

Research Article

Economic-Exchange in North-Eastern Indian with Special Reference to the A•Chik Tribes As Reflected In Their Tradition and History

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Abstract:

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A•chiks are one among the tribe that lives in the hilly region. Their art and culture for their survival in everyday life is quite different from other tribes. The A•chiks are entirely dependent on agriculture so as to develop themselves they have to trade in the same market with other communities. Before they started their trading and marketing with other communities, they exchanged their goods according to their needs among themselves in the market. According to the book by Harendra W. Marak, the witness about their first market was in the hills of Dimrim Bri Palwang A•ding. He wrote-

“There they make horn as a trumpet
And skin as shield, and went to sell in the market”
(trans) (A•chik Aganbewalrang, 12)

The readymade trumpet and shield are trade for a basket of cotton and a string of ginger.

They take their readymade material along with them to the market and exchanged them with other materials and living beings. In the book of Dikki Part-I written by L. R. Marak says that the A•chiks exchanged even the gong. They not only used materials in exchanging but also used their gong to exchange for the slave. In this way they earn their living using gongs in terms of money for buying the slaves. In ancient days

they also use to exchange their readymade materials like trumpet and agriculture product like cotton, ginger and so on.

It also can be noticed that when Gonga, an ancient forefather of the A•chiks who first recognised the cotton tree and cut down to weave a cloth. His dog was loitering around the field with a piece of cotton on its tail. Seeing the cotton Bamon Racha Sojon Gitel also thought of doing the same thing. So, he kept the cotton for himself and tied a piece of gold and silver on the dogs' tail. This shows that before currency gold and valuable stones are also used as a medium of exchange among the A•chiks. (Apasong Agana, D. S. Rongmuthu, 148)

A few centuries ago the A•chiks were famous for headhunting. That practice constrained the neighbouring population of the plains from entering the hills. But people must exchange their produce to meet their requirements, and A•chiks both from hills and plains needed such trade. Hence some trade started at border points on a very limited scale. Over time, these contacts grew into organized weekly markets under the initiative of the zamindars, who were subjects of the Muslim ruler. Initially cotton was sold outright or Exchanged for pigs, cattle, goats, tobacco, and metallic tools. In the beginning silent barter was possible

because each party understood from long involvement the respective values of their goods. This process continued to the present, with increased involvement of traders from neighbouring areas, and has now become fully monetized. Cotton, ginger, and dried chillies produced by the A-chiks are sold to the traders. The A-chiks in turn purchase metal pottery, metallic tools, and other industrial goods such as cloth from the traders.

Economic Condition Variation

When we look back the life of the A-chiks in a society there are unseen qualities. They consider Barter system as one of the major aspect in their daily life. Especially at the time of trading and marketing with other community like Muslim, Bengali and Hindu etc. In the beginning they usually use their goods instead of money for exchanging. Though they could not produce salt by themselves as a result of which they have to get it from other communities who live in the plain areas. Gradually the system of marketing changed. So this compelled them to use currency. Before coming of the British to Garoland they also used Indian coins. The use of Indian coins brought changes in their trade system. In this way many A-chik traders got an opportunity to do well in business.

The use of coins particularly from the 18th century shows the subsequent work of the A-chik society. Even if there was no currency and source of marketing, they still met their daily requirements through Barter system. They exchanged their goods like chilli, ash (kalchi), rice and others. This can be called as Barter system and till today this cannot be rooted out from A-chik society.

There are no written records and proper information when the coins has been introduced in the A-chik society. At the time of their migration from Tibet they may not be coming along with the coins. But it can be noticed that they started using it after living together with other communities. But no one knows exactly in which year it has been used. In the book of *History of Garo Literature* written by Prof. Milton S. Sangma, one can notice that the other communities like British and American Missionary has come and have their subsequent work in Garoland (p. 2, 20).

Thereafter there is a rapid growth of currency in A-chik tribe and gradually in this century not only the foreign currency but also the Indian currency has spread at the same time. In the year 1860s the A-chik became Christian and churches were replaced. So they usually used money or coins especially for the offerings (p. 35). During that year they used the money lavishly but as they could not invent money for themselves they have to use it from others.

Materials are greatly valued by the A-chiks. Even without money their property gives them satisfaction. In ancient times A-chiks were not famous for their money but they are famous for their property or wealth. The one who has got enough of property usually wear bracelet by which people will come to know that he is rich. A-chiks have many valuable things such as gongs, Ripok Dokatchi etc. which are priceless. These types of materials are used in terms of money to earn their living in a society.

When money was introduced among the A-chiks for the first time they began to use it. They use to sell their agriculture produce in the market and obtained money from other tribes. They begin to trade after knowing how to use the money. In ancient days since there were no banks, the traders used to preserve their coins in a hollow bamboo or in a basket. Coins loaded in a hollowed bamboo were loaned to others and the borrowers who could not count it have to return in the same manner. Money is not only used for business but was implemented as their various activities. They made necklace out of coins and this has been considered as one of the precious ornaments for the A-chik women to put on which is known as *Suki Nabak*. This ornament is very rare and it cannot seen for generations instead it started disappearing. People made all possible effort to buy it but cannot be traced. The ancient coins became a business today among the people and they are selling each coin minimum for a lakh of rupee. It is not only the coins but people are also selling their valuable property and losing them. In this way preserved coins and properties of A-chiks are disappearing day by day. At present Ripok Dokatchi and gongs have become rare and some of the valuable materials are altogether lost.

The coins are being used by the A-chiks for ages. They put a coin in the hand of a death person. They believed that when the souls of the dead person go to the land of spirit on the way they have to offer a coin to the demons. So this coin is also included in their belief system which cannot be avoided. Many forefathers of A-chiks buried their collected coins and pass away. Burying of coin became the tradition in the A-chik society. Some family members recover the buried coin but some did not. For what reason they buried the coins and valuable material is not known. Practicing of burying coins and material not only banished the wealth of A-chiks but also bring down the families. In the book of *Dikki Part – I*, mention that the father of Katchi buried the valuable gongs and pass away. After his death his families have to live a poor life for many years. Burying of coins and valuable material can be one of the reason for economic backwardness in the A-chik society.

CONCLUSION

Each family in a traditional context acts as a self-contained economic unit. Modernization has brought some changes in the socio-economic sphere of this population. The A·chiks residing in the hills did not weave cloths till few decades back; they used to procure thick cloth from the people living in the plains. Now that the loom has been introduced in the hill areas, they weave *dokmanda* (a kind of cloth) for commercial purposes as well as for their Personal use. Previously each family used to make pottery for its own domestic use, but nowadays the art is confined to a few families only who either sell it or barter it.

The A·chik indigenous traditions provide an array of information about the past and depict that handcrafts had played an important role in their daily life of the people since early times. Pottery production in Garo Hills is not a material which depicts the creativity and aesthetic sense of the people but it also throws light on the food habits of the people, their religious and social customs, the technological

advancement attained by them and even their economic conditions.

With the advent of money there has been a great change in Garo Hills. The way of living changes in the society besides development in society, increase in education among the people and awareness to follow the new generation. With the advent of money the A·chik people have developed economically. The A·chiks have also started working for money as daily wages from that day itself.

Primary source

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