



Livelihood Transition: Economic Impact on Bugun tribe of Arunachal Pradesh

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Abstract:

The Khowa tribes, also known as Buguns were indigenous tribe of Arunachal Pradesh live in 12 native villages in Singchung administrative circle of West Kameng District, Arunachal Pradesh. They speak Kho-wa language. They have their own tradition, language and life style. Gathering of forest products, hunting, fishing and shifting cultivation was the livelihood pattern of them earlier. With the coming of modernization and flow of people, the life style of Buguns is in transitional phase. The changes in livelihood have significant impacts on socio-cultural and economic life of the Buguns.

Therefore, present study is an attempt to understand the economic impact on Bugun tribe due to modernization process in their society.

Keywords: Indigenous, modernization, economic impact, transitional phase, livelihood.

Arunachal Pradesh is a land of multi-ethnicity and multi-diversity state where 26 major and more than 100 sub tribes live together. Buguns are one of the major tribe of Arunachal Pradesh who has distinct features like language, food habits, livelihood, autonomy, etc. Buguns are primarily inhabitants of Singchung administrative circle of West Kameng District. They have associated with livelihood pattern such as shifting cultivation, cattle rearing, hunting and forest food gathering.

The Buguns are Mongoloid race and they believe to have descended of Achinphumpulua and Moi Ninu. They are divided into different clans based on the location of their village. Village administration is run by village council (Thap Nimiyang) headed by village chief (Thap Bkhaw). The village elder along with village chief decides the functioning of the society, disputes, use of forest resources, etc. The decision of village council is final and above everyone and the functioning of village council is purely democratic in nature.

Nimiyang is accepted as social welfare organization and its foremost function is to maintain peace and tranquility in traditional village. The functioning of Nimiyang is many. Its immediate concern is to understand and work for the general wellbeing and prosperity of the members of village and society. To uphold the interest of all matters like materialistic

and religious affairs, community fencing, community welfare work, etc are monitored by the Nimiyang.

Nimiyang call meeting at any point of time as per the demands. The decisions like conduct of festivals, rituals, cultural show and developmental plan are chalked out by the Nimiyang. With the passage of time and coming of modernization and modern court, the functioning and importance of Nimiyang is partially reduced.

Buguns are partially endogamous as they marry within their community but marriages within inter- tribes and non- tribal is also accepted in modern days. They maintain clan exogamy like other tribes of Arunachal Pradesh and do not marry within their own clan.

Unlike Sherdukpen and Monpa, Buguns practice shifting cultivation (Jhum), which is their traditional practice of cultivation. The domestication of animals was important economic activity of the Buguns at past.

Buguns are originally animistic believer and nature worshiper. They worship four major forces of nature- the sky, the mountain, the river and the earth. The spirits and deities are pleased for peaceful living. The propitiations are made through rituals perform by the priest (Phabi) and accordingly sacrifices are offered and people put an every effort to secure the blessing from supernatural power.

In modern days Buguns were on transitional phase. Their religion and culture have been greatly influenced by nearby tribe like Sherdukpen, Monpa and by Christian missionary. Many have been converted to Christian and Buddhist. The Christian converts keep themselves away from rituals and celebrations organized by the indigenous group. The conversion of Buguns to Christianity has partially affected the Bugun society in the field of culture and belief system. Many Christian converts were giving up traditional celebration and rituals. Christian missionaries in name of humanitarian help divert the mind of poor and needy.

Some of Buguns formally called themselves as Buddhist but they still follow their age old faith and worship. The influence of Buddhist is seen in naming of children, using of materials use in rituals and giving up of sacrifice offer during rituals and celebrations.

Traditionally, Buguns celebrate different type of festivals in their respective village. The people of Wangho, Dikiyang and Kaspi celebrate Kshat Sowai, people of Singchung celebrate Dying Kho, people of Namfri and Magopam celebrates Mabuk-Mabai Satai-Manto, people of Bichom celebrates Jarai- Bamai, etc. After the coming of Buddhism and Christianity in Bugun soil this indigenous tribe started to celebrate Buddhist festival like Losar and Christian festival like Christmas, Good Friday, etc.

After independence Buguns still live in isolation for many decades as they were timid in nature and live in their specific traditional livelihood. Moreover, road and communication was not properly developed during those days which make people to remain within their society and cut off from different tribes and people. They simply concentrate on their own

community and society which resulted in late coming of developmental activities in Bugun area.

Chinese aggression 1962 is happened to be turning point for the people of Arunachal Pradesh in general and of West Kameng and Tawang district in particular. It is through 1962 incident this isolated region come in the focus of central government which resulted in flow of military and establishment of military base camp at different region in West Kameng and Tawang district. The flow of military and people from outside world has influence the indigenous Bugun tribe which resulted in partial transition of people from traditional to modern.

Livelihood transition and its economic impact on Bugun tribe: Traditionally, the Buguns were agriculturist tribe. They are very hard working people who totally depend on shifting cultivation, hunting and food gathering for their survival. Maize, eatable roots from forest, green vegetables, potato, sweet potato, Eka Rumbang, etc were their stable food in those days. They also domesticated animals for meat, rituals and celebrations. They organized community hunting from time to time for meat and community celebrations. Their society is very much united and people were cooperative on every activities of the village. Any problems in the society were deal by village council strongly. Nimiyang act as strong institutions for running of day to day administration of the village.

With the introduction of modern agricultural techniques and methods permanent cultivation process developed in Bugun society. It creates awareness among the people to have permanent economic activities in their village. Moreover the concept of good living and secure life also developed among the Buguns. Many families had occupied permanent land for apple, kiwi, tomato, plum, cabbage, potato, etc. cultivation. They applied scientific method of farming in their agricultural field which resulted in huge profit in comparison to traditional farming. The people living nearby Dikiyang hill have started the cultivation of wet rice and finger millet. The consumption of old stable food made from Palm tree (nub) powder popularly known as Eka Rambang is also reduced.

They cultivate crops like maize, finger millet, buck-wheat, wheat, potato, sweet potato and varieties of vegetables. The construction of road has plays an important role in economic growth of the Bugun people because their agricultural product are taken to market very easily and earn profit. In olden days despite of huge product they were unable to earn profit as their products are unable to reach market.

The Buguns follow simple food habit. They generally take boiled vegetable items. With the coming of modernization and technology people slowly left their old habit of eating maize, eka ramdang, etc which is now replaced by rice, magi, biscuits and chapatti.

Jhum cultivation was the life line of Buguns in olden days. Earlier, entire cultivable forest area is treated as common land or community land but after coming of modernization people divide the hills and plain areas for cultivation. Little disputes are also notice after

beginning of permanent cultivation process. People started to claim land of each other for cultivation which resulted in disputes among the people.

It is found that people mostly involve themselves in Cabbage, Potato, kiwi and apple cultivation in their society. Those who were well established in other business were also giving their interest in agriculture and horticulture product. Many Kiwi, Tomato, Cabbage and Apple garden is coming out in Bugun society in modern days.

Agricultural Calendar of Bugun tribe:

Sl. No.	Month (Gham) name in Bugun Dialect	Month in English	Agricultural activities
1.	Rua	January	Survey of Jhum land cultivation followed by clearance of forest and jungle
2.	Jok	February	Old jhum land cultivation plot is again clear and drying up
3.	Phi-Nyajok	March	Setting fire and clearance of plot followed by digging and sowing of seeds. Celebrates Mane Tsabo rituals.
4.	Phi-Nya-Mua	April	Rearrange the plot for sowing of seed of beans, sweet potato, maize, etc.
5.	Harun	May	Sowing of different seeds of vegetables.
6.	Khla-Loi	June	Seedling and weeding of vegetables.
7.	Khra-Khowang	July	Weeding and caring of vegetable and fruits. Mabuk-Mabai Satai Manto ritual festival is celebrates at Namfri village.
8.	Ridua	August	Birds scaring and harvesting of potato and maize
9.	Rimua	September	Scaring of birds and wildlife in fields
10.	Harang	October	Early harvest of the vegetables and fruits, rice, etc.
11.	Haria	November	Harvesting of rice, millet, finger millet, etc.
12.	Rutham	December	Celebrates Kshat Sowai, Mathong Tsabo and Mabuk-Mabai Satai Manto ritual festival by people of Wangho, Namfri and Singchung village.

Source: Field Work, 2023.

After the coming of modernization people followed systematic agriculture calendar and select permanent plot for agricultural as well as horticulture purpose which gives good benefit to the Buguns. Earlier, their products are sale by the middle man where they got

little benefit but after flow of market, road and communication they directly sale their product to the buyers. This gives them huge profit in their business.

Animal rearing or livestock rearing is another important economic aspect of the Buguns in the past. Animal husbandry has an important role to play in the socio-economic and religious life of the people. It is because the deities are invokes to protect life and property of the Buguns by offering different animals through different rituals for different occasion.

They generally reared goat, cow, pig and horse. Animals are used for both consumption and sacrifices. It has a huge value in Bugun society. The possession of animals/livestock gives indication of the wealth and social status of an individual and family in the past. At present days property like shop, building, job, education and business determines the position and status of the Buguns.

The rearing of animals becomes problematic in present days because people started permanent cultivation thereby they erect fencing all over the jungle and nearby area which resulted in huge problem for grazing of animals. This resulted in degradation of animal rearing in Bugun society. People focus more on earning rather than animal rearing¹. Since the payment of bride price is made in kind, the domestic animals are use for payment of bride price also.

Hunting was one of the important activities by Buguns in the past. Hunting is performed by individual as well as community. There is a common place of hunting for villagers in their society known as Sabo-Lua.

In Bugun society all sons get equal share from their parental property. Generally, daughters do not get the immovable property of their parent but important ornaments like beads, bracelet, etc. are offer to daughter by their parents².

Barter system plays an important role in transaction among the Buguns at past where the benefit was very low. In barter system the parties meet half way between the two villages on the appointed day and exchange their commodities. This system was extended with the neighboring tribes like Aka of Jamiri, Sherdukpen of Shergaon and some Monpa villages like Morshing, Thembang, Mandalaphundung, etc³. At present any agro or horticultural product is directly brought to market which make easy for them to earn maximum profit.

Conclusion: Livelihood transition or modernization has been positively responded by the Buguns. It has both negative and positive impact on traditional Bugun society. Transition helps in increasing of social participation to a great extent in Bugun society. People were able to interact with outside people who enhance their knowledge of market economy and profit. They adopt modern method and technique in their agriculture and horticulture field. People give up their old habit of gambling, hunting and alcoholism and focused themselves

¹¹ Narrated by Shri Phuntso Phinya, senior member of Singchung village and still rear cow and goat, interview taken on 06/02/2023, time 5 P.M.

² Narrated by Shri Darkhan Glow, Priest of Singchung village, intervie on 12/01/2023, time 3 P.M.

³ Pandey, B.B. 1996, *The Buguns: A Tribe in Transition*, Himalayan Publisher, Itanagar, p.70-71.

on agriculture, business etc. This transition of people from traditional to modern has vast economic influence thereby people involve themselves in earning and developed a sense of saving habits. Due to transition people gets enough opportunity to sale their products in the market to earn more profit. Moreover, due to flow of people and market the Buguns were able to connect with new knowledge and ideas by which they can able to achieve transformation in their day to day life. It also brings modern education and knowledge which is very important for survival in modern days. The modernization process has brought discipline and cleanliness in their society. People became aware about health and hygiene which is a good sign for overall development of their society.

On the other hand, the transition of people and coming of modernization has partially affected the indigenous tradition, culture, and faith and belief system. People change their religion which affects the traditional socio- cultural ethos of indigenous Buguns. Many Buguns are not ready to celebrate their indigenous festivals and celebrations. The transition in Bugun society has also increase economic disparity in form of rich and poor in their society. Cultural deterioration can be seen as the negative impact of transition and modernization as many Buguns had adopted other religion which resulted in deterioration of old traditional cultural practices and belief system as converted Buguns do not participate and profess their age old belief and faith system today. In many Bugun villages Christian converts are in majority thereby the minority indigenous were unable to celebrate their traditional festival due to lack of people and fund. In this ways transition has both negative and positive impact on Bugun society.

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