her of 'nimpa du' (expulsion). The group shows their disapproval or expulsion to any member by not informing him or her about the programme of the Patang. For example, while they are working in the field itself they decide the next day programme for whom to work, what are the required tools to carry? i.e. spade, hoes, wooden plate, sickle, etc and where is the place to work. If the group purposefully do not inform any programmed of the day to a member means she or he is excluded or expelled from the group. Members have never been included or rejected on the basis of rich and poor, caste, race and sex in the group. Every day in the field they chalk out the programmes for next day. A person for whom they are to work will go to every member's house to inform the details in the evening. Likewise they can exclude from the group who is not fit for them by not informing the next day programmes.

TYPES OF PATANG:

Patang can be classified into three categories on the basis of age, time and work it performs. They are as follows:

Based on age. On the basis of age we can classified into three types of Patang. They are:

- i. Hime Patang: Children Patang or a group between the ages of seven to thirteen years is called Hime Patang.
- ii. Nyimung-Yapa Patang: A group of young girls and boys, between the ages of thirteen to twenty five years.
- iii. Akha Patang: Adult Patang or matured or group of grownup, where age is above twenty five years may included in Akha Patang.

Based on nature and time of works performed in a day:

- i. Konchi Patang: Early morning Patang, of any age group that work in the field from early morning i.e from 4.00 am to 7.00 am is called Konchi Patang.
- ii. Alo Patang: Day Patang, any of age group that work in the field whole length of the day, say from morning 8.30 am to dusk is called Alo Patang.
- iii. Lopo Patang: Lopo means a half day. Any Patang that works for half day is called Lopo Patang. They can work at morning half or afternoon half, i.e. morning 8.30 am to till 1.00 pm or till lunch time or in the afternoon from 1.30 pm to till dusk. Specially, a mother who has an infant baby, the school goer children and office goer adult make a group as Lopo Patang. Half of the day they spend in the office or in school and half day they work in the field as a group or Patang.
- iv. Kamo Patang: A group who work in the moonlight. Earlier the Akha Patang (old group) use to do work like diter tanning (tiling of early ripening paddy field) and diter nyornning (making puddle and leveling) during moonlight. Kamo Patang is no more at present.

Based on the work or activities it performs:

i. Piinang Patang: Piinang means a paddy husk; used as manure in Apa Tani fields. It means the group who carry paddy husk from husking place in a house to the field. It is done during winter season in the month November to January. In this season agriculture work starts by repairing of the dykes of terraces, gardens are newly fenced and new seedlings are planted in groves. Manure is carried to field and gardens. The beginning of agriculture work is also the season to make or form a Patang in one's life. The child at the age of seven or eight years starts to work as Piinang Patang (a group who carry the paddy husk). To carry the paddy husk in a small basket is simple and easy. So, it is carried out by Hime Patang (children group), because here the specialised task is not required. The children are assigned to do this work accompanied by one or two elders. This Patang is also called Hime Patang (childrens Patang). In the Piinang Patang, children started learn to carry the traditional basket filled with light weight piinang (paddy husk) into the paddy field or garden and broadcast it for manure. This is the initial stage of learning agriculture work when children enter into the group called Patang. Gradually they learn one after another activities that related to agriculture and in future they will become successful cultivators.

During this stage they learn to do *lyapyo-balu oniing* (digging the soil in millet fields and gardens) with a small spade. The elder or parents who escort them would tell the children lovingly and demonstrate to dig out the soil. Usually, Piinang Patang or Hime Patang works for *lopo* (half day) and *konchi* (early morning). They are in early training stage as per their delicate physical condition. It would be too exhaustive for them to work full day. During this stage children have to learn other domestic activities also, like fetching water from well and streams, tend the domestic animals and fowls, to collect firewood from nearest bamboo grove or jungle, to dry up the paddy in sun, pound the paddy, light up the fire in the evening before their parents come back from the field and jungle, look after their younger siblings or do as babysitter for own sibling etc. They also learn to identify the eatable insects, wild seasonal fruits and vegetables which serve as food supplements for day to day life of the Apa Taniis. This is the stage that parents allow them to step out from the house as a member of Patang to discover, to learn and to adapt with the wonders of nature. On the way to the field, they collect the wild berry, *tasing* (larva of dragon fly), *hamang* (vegetables) and bring it to the house to show their parents and siblings. Sometimes they bring the things which are not eatable. Their parents would tell them which one to eat and which one not to eat. In modern society, it is in the pre-primary or primary school that teachers tell the children to identify the animals, plants, flowers, birds etc. But in traditional Apa Tani society this process takes place in the Hime Patang.

A child from very young age starts to learn and carry out their economic activities by being a member of Hime Patang. Besides, the preliminary work of carrying piinang (husk) to the field and till out the soil, children also learn to do *aru honiing* (weeding), *sampya boniing* (dragging the wooden plate filled with soil) and *kiidi baniing* (soil transfer by carrying in the field). It is done for leveling the field by transferring the soil from one place to another in the same field. The children groups are required during harvesting also for *pabung baniing* (to collect the paddy grain from an individual reaper and keep it to the mat in the field). This is how a person learns from very young age till they matured to cultivate the field in very extensive manner. The highly specialized and far greater capacity of traditional methods of cultivation of the Apa Taniis has been handed down to generation through the Patang system.

ii. Pagar-Enso Patang: Pagar-Enso is the activities related to repairing the bunds, dykes, embankments, dams, channels, *kutu-riiang* (levelling irrigated field), *aru-tami* (weeding before transplantation of paddy in the field), *agar reppu* (cleaning the bunds and scatter the soil deposited near the bund in the field). This is the preparation of field for transplantation of paddy and millet. The *pagar-enso* is done at the month of February and March, for this work especially the *Akha Patang* (adult Patang) is in much demand. Sometime Hime Patang also work with the *Akha Patang*, but Hime Patang share the simple works like *kiidi baniing* (carrying soil), *sampya boniing* (dragging the wooden plate filled with soil) and *aru-tami honiing* (weeding). The *pagar* (repairing of bund), *bogo paniing* (preparing of water distribution point for irrigation channels), *pading miiniing* (to built protection embankment), *siiliing miiniing* (repairing of irrigation channel) etc. are specially done by the adult group. Here the work requires physical strength and specialized techniques.

In this season women have broadcasted paddy and millet in the miding (paddy nursery bed) and yorlu (garden). In the village whose turn it is to celebrate the Myoko festival in March, large stocks of firewood are collected by male member, Lapang (assembly platform) are rebuilt, Babo (ceremonial post) for the festival are dragged in and erected. Hunting expedition continue.

iii. Halying Patang: Next to the pagar-enso (rebuilding bunds) season is the halying, which means transplantation of paddy and millet to the aji (field) and lyapyo (millet garden). It is done in the month of April and May. Any group, children, young and old Patang who are engaged in transplantation of paddy and millet are called Halying Patang (paddy transplantation group). It is high peak season of agricultural work. The transplantation has to be completed at very short span of time. Say within fifteen to twenty days. In this season any type of Patang are in high demand. Every second of a day is important during halying. The konchi (early morning) Patang go to the field at the time cocks crow, say 3:30 am or 4:00 am. Mostly the women old Patang in the early morning do endii budu (uproot the paddy seedlings from the nursery) and other groups do the transplantation. After returning back from Konchi Patang, they would have morning meals or breakfast in their own respective house. Nobody provides any food to Konchi Patang. At around 8:30 am, the Patang members gather at house of the member for whom they are to work. They carry their day's meal and paddy seedling in the basket and proceed to the field. The Apa Taniis consider transplantation and harvesting seasons as most urgency. They compromise other works for halying (transplantation of paddy) and entii (harvesting).

iv. Entii-Patang: It is harvesting Patang. The pyaping (early ripening variety) paddy harvest starts in the month of September and emmo (late ripening) paddy in the October. This is again the time of urgency. The entii (harvesting) Patang generally consists in equal ratio of male and female. Every age of Patang is active in this season. Each individual worker reaps, threshes and carries the grain without comparing with others. Here the reapers are mostly the women. They cut the stalks about half way down and pass the sheaves back to a man standing behind her. A man kept giida pata (a big carrying basket) in front of him in which a wooden board about size of 25cm length and 15cm breadth called pata in attached at the rim. As each sheave is handed him, he threshes out the grain by beating the ears against the board so that the grains slides down into the basket. The straw he dropped to one side, to be used later for thatching or burn it for manure. When the grain basket is full, they transfer the grain to pereh (mat) spread on the ground in the field. The children group helps the pabung baniing (who carry the grain from individual basket to mat). The works division is systematically made among the groups. Women do as entii pini (reaper), men as entii dannii (thresher) and children for pabung baniu (collect grains from threshers). During the harvesting, Patang works starts from early morning till late night about 9:00 pm. Akha Patang (adult group) carry the grain to the granary at late evening till 9:00 or 10:00 pm, which is called kamo baniing (carrying grain during night) with the help of murru or yamu (traditional torch or fire).

The Patang works in turn among the members field. For the services rendered by the members no payment is made but the similar type of services is expected in the future by person who rendered the services. Thus, entire services rendered are based on the principle of mutual help and reciprocity. As a rule the members of a Patang work in turn on the field belonging to the members, and receive from the field owner no other reward than a midday meal and some rice wine. But the rich man can hire a Patang out of turn for wages.

The wage for the day is divided among the members equally or keeps it as Patang fund. This traditional system of exchanging services, therefore, can be considered as a system of insuring the service to the group with the hope of getting similar services from other at the time of need. Everything is based on the mutual understanding. Besides these services, the members also give material helps and support to its members in time of muchu (fire accident), flood, sickness, etc. Thus, the Patang as an institution is more of economic in nature which regulate exchanges of different kinds of services among the people in the village, based on mutual reciprocity and cooperation. This system among the Apa Taniis is an example of organized group solidarity based on moral obligations to help each other.

CONCLUSION:

The Patang is not only a labour group for agricultural work but also a great humanising agent. When a person enters into Patang he learns not only the agricultural works but also the social norms, standards, morals, beliefs, values and ideas of the society. At the early age of Hime Patang, culture of the society is introduced to the child. The interaction among the Patang members conditions the individuals' personality. The simple gesture of acceptance and rejection by member is deeply effect the individual behaviour. Not only that, but it also provides a stimulus to pursue their interests with confidence and courage. The attitudes of kindness, sympathy, love, tolerance, mutual help and sacrifice which provide the cementing force to social structure are developed in the Patang. Apart from fulfilling the labour requirement it also work as an agent of socialization. Thus, it controls their behaviour and regulates their relations in the society.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT:

Author wishes to thank all the key informants who were the primary source of data of the study as well as those individual who generously shared time and expertise to realize the study. Namely- Takhe Piilo a priest and Gaon Bura, Punyo Nyikang a priest and Gaon Bura, Tasso Tapa a Priest and Gaon Bura, Kago Nabing a priest and Hibu Yager who provided me with lots information about the social institution of the Apatani.

REFERENCES:

- Choudhury, J.N. (1979). *Arunachal Panorama, Itanagar, Directorate of Research, Government of Arunachal Pradesh.*
- Elwin, V. A Philosophy for NEFA, (1957). *Directorate of Research, Government of Arunachal Pradesh, Itanagar.*
- Haimendorf, C.V.F. (1945). *Ethnographics Notes on the Tribes of Subansiri Region, Shillong,*
- Haimendorf, C.V.F. (1955). *Himalayan Barbary, London, John Murry.*
- Haimendorf, C.V.F. (1962.) *The Apataniis and their Neighbours, London, The press of Gleoncoe,*
- Haimendorf, C.V.F. (1980). *A Himalayan Tribes from cattle to cash, Gaziabad, Vikas Publication.*
- Haimendorf, C.V.F. (1983). *Himalayan Adventure: Early Travels in North East India, New Delhi, Sterling Publication.*
- Kani, T. (1993). *The Advancing Apatanis of Arunachal Pradesh, Guwahati, Pubadesh Mudram.*
- Mamu, Tage. (2010). *Patang: Socio-Economic institution of Apa Taniis, (M.Phil. Dissertation, Unpublished) Rajiv Gandhi University, Rono Hills, Doimukh,*
