



Research Article

British Frontier Policy and Creation of Native Agents (*Kotokis, Jamadars and Gams*) in Siang Valley

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Abstract: In the nineteenth and twentieth century, the Siang Valley of Arunachal Pradesh witnessed the British policy of creating native agents such as *Kotokis, Jamadars and Gams* to facilitate colonial political control in the valley. The injection of such native agents interfered with the indigenous political setting of the valley. The present paper tries to discern the factors behind the policy of creating native agents, its process and the effects it had on the tribal society of Siang Valley.

Keywords: Adi and Galo tribe, British Policy, Frontier, Kebang, Political Officer, Siang Valley, Tribal Society.

I. Introduction

The Burmese invasion in Assam was followed by the Ahom king seeking help from the British which led to Anglo-Burmese war. The war ended with treaty of Yandaboo in February 24, 1826 and the lower Assam was put under British administration, later the upper Assam was also annexed by the British government in 1838. However, the British contact with the tribes of Siang Valley occurred even before they annexed upper Assam in 1838. The British for the first time came in contacts with the Adis of Siang Valley on 22nd November, 1825 with the arrival of Captain Berdford at Pasighat (Osik, 1992:29).

Berdford was deputed by the authorities of East India Company to lead a team of Geological Survey to North-East Frontier of India in order to explore a trade route to China through present day Arunachal Pradesh (Osik, 1992:29). The reason behind this was that the English merchants were eager to obtain the monopoly of opium trade in China but Britain did not have good relationship with Nepal and Burma after the outbreak of



Anglo-Nepalese War (1814) and Anglo-Burmese Wars (1824-26). So, left with no alternative the English had to try to find a trade route through present day Arunachal Pradesh (Osik, 1992:29-30).

Similar expedition was taken by Lt. Wilcox who started exploration of the Subansiri river on November 28, 1825 and met some Adi village elders who had arrived to make their annual collection from the people of the area (Nyori, 1993:86). Though these missions were undertaken to find a trade route to China, it was officially stated that the objective of these mission was the discovery of the source of Brahmaputra and collection of geographical and other topographical information about North-East India (Osik, 1992:29).

The trade route to China was however not the only thing that brought Frontier region to colonial authority's attention. After the annexation of Assam under colonial authority, the discoveries of tea, timber, rubber, ivory etc. further enhanced British East India Company's commercial interests in the region. Hence, they wanted to secure the fertile lands in the foot hills of Assam for their commercial interest, and in order to do so they needed to keep the tribes of frontier region at ease who were now raiding the plains more frequently than ever.

This increase in raids of the tribes was result of the fall of Ahom during the Burmese invasion leading to a void in the administration of foothill regions; the invasion also resulted in killing or carrying away a large number of *Paiks* earmarked for services of the tribes. Also, the insecurity of life and property in the border areas induced many to immigrate into safer zones under direct supervision of the British authorities. This drastically affected many tribes since they were dependent on the supplies from the plain and hence every winter the hill chief repeatedly visited the plains and carried off each in turn whatever they could (Chakravarty, 1989:410). This was an immediate challenge to the colonial authority against safeguarding their economic interest in the foothills of Assam.

Therefore, in order to keep a check on these raids, the colonial authorities followed the same policy of conciliation as followed by the Ahom government by the payment of *Posa* (Allowances paid to hill tribes inhabiting the hills on the northern frontier of Assam), however the mode of payment was changed during 1836-38 through agreements which commuted all demands into fixed annual sums from the Government. In 1850, *Posa* started to be paid in cash and not in kind as had been the system till then and by 1852 cash payment became the usual rule (Chakraverty, 1989:410). Nevertheless, at times the colonial authorities followed the policy of economic blockade and stopped the payment of *Posa* whenever a tribe raided the plains or disobeyed their authority in the foothills of Assam.

Further, the colonial authority also started using the office of *Kotokis* or Political Interpreters. The duties of *Kotokis* as outlined by Capt. H. S. Biver were (Bose, 1973:147-150):

To proceed to the hills on any occasion when required so to do in connection with the tribes and to render aid in furnishing information on the tribes and in interpreting any matter as also

to attend upon the Deputy Commissioner when he proceeded to the country bordering on the hills of the tribe to which they were attached.

The colonial authorities regulated their affairs with the tribes through these *Kotokis* and also with the display of force whenever necessary. Additional to *Kotokis* (Political Interpreters, two more positions of Political *Jamadars* and *Gams* or *Gaonburahs* were introduced.

The present paper tries to highlight the creation of such native agents in Siang Valley. The paper will also disseminate how these native agents were injected into the tribal society of Siang Valley and its effect on their society.

The following are some of the works related to the topic of the proposed study which have been consulted and reviewed for a broader understanding on the theme:

Monographs and reports of nineteenth and twentieth century largely help to understand the colonial government's perspective towards Siang Valley and its tribes. Mention may be made to George Duff-Sutherland-Dunbar's article 'Abors and Galongs' published in the *Memoirs of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* (1913-1917) is a result of about four years' study of the tribes of Siang Valley. It presents Dunbar's writing based upon his observation and evidence of the Galo and Adi settlements. The paper deals with both historical and ethno-historical aspects of the tribal society in the Siang Valley.

Books and accounts of colonial authors provide a good insight into British-tribal relation as well as the state's perspective towards the whole region. Mention may be made to Alexander Mackenzie's *The North-East Frontier of India* which was originally published as *History of the Relations of the Government with the Hill Tribes of the North East Frontier of Bengal* (1884) which deals with the relation of British government with the tribes of North-East and the policies that were adopted while dealing with these tribes. Another important work is Robert Reid's book, *History of the Frontier Areas Bordering on Assam: from 1883-1941* (1942). It is a follow up of Mackenzie's book which covered the History of British-tribal relation till 1884. Reid's book is a window into the colonial mind with its notions of people and space in the North-East region. It is an impressive account of colonial perspective and policies which shaped the making of North-East frontier. Addition to that, Reid's book also provides a list of officials that held important official roles in the region. Further, Edward Gait's book, *The History of Assam* (1906) covers the vast History of Assam and gives good details on the relation of the British with the frontier tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. Chapter twenty-one of the book deals with British relations with the frontier tribes wherein Gait provides noteworthy episodes in the history of the frontier. These books help the present research by providing great information on history of the colonial activities and British-tribal relationships in the region.

Biographical and Semi-Biographical books of the people who worked in the frontier region is of utmost importance for the present research since a large part of the proposed research deals with frontier officials' life and duty. Books worth mentioning are Kuttik Moyong's autobiography *My Life and My People* (1978) and Lijum Ete's book, *Boken Ete: An Odyssey* (2011) which is a biography of Boken Ete. Kuttik Moyong and Boken Ete both worked as Political Interpreters (PI). The biographies present their ideas and activities from the perspective of a government agent. These books provide a good source for understanding the perspective of a frontier official in the frontier region which is important of the present study.

There are some books that deal directly with Arunachal Pradesh's historical, administrative and societal aspects. These books prove vital in understanding the core elements of the region where the present research is proposed. B.B. Pandey's books *Leadership Patterns in a Tribal Society* (1991) and *Arunachal Pradesh Village State to Statehood* (1996) are some of those. These books deals with the details of interaction between the state and society and outlines the emergence of Arunachal Pradesh from the nebulous assortment of self-contained autonomous villages into its present identity and position in the country as a state. It further discusses how in this long journey, changes came from within or without, how the independence of India heralded a new era of development and helped to understand how it provided the region with popular democratic leadership through extension of contacts of development on different aspects of life of the people and thereby consciousness. Another book which deals with the same aspects of Arunachal Pradesh is J. N. Chowdhury's book *Arunachal Pradesh: from Frontier Tract to Union Territory* (1983). The book provides a chronological study of the region's growth from a frontier tract to union territory. Tai Nyori's book *History and Culture of Adis* (1993) provide us with a specialised study on Adi and Galo history and polity which is extremely useful for the current study. M.L. Bose's book, *History of Arunachal Pradesh* (1997) tries to provide a comprehensive history of Arunachal Pradesh starting from the period of British annexation of Assam in 1826 to the end of British rule in 1947. It provides an understanding of the development of this region through the British period. The book also provides the historical developments that were dealt during the post-independence time. These books help the proposed research by providing a broader historical perspective to the events and developments that the present day of Arunachal Pradesh underwent during and after the British era.

When it comes to anthropological works or ethno-historical works in the region, Verrier Elwin's book, *A Philosophy for NEFA* (1957) stands as a vital book which covers every societal aspect of the major tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. The book is a product of the data and information that were acquired via touring frontier officials and their tour diaries. The book is the guiding principle for policies that were adopted for NEFA. It was also a guide for the frontier officials which provided them with the philosophical dimension on how the government must make an approach to the tribes of the region. Another work of Elwin, *India's North-East Frontier in the Nineteenth Century* (1959) is a compilation of several accounts of colonial period on tribes of

Arunachal Pradesh. These works provide good amount of information but since these are largely concentrated into ethno-historical work, they fail to touch the history of explorations and operations in the region in a concrete manner.

II. Objectives of the Study

Following are the objectives of the present paper:

1. To highlight the British policy of creation of native agents in Siang Valley.
2. To explain how and why these native agents (*Gams*, *Kotokis* and *Jamadars*) were introduced into the Siang Valley.
3. To discern the impact of creation of native agents on the tribal society of Siang Valley.
4. To throw light on how the local polity of Siang Valley changed due to the coming of government backed native agents.

III. Methods and Methodology

For the proposed study, both primary and secondary sources were utilized. Secondary data or sources were collected by reviewing literatures on administrative growth of NEFT (North East Frontier Tract) and reviewing all relevant research works done relating to the proposed topic. Autobiographies, biographies, memoirs, of important people and frontier officials were also reviewed.

Primary data or sources were collected from state archives at Itanagar. Furthermore, oral testimonies of important people were also recorded by the means of audio and video recording for the collection of empirical data.

IV. Result and Discussion

Efforts to locate trade routes to China gave way in the late nineteenth century to the colonial perception that direct control would not yield enough economic benefits to warrant the cost of administration. Hence a policy of non-interference to the tribes was followed by the colonial government since it was not just that the eastern Himalayas' rugged, jungle-clad, humid environment presented a formidable impediment, colonial discourse also framed their inhabitants as primitive, isolated, anarchical tribes, antithetical to the civilized and that capitalist space of the Assam plains where large British capital was invested were indeed in a threat from them (Guyot-Rechard, 2017:7).

Consequently, an Inner Line enclosing areas of regular administration was drawn in 1873 at a distance from the foothills, further the Outer Line of notional British territory was also drawn which was even fuzzier since none existed east of the Dibang River. The Inner Line and policy of non-interference were to protect Assam by strictly regulating interaction between the hills and plains (Guyot-Rechard, 2017:7). The whole focus

was maintained on safeguarding their economic interests in the plains of Assam from the tribes who occasionally raided them.

However, in 1908, Noel Williamson, the Assistant Political Officer of Sadiya proposed for extending administration in the Siang Valley. Williamson toured the hills and returned with proposal to build roads and tax certain villages in order to make them realise they were within British territory (Guyot-Rechard, 2017:7). The colonial authority felt no urgency to extend actual administration over the frontier tribes so long as Tibet was a dormant neighbour and they looked upon the tribal territory as a suitable buffer (Luthra, 1971:1143-1149). But the dynamics soon changed over the fears of Qing China's expansionism and in 1910, London and Delhi for the first time accepted the possibility of assuming 'loose control' over the eastern Himalayas (Guyot-Rechard, 2017:8).

In 1911, Reports were received of Chinese government dispatching a force down the Dibang river towards the Siang Valley. Again, there were reports that a party of Chinese appeared in the Aka country close to the administrative frontier of Assam. There was even further news that the Chinese officials at Rima have sent summons to the Mishmi tribal headmen to appear before them with a view to the annexation of the Mishmi country (Luthra, 1971:1143-1149).

Following these events, the British government realised that on the administrative border of Assam, there existed some of the wealthiest districts where large sums of private European capital had been invested and where the European population outnumbered the European population of almost any other district in India. Therefore, there was a strong economic stake in the determination of British policy towards the frontier tribes (Luthra, 1971:1143-1149). So, the Lt. Governor of Eastern Bengal and Assam authorized Noel Williamson to tour more villages into the Siang Valley in order to check the Chinese influences in the frontier region, also the Secretary of State raised no objection to the recommendation made by the Foreign Department to tour beyond the Outer Line (Nyori, 1993:112).

Following the authorization, Noel Williamson with Dr. Gregorson and his party left Sadiya for the Siang Valley to trace the extent of the Chinese influence on 8th March 1911 (Nyori, 1993:112). But a turn of unfortunate events took place and Noel Williamson, Dr. Gregorson and their party were massacred by some Adi tribesmen in the hills of Siang Valley. Following this event, expeditions were sent against the Adis and the Anglo-Abor confrontation of 1911-12 took its course. The Adis resisted the advances of British force but their resistance eventually came to an end. This was followed by sending Political Survey Missions and geographical exploration of North-East Frontier in general and the Adi areas in particular. Subsequently, forward policy was adopted by the British for territorial extension into the interiors of the Adi areas (Loyi, 2011:258). Further, the frontier was divided into three sections and separate Political Officers were posted for each section.

Administrative structures were also changed in cognisance with the new policies adopted by the colonial authority (Loyi, 2011:258).

The end of Anglo-Abor confrontation however did not solve the bigger picture of the possibilities of Chinese incursion into the frontier region which could result exposing and hampering of British economic interest in the plains of Assam. Therefore, in 1914, Shimla conference took place where the Tibetan and British Indian representatives signed a boundary agreement regarding the eastern Himalayas and McMahon Line was drawn thereby placing the international border near the edge of the Tibetan plateau (Guyot-Rechard 2017:8). The assumption was that the British India would now bring the mountains north of Assam under 'loose control' (Guyot-Rechard 2017:8).

Creation of Native Agents

This formulation of policy of loose political control over the frontier tribes as recommended by the Government of Eastern Bengal and Assam resulted in Political Officers taking tours into the Siang Valley much frequently up to the international border (Osik, 1992:104) to further amplify their understanding and knowledge about the frontier for a possible extend of administration into the hills. This eventually led to changes in the tribal Polity of Siang Valley. These changes came in the form of new arrangements in the local leadership wherein *Gams*, Political *Jamadars* and *Kotokis* began to be recruited to aid the political officer from amongst the *Nyi-kok* and *Nyi-te*; In the tribal society of Siang valley, *Nyi-kok* were the people who acquired recognition as a leader in the society for possessing a deeper and wider knowledge of the traditions, conventions, practices, oratory skills, and customary laws.¹ Further, *Nyi-te* were simply the wealthy people and they acquired their recognition as a leader in the society because of their wealth in terms of cattle, land, valuables, ornaments, wives and also slaves in some instances.² The colonial authorities mistook them as chiefs of the villages. The colonial authority wanted to use the traditional leadership acquired by the *Nyi-kok* and *Nyi-te* to facilitate their administrative growth in the hills and made them the intermediaries between the people and the colonial government, they were to act as representatives of the government and safeguard their interests in the hills.

The office of *Kotokis* had its origin in the Ahom period. The Ahom kings appointed political officers to open negotiation or send ambassadors to other kingdoms, these political officers and ambassadors were called *Kotokis* (Bose, 1997:157-158). The office of *Kotokis* were taken into the British Indian administration from Ahom government, but the duty of *Kotokis* who were introduced in the hills by the British Indian Administration were merely as translators and conveyors of the decisions and orders of officials to the people (Pandey, 1991:64) that's why they were also known as 'Political Interpreters'. The *Kotokis* were to supposed to proceed to the hills on any occasion when required to do so in connection with the tribes and to render aid in furnishing information on the tribes and in interpreting any matter, they also accompanied the tribesmen when

they came down to the plain. For their duty the government remunerated them by the grant of revenue-free land and paid them paltry salary, they also received remuneration from the tribes as well (Bose, 1997:158-159).

The term or position of *Gams* or *Gaonburahs* were not new to the tribes of Siang Valley, when Adi and Mishing came into contact with the people of Assam during the days of Ahom rule, their elders for the first time were known as *Gams* or *Gaonburahs*. But the position of *Gam* was welded into their society when British Government assumed a loose political control in Siang Valley (Nyori, 1993:138). The word *Gam* or *Gaonburah* was frequently used by the colonial officials to denote the elder of a tribe ever since they came into contact with the tribes of Frontier region. The word *Gam* or *Gaonburah* in Assamese language meant village elders, that is why they found it convenient to use that word as a reference to an elder of any tribal village in the frontier region. George Duff-Sutherland-Dunbar in his paper ‘Abors and Galongs’ published in the Memoirs of the Asiatic Society of Bengal writes:

The headman (Gam) of the village is chosen by the voice of the community. In this election experience to guide such affairs as policy and the selection and division of fresh sites for Jhums (Shifting cultivation), and wealth to entertain strangers when necessary in the name of the village, all weigh. Age is also a factor, for the Gam is the village Nestor. An unusually young Gam connotes exceptional force of character.

Dunbar’s reference to these influential men as “Headman” is just another instance of an outsider mistaking these influential traditional leaders as chiefs of the villages. Later the colonial government appointed these mistaken “Chiefs” as *Gams* in order to make them intermediaries between the administration and the people. But traditionally speaking, these were the traditional leaders who acquired high position in their society through a traditional pattern of leadership. Later on, the practice of only denoting the village elder with the word *Gam* changed with time when the colonial authority informally started appointing *Gam* for the villages which were brought under colonial administration after 1912 (Nyori, 1993:138).

Furthermore, the British Government also introduced a new post above *Gam*, they were known as *Jamadars*. He acted as a regular area Superintendent where the posting of such officials were not possible. Political *Jamadars* were appointed among the local people but they were less popular than *Gam* since they were paid officially and were more like the Interpreters, a set of paid officials (Pandey, 1991:66).

At their first encounters with the tribal villages the colonial authorities mistook village elders *Nyi-kok* and *Nyi-te* as village chiefs or leaders due to their popularity and influence.³ The colonial government saw perfect candidature for government agents in these traditional leaders who were to use their popularity and influence to work as intermediaries between the government and the people, hence they were appointed as *Gams*, *Kotokis* and *Jamadars*. These appointments were made in very informal manner. The political officer would simply appoint a person who possessed the qualities of a *Nyi-kok* or *Nyi-te* by word of mouth and that

information would circulate among the villagers orally. For instance, Kuttik Moyong writes in his autobiography about his appointment as a *Kotoki*/Political Interpreter (Moyong, 1978:6):

When I was at Sigar village on a hunting trip with villagers I was called by my cousin brother Gumin who was also serving as a Political Interpreter. He informed that the APO (Assistant Political Officer) Mr. Godfrey, wanted to see me. I was anticipating some trouble or arrest. But it was good news and a pleasant surprise. Mr. Godfrey offered me the job of Political Interpreter and instructed me to join at Pangin. It was then on February, 1930 I joined Government service as a Political Interpreter and this was an important turning point in my career.

Thus, there was no formal process of one's appointment as a native agent, the political officer at his will could appoint anyone he think would fit the candidature. These native agents therefore owed the political officer their position and significance, and would only keep it at the political officer's discretion.

Below is a list of some prominent *Kotokis*, *Gams* and Political *Jamadars* who functioned at Siang Valley at the prompt of Political Officer in the 1940s.

Table 1: List of some prominent *Kotokis*, *Gams* and Political *Jamadars* from Siang Valley in 1940s

Sl. No.	Name	Village	Designation
1	Kuttik Moyong	Rasam	<i>Kotoki</i>
2	Rokom Moyong	Rasam	<i>Kotoki</i>
3	Subuk Tasung	Boying	<i>Kotoki</i>
4	Tonggo Tatin	Riga	<i>Kotoki</i>
5	Alut Perme	Ayeng	<i>Kotoki</i>
6	Adang Borang	Mebo	<i>Kotoki</i>
7	Talem Messar	Mikong	<i>Kotoki</i>
8	Apak Jamoh	Tigra	<i>Kotoki</i>
9	Boken Ete	Bene	<i>Kotoki</i>
10	Lingkit Tali	-	<i>Jamadar</i>
11	Gidam Yomgam	Yomcha	<i>Jamadar</i>
12	Marli Ringu	Kora	<i>Jamadar</i>
13	Limi Lollen	Kombo	<i>Jamadar</i>
14	Gongying Ering	Roing	<i>Gam</i>
15	Rukpaying Rukbo	Kelek	<i>Gam</i>
16	Akul Tayeng	Bodak	<i>Gam</i>
17	Martin Irang	Siluk	<i>Gam</i>
18	Akur Tayeng	Sigar	<i>Gam</i>
19	Tabong Talo	Ledum	<i>Gam</i>
20	Talut Padung	Ledum	<i>Gam</i>
21	Tasing Panyang	Mikong	<i>Gam</i>
22	Doka Zirdo	Zirdo	<i>Gam</i>
23	Tado Ringu	Kora	<i>Gam</i>
24	Bari Kadu	Kadu	<i>Gam</i>
25	Yimi Kadu	Kadu	<i>Gam</i>
26	Pinlem Lollen	Aalo	<i>Gam</i>
27	Minge Ete	Darka	<i>Gam</i>

28	Marngu Karlo	Karlo	<i>Gam</i>
29	Kore Bagra	Bagra	<i>Gam</i>
30	Dagi Angu	Angu	<i>Gam</i>
31	Mito Basar	Basar	<i>Gam</i>
32	Komba Koyu	Koyu	<i>Gam</i>
33	Ngoyu Tayi	Gensi	<i>Gam</i>
34	Bijum Tato	Kechi	<i>Gam</i>
35	Gibi Mindo	Liromoba	<i>Gam</i>
36	Yomrak Yomcha	Yiyom	<i>Gam</i>
37	Damsen Lombi	Karlo	<i>Gam</i>
38	Tayu Doke	Doke	<i>Gam</i>
39	Toyi Riba	Dari	<i>Gam</i>
40	Dorsen Riba	Dari	<i>Gam</i>
41	Gorka Riba	Pagi	<i>Gam</i>
42	Geke Nguba	Reny-Giye	<i>Gam</i>
43	Perje Nigyor	Tayi-Diyu	<i>Gam</i>
44	Marge Lollen	Kombo	<i>Gam</i>

Source: Data collected from field work and Confidential Reports on Formation of Abor Tribal Council, File No. A/508/1947, Arunachal State Archives.

Impact on the Society

Siang Valley constituted mostly of independent villages which were a state unto itself (Pandey, 1991:13). These independent villages further displayed a republican type of system with integrated villages administered by *Kebang* (Village Council) headed by village elders known as *Kebang Abus*. The polity of Siang was vested around these basic indigenous village councils and it acted as the centre of Polity in the region. About the *Kebang*, S. Dutta Choudhury, former Editor Gazetteer of East and West Siang Districts writes (Dutta, 1994:254):

Of all tribal councils in Arunachal Pradesh, the Kebang or village council of Adis of Siang is the most remarkable in many ways. It is highly organised and powerful self-governing body, exercising effective control and authority over the residents of a village sanctioned by centuries of tradition of the people. The Kebang is essentially a democratic institution in its character, the composition and function. In fact, the socio-political life of the Adis, is inconceivable without their Kebang.

It is evident from these words that the *Kebang* is an astounding institution of the Adis of Siang Valley. However, it is important to understand that word *Adi* here does not denote one single tribe but to a cluster of tribes that inhabit the Siang Valley, including the Galo tribe who were during that time also put under the banner of *Adi* tribe.

The changes in the society of Siang valley came in the form of new arrangements in the local leadership wherein *Gams*, Political *Jamadars* and *Kotokis* began to be recruited to aid the political officer from amongst the *Nyi-kok* and *Nyi-te* of the villages whom the colonial authorities earlier mistook as chiefs of the villages. The colonial authority wanted to use the traditional leadership acquired by these *Nyi-kok* and *Nyi-te* to facilitate

their administrative growth in the hills and made them the intermediaries between the people and the colonial government, they were to act as representatives of the government and safeguard their interests in the hills.⁴ Due to recruitment of native agents such as *Gams*, *Kotokis* and Political *Jamadars* by the colonial government, the *Kebang Abus* (council elders) lost their significance in the society. The interference of *Gams*, *Kotokis* and Political *Jamadars* in the *Kebang* weakened the position of village elders in their society. The injection of official leaders in the villages of Siang Valley by the colonial authority led to villages lose its autonomy and were no longer a state onto itself, this was further amplified by the passing of Assam Frontier (Administration of Justice) Regulation of 1945.

The character of *Kebang* was further changed with the introduction of the Assam Frontier (Administration of Justice) Regulation of 1945. The para 3 of the regulation stated that the administration of the Tracts is vested in the Governor and of each Tract in the Political Officer, the Assistant Political Officer, and the village authority thereof, or such other officer or the officers as the Governor may see fit from time to time to appoint in that behalf, subject to the provisions herein after contained (Luthra, 1971:82). The Political Officer, the Assistant Political Officers of the Tracts shall be appointed by the Governor, acting in his discretion. Furthermore, the para 5 of the regulation stated that the Political Officer shall appoint such person or persons as he considers desirable to be the members of a village authority for such village or villages as he may specify, and may modify or cancel any such order of appointment, and may dismiss any person so appointed. In any area for which no village authority has been constituted the powers and functions of the village authority, as provided by this Regulation, shall be exercised and performed by the Political Officer, or by any Assistant Political Officer authorized by him in this behalf (Luthra, 1971:82).

The Regulation vested all administrative powers in the Siang Valley to the Assistant Political Officer and officials appointed by him. Further those government patronised leaders who were appointed by the Political Officer only acted in a way to please the Political Officer since their position and all the benefit they assumed could be terminated anytime by the Political Officer, this eventually became the basic nature of their work by which they ignored the voices of the masses and only focused on making the villagers obey what the colonial government instruct them. They even started making decisions in the *Kebang* as a representative of colonial government and ignored the collective decision-making structure their tribal society. Therefore, these Official Leaders (*Gams*, *Kotokis* and Political *Jamadars*) who assumed their powers through the colonial government were in a sense no leaders but puppets whose strings were held the by the Assistant Political Officer stationed at Pasighat.

Also, the reason behind these official leaders focusing more on pleasing the colonial authority rather than pleasing their own people was firstly the material benefits that the colonial authority was rewarding them with and secondly their belief that the British government could not be challenged. The reason being that people

knew how the Padam and Minyong were defeated by the colonial forces in Anglo-Abor confrontation of 1911; they did not want to fight an enemy they would not be able to withstand. In their perception the “rule” of British authorities would never end and they saw the British authorities as the new *Nyi-te* who bestowed power and material benefit to the people.

It is a known fact that the colonial authorities, as a policy, always displayed their power and might so that tribes do not contemplate fighting against them. Mili Nyodu of Dipa village remembers an event he heard from his father when he was a child. According to it, the British officials once invited many village elders of Siang to Sadiya. A *Sobe* (bos frontalis) tied to a pole, was ordered by a British official. A sepoy shot the *Sobe* with a gun and with just one shot it fell on the ground and died immediately. The British official then proceeded to address the elders and told them that if their gun can kill a giant animal with just one bullet then one can estimate the strength of a government with thousand bullets. That, they should therefore never try to challenge the government was the final caution.⁶ Stories like these, cleverly crafted to influence people’s mind usually worked.

So the government-patronised leaders naturally developed the tendency to please the government rather than to serve the people, hence their main aim was to make the people obey the orders of the government. Added to that, some of them started using their powers for their own benefit. This is reflected in Boken Ete’s biography who was the first person to be appointed as Political Interpreter (*Kotoki*) amongst the Galos. In his biography he writes (Ete, 2011:11):

During the late 1930s, we came to know that the development activities, enforcement of rule of law etc. is done by Sarkarie (the Government). However, along with it came the menace of the Halik-Libbors. Actually the halik-libbors were the people who apprehended people on behalf of the government. They used to extract illegal fine from the offenders in both criminal and civil cases. As we had never seen any government officials in our lives, these halik-libbors took full advantage of our ignorance. They used to carry a piece of paper showing it as the government sanction for their acts. These tricksters were accompanied by the Alkola (government messenger). The alkolas were the government couriers who carried written messages and orders of government. They commanded the halik-libbors. Both, in unison, used to harass the people. There was no one to control them.

The term *Halik-Libbors* as mentioned by Boken Ete has a very interesting background to it. *Halik* is a derivative of the word *Lalik* which means a shirt or coat in Galo language and *Libbor* is derived from the word *Likbor* which means bigger in size. The government officials who visited the villages on behalf of the colonial authority wore large shirts or coats which were very unique to them; hence they started referring to them as *Lalik-Likbor* or *Halik-Libbor*.⁷

The power held by these native agents with some ill-practice as narrated by Boken Ete caused people began to covet all of the power, privileges, authority, and other things that the British government bestowed.

Many felt like they had no option rather than establishing friendly ties with the officials and subsequently they started being obsequious to the government at Pasighat. People who wanted to secure official patronage submitted to the colonial authority at Pasighat and accepted them even before the latter occupied the area physically (Pandey, 1991:62-63). Late Ligin Bomjen, an influential man from Bagra village talked about one event when some people from his village went to Pasighat with presents of goats to pay respect to the British Political Officer there.⁸

V. Conclusion

The introduction of these three categories of official leaders affected the *Kebang* (village council) and its leadership adversely. Earlier *Kebang* was the only basic unit around which the polity of Siang Valley revolved, but now the dynamics totally changed. The *Gams* had their influence in the village, the Political *Jamadars* in an area comprising several villages and the *Kotokis* or Political Interpreters the same as the officers to whom they were appointed with. With time *Kotokis* became the most influential of the three since they used to tour villages with the officials and people conveyed their prayers and appeals to the authority through them. Their influence even got further enhanced by the practice of making them represent the government in settling disputes in the *Kebang*⁹ which weakened the *Kebang's* authority and completely changed the democratic nature of the village council. These official leaders changed the traditional pattern of collective leadership by assuming an individual leadership which was not even chosen by the people but by the administration. They did not function like the leaders who would be the voice of the people but as government agents who just wanted to dictate government's rules and directions to the people.

So the government-patronised native agents naturally developed the tendency to please the government rather than to serve the people, hence their main aim was to make the people obey the orders of the government. Thus, these changes that were brought about in the society of Siang Valley changed the free-living spirit of village democracy and crippled the leadership of *Kebang* which was the apex body of local polity prior to the injection of native agents in the valley.

Notes

1. Extracted from the interview with Tanya Dabi, aged about 67 years, former General Secretary of Arunachal Pradesh Student Union and *Bogum Bokang Kebang* is a permanent resident of Pasighat under Pasighat Administrative Circle, East Siang District, Arunachal Pradesh, held scheduled interview on, on August 28, 2020 at 4:19pm. (**hereinafter referred to as TDI**)(*Tanya Dabi Interview*).

2. TDI.

3. Extracted from the interview with Takir Zirdo, aged about 79 years is a permanent resident of Naharlagun under Papum Pare District, Arunachal Pradesh, held scheduled interview on March 2, 2020 at 7:25pm. (**hereinafter referred to as TZI**)(*Takir Zirdo Interview*).

4. TZI.

6. Extracted from the interview with Mili Nyodu, aged about 50 years is a permanent resident of Dipa Village, Likabali Administrative Circle, Lower Siang District, Arunachal Pradesh held scheduled interview on November 4, 2020 at 10:17am.
7. Extracted from the interview with Nyapak Koyu, aged about 57 years is a permanent resident of Niglok village under Ruksin Administrative Circle, East Siang District, held scheduled interview on August 29, 2020 at 7:00pm.
8. Extracted from the interview with German Bomjen, aged about 67 years is a permanent resident of Naharlagun under Naharlagun Administrative Circle, Papum Pare District, Arunachal Pradesh, held scheduled interview on November 24, 2020 at 3:20pm. (**hereinafter referred to as GBI**) (*German Bomjen Interview*).
9. GBI.

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