

Significance of mithun (*Bos Frontalis*) in traditional practices among tribes of Arunachal Pradesh and its related conservation issues

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Abstract:

North East India is the abode of natural beauty and biodiversity hotspot. But till date very little attention has been given to this unexplored paradise of different species. *Bos frontalis* or Mithun is one of the rare species found in parts of North East India and Arunachal Pradesh is one of them where highest number of mithun population has been recorded. Deeply rooted in the mythology and being an integral part of cultural life especially among the Tani Groups viz. Adi, Apatani, Galo, Nyishi and Tagin, mithun is not only considered as one of the most important cultural and economic resource of these tribes but also the pride of Arunachal Pradesh. The mithun was traditionally used as a medium of exchange (which is still a common practice among the people residing in villages), a means to settle disputes, and as the bride price.. Without sacrificing mithun a festival is not possible to celebrate because people of Arunachal Pradesh believe that sacrificing mithun is directly related with blessings from Donyi-Polo (sun-moon God). Mithun also being considered as financial security during any kind of emergency in the family. In this way tribal people are randomly sacrificing mithun in many fields (any occasion, marriage, festival, picnic and many more) as a result of which population of mithun in the region seems to be declining. Since, this species is considered as rare, therefore strong law and act need to be followed by the government, need to stop slaughter of mithun, it's a pride of state and nation thus, proper research and policy implementation is very much required for the conservation of mithun.

Keywords: Mithun, conservation, policy, traditional practice.

Introduction

The North East region of our country is comprised of eight states viz. Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Mizoram, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura and covers around 2,62,379 sq. km of land area of Indian subcontinent. This region is unique geographically, representing the zone of transition between Indian, Indo-Malayan, and Indo-Chinese regions as well as meeting place of the Himalayan Mountains with the Peninsular India. Under this geographical background, there lives a unique bovine species called "Mithun" (*Bos frontalis*) which is available only in four states of India-Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur and Mizoram, out of eight North East States and plays an unique role in terms of social customs among the mostly tribal inhabitants of these hilly terrains rather than part of livestock production system. The scientific name of the Mithun is *Bos Frontalis* which is a unique ruminant found in the hill regions of North East India, Myanmar, Bhutan, Bangladesh, the People's Republic of China and Malaysia. In India, there are four distinct strains of Mithun i.e. Arunachal strain, Manipur

strain, Mizoram strain and Nagaland strain. These different strains are distinguished by their distinct physical and genetic features¹. According to the 2007 livestock census, highest number of Mithun in the north-eastern states has been recorded in Arunachal Pradesh figuring 2,18,931 followed by 33,385 in Nagaland. The people of Arunachal Pradesh especially the Tani Groups viz. Adi, Apatani, Galo, Nyishi and Tagin, have been engaged in Mithun rearing activities since time immemorial and therefore Mithun has occupied a central position in the socio-cultural life of these indigenous communities. Mithun is semi- domesticated animal, rearing of Mithun is very tough task. It is believed that only a person who is gifted can rear Mithuns. Mithuns are left in the forest, where they usually stay within a small periphery.² Mithun feed on forest leaves, young plants and grasses.³ Mithuns are normally browsers rather than grazers, eating forest leaves and young plants, instead of requiring pasture land like other bovines. In a kind of part-time domestication, Mithuns have usually been "kept" by releasing them into forests for feeding during the day with or without human supervision¹. In Arunachal Pradesh mithun is mostly used –

- In festive time as food for the people.

- In occasions of marriage ceremony and other tribal rituals.

This animals though domesticated are still reared in the wild under traditional practices with almost no human input except occasional salt feeding. At the same time, changing social practices among the tribal population who are the custodians of this unique bovines, are responsible for somewhat decreasing importance of mithun among the young generation of the society over the years.



Photograph 1. Mithun (Bos Frontalis)

Arunachal Pradesh official record of Total population of Mithun (2007 – 2012):

In the year 2007, total population of Mithun in Arunachal Pradesh was 219784 where, highest number of Mithun was in Kurung Kumey district i.e. 32936 Mithuns and lowest Mithun population was in Tawang i.e. 77 Mithuns but no single Mithun was found in Changlang. (source 18th Quinquennial livestock census 2007 Government Of A.P, Dept. of Animal husbandry and veterinary, Nirjuli).⁴

Table no. 1.

Sl.no.	Name of the district	Mithun population year 2007
1	Tawang	77
2	West Kameng	2098
3	East Kameng	23034
4	Papum pare	25872
5	Lower Subansiri	27638
6	Kurung Kumey	32936
7	Upper Subansiri	25096
8	west Siang	19075
9	Upper Siang	18629
10	East Siang	10665
11	changlang	0
12	Tirap	3802
13	Lohit	3165
14	Anjaw	7787
15	Lower Dibang Valley	15613
16	Upper Dibang Valley	4297
Total	219784	219784

Objectives:

Objectives of the study are as follows-

- To find out the significance of Mithun in traditional culture among three community of the study area.
- To examine the methods of traditional conservation system of Mithun in the study area.

Materials and methods

Study area

Three districts of Arunachal Pradesh are taken as main study area for this paper, namely Upper Subansiri, Papum pare and West Siang district. Upper Subansiri lies between 27°45' to 28°42' North latitude and 93°18' to 94°36' East longitude. The district is bounded on the east and south by west Siang district, on the north by China (The Mc Mahon Line) and on the west by Kurung Kumey and Lower Subansiri district. And most of the TAGIN community is dominated in this district. Papum pare is located in between 26°55' N to 28°40' N latitude and between 92°40' to 94°21' longitude. The Nishis or Nishings is the major tribe of this district. West Siang District located in the central part of Arunachal Pradesh extends between 93°57' to 95°23' East longitude and 27°69' to 29°20' North longitude. The homeland of various tribes like Galo, Minyong, Bori, Bokar, Pailibo, Ramos, Membas & Khambas out of which Galo tribe selected from this region for the study.

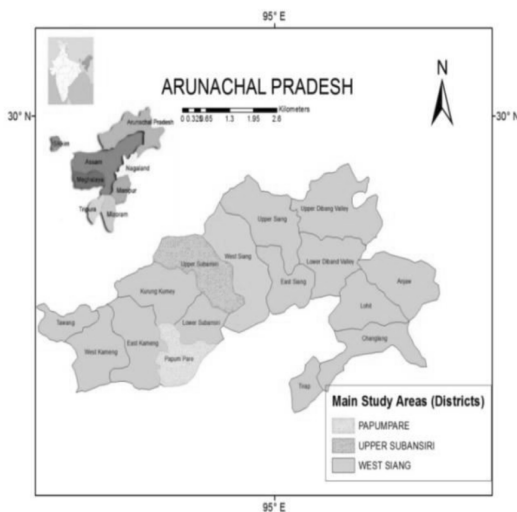
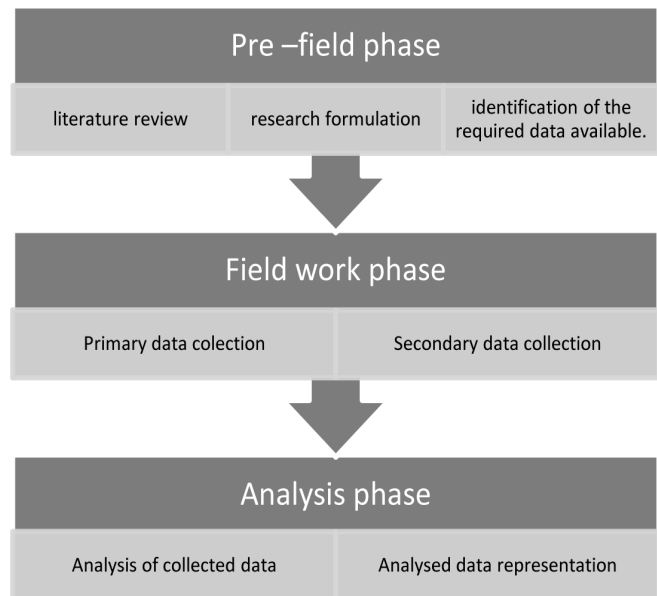


Fig: 1. Location map of study area

In order to make the study more informative, acceptable and empirical, necessary information and data's are collected through primary, secondary sources by adopting observation as well as convenience sampling technique. In order to obtain the required information and data, direct personal interviews and casual conversations are conducted with the helped off well designed schedule. The interpretation and analyses of the information has been conducted by adopting quantitative and qualitative approach.

The research phases are given in the following *flow chart*-



During the pre-field phase, the literature review was conducted to strengthen the concept of this research through various books, journals, and review activity consisting of problem definition, research activity, research formulation and the identification of the required data available.

The two main activities of the field work phase comprises of *primary* and *secondary* data collection. The study has been carried out based on by collecting primary data from selected communities (Tagin from Upper Subansiri district, Galo from West Siang District and Nyishi from Papum Pare District) with 30 sample size, 10 samples from each community. And also, all the relevant secondary data have been collected from Government offices.

Analysis phase mainly includes data analysis part which is done on the basis of collected information and data from the respective fields. Collected data are being analyzed with the help of simple statistical calculations and computer with

related software programmes like -Microsoft excels, Microsoft word, and GIS.

Result and discussion

Among all tribes of Arunachal Pradesh mithun is mostly used in three major tribes i.e. - Tagin ,Nyishi and Galo under this three community Mithun been use immensely in every field or can say any circumstances and this animal was also state animal. Below elaborate some significance status of Mithun under three selected districts:

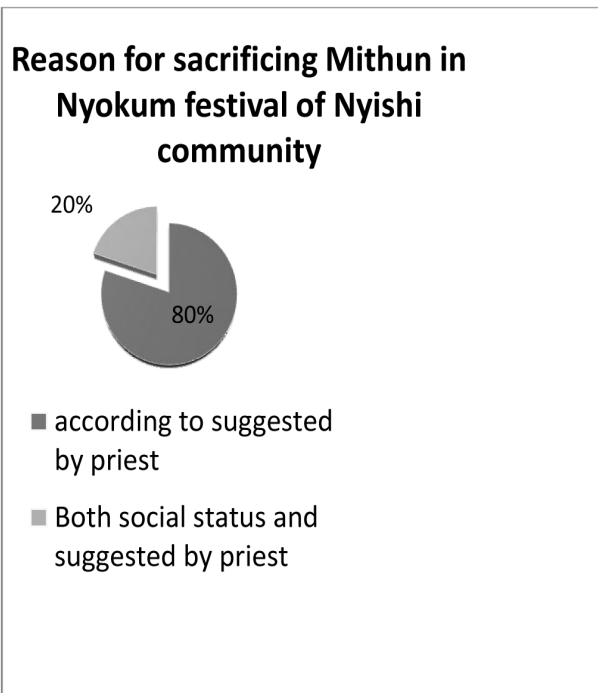
Tagin and Nyishi community:

Mithun is most important animal in both Tagin and Nyishi community their significances are same in both tribes because Tagin and Nyishi community both are relevant in every field which both are belong by same clan. This two community’s value mithun as similar with human being. Its shows their wealth, richness, social status and make them proud in the society. If mithun has given someone as a penalty it means there had happened major incident such as- in murder case, attempt to murder case, if some died in accident, culprit must give mithun as penalty to victim family member.

In traditional marriage system mithun plays an important role, as groom’s family members must give mithun to bride’s family as bridal price. The price range between minimum 4-6 mithuns and maximum 7-10 mithuns. They also slaughter mithuns, pigs and cows for bride’s family, relatives and also for other community as for feast.



Photograph 2. Mithun slaughtering in marriage ceremony



One of the most important significance of Mithun is in their respective festivals (Si-Donyi and Nyokum yullo), Si-Donyi festival Tagin community two Mithuns are compulsory to sacrifice for well being of the community and in Nyokum festival by Nyishi community one is compulsory to sacrifice.



Fig no. 2 & 3. Reason of sacrificing mithun in Si-Donyi festival and Nyokum Yullo

Given to portray reason of sacrificing mithuns at Si-Donyi and Nyokum Yullo festivals of two communities. Its shows that 60% Mithun has sacrificed by suggested taken from the priest and 40% are followed both social status and as well as suggested by priest but 0% in according to single social status. But in Nyokum festival only 20% Mithun being sacrificed by both social and suggested by priest and 80% according to priest but 0% in according social status.

By selling mithun sometimes these two communities arrange finance for medical treatment, education of children etc.

According to the survey it has been observed that price of the mithuns aging 2-3 years old (Rs 35,000 to 45,000) and 3-4 years (Rs 45,000 to 55,000) are found to be highest in Papumpare and Upper Subansiri districts (according to 2011) but recent years price rate rises which starts from 35,000-40,000 and goes upto 60,000-70,000. Selling of mithun meat is found to be very profitable. During the course of study it was found that market price of mithun meat per kilogram ranges from Rs 350 in the study districts.

Uses of different body parts of Mithun in three different selected tribes:

Mithun horn has to use for decorated home or house and it has been use to hanging out side of the house for showing how much mithuns they cut or sacrificed through which outsider people come to know their capacity and social status. It is actually for show up their richness or wealth.



Fig.5. Mithun horn

Mithun fur, village people use to make local small bag for carrying taboco etc, and also make local cap, local Dao cover and many more but nowadays skin is use to consume by people.

Galo community:

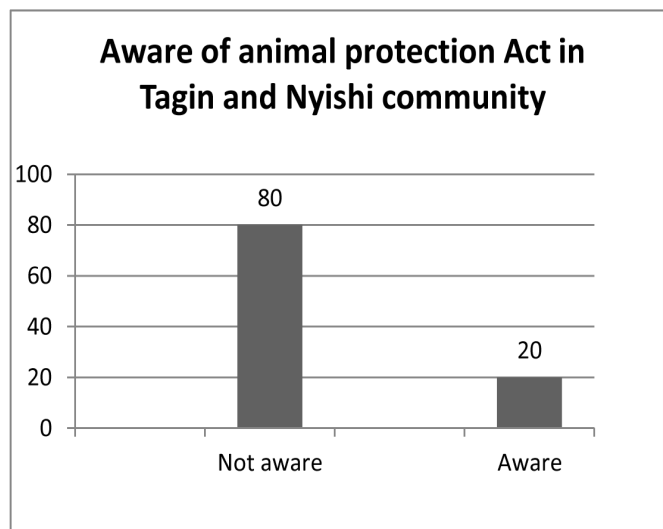
In Galo community also mithin is equally significant in education, health treatment (medical ground), business matter, and for others household problems etc. as well as in social status .One difference is there that in marriage, in



Photograph no. 3. Mithun sacrificing in festival Galo community mithun sacrifice is not much compulsory as a bridal price, in this community simply marriage has done by sacrifice of chicken by priest. Galo people

Compulsorily sacrifice mithun in festival of Mopin as suggested by the priest.

Fig.6. Aware of animal protection Act in Tagin and Nyishi



community

When the people of all the three communities were asked about animal protection act the survey result came out as - Only 20% are aware of Animal Act even though they are not followed the rules and maximum people are aware about the animal protection Act i.e. 80%. In Nyishi community also similar with Tagin community only 20% aware and 80% are not aware about any animal Act. Among three districts Mithun meat is Available in the markets and price rate also highest in Papum.

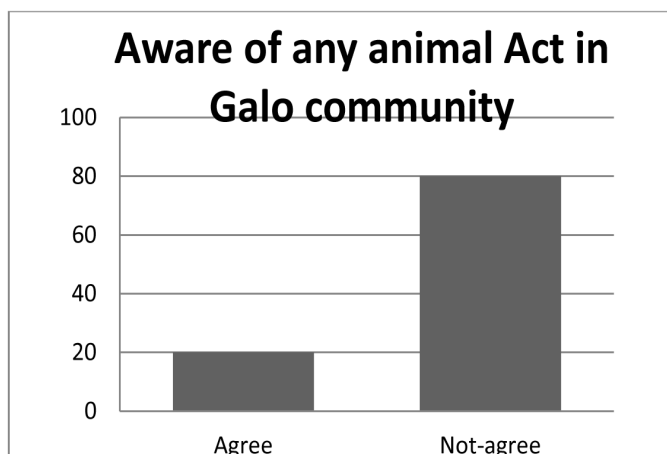


Fig.7. Aware of any animal Act in Galo community
 In Galo community survey there is only 20% are aware of any animal Act and 80% are non aware of animal act which is shown in the above given fig.

Conservation system of Mithun in Tagin and Nyishi community:

Tagin and Nyishi community’s mithun conservation system is same, they conserved mithun in forest area as they make demarcated area under the forest by construct bamboo or wood fencing for the mithuns and conserve their mithun in forest area together by the village community. But each owner of mithun put mark on their mithun to recognize their own mithun and mark may be in ear or body , may be in leg and also may be in tail.

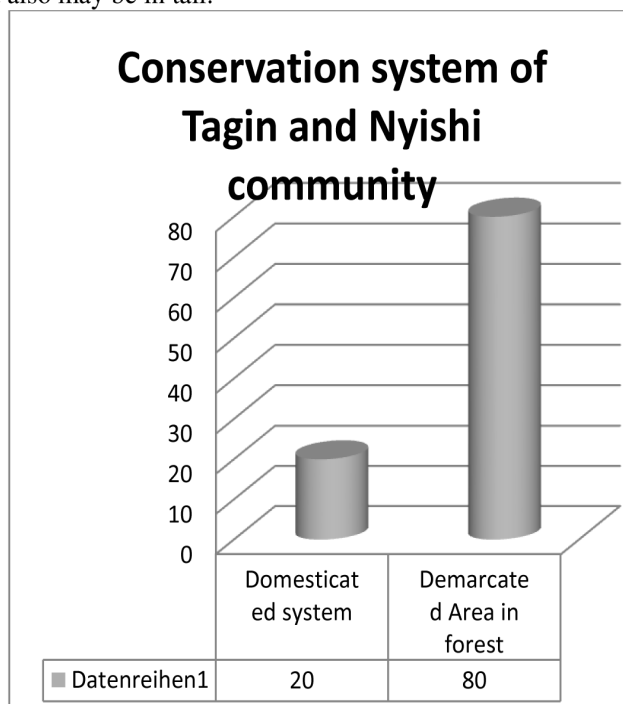


Fig.8. Conservation system of Tagin and Nyishi community

The above diagram portrays maximum and minimum conservation system of mithun in Tagin and Nyishi community as far chart 80% of people conserve their Mithun in demarcated area in forest and only 20% people are conserve their Mithun in nearby their home(domesticated system) ‘Sibeh Tabiyo’ system, local name of habited area of Mithun.

In Galo community it has been found that they conserve mithun in particular demarcated areas in forest which has bit far from the village area. They use to construct fencing by bamboo and by wood in the forest area for conserve Mithun. That particular demarcated area or constructed bamboo or wood fencing traditional known as RULA. It has been found that here 100% mithun are conserved in demarcated area in the forest area therefore it seems that 0% in domesticated system.

Conclusion

From the study it can be concluded that the tribal people of three selected communities i.e. Tagin, Nyishi and Galo communities’ mithun is an integral part of their culture and economy. These communities are using mithun for their status and superstitions and contributing to the decreasing number of mithun in the study area. But till date in Arunachal Pradesh there have not proper implementation of Acts or laws for conservation of mithun. Mithuns are being used in many fields because it is one of the most important animal and it is also pride animal for the state as well as for the nation and it has been also recorded Arunachal Pradesh got highest number of mithun population in North East India. But if such poor conservation system and devilish slaughtering in the name of culture continues then very soon the region will lose one of its rarest species and pride. It is a wake up call for all the tribal communities in Arunachal Pradesh to come up and help in conservation of mithun in the most possible way.

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