

Research article

Lura system of the Galos: A study of its origin and socio-religious significance

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Abstract: Mithun, also popularly known as ‘Cattle of Mountain’ is an important bovine species of north-eastern region of India and also of China, Myanmar, Bhutan and Bangladesh. Mithuns are presently reared under free-range condition in the hill forests. Mithun plays an important role in the socio-economic and cultural life of the Galo people. However, with the dwindling population of Mithun over the years and gradual denudation of free-range area along with the biotic and abiotic stress, there is urgent need of scientific intervention and practicing the aged old traditional method of Mithun management (Lura) for proper management as well as conservation of this beautiful hill animal. This article is an attempt to highlight the significance and various important facets associated with the Lura system of the Galos of Arunachal Pradesh.

Keywords: Hogam, Lura, Mithun, Nyibo

Introduction :

The Mithun (*Bos-Frontalis*) is a bovine species indigenous to the South Eastern area of the Himalayas and adjacent mountains ranges in north eastern India. Mithun is often referred to as ‘Cattle of hilly region’ of North Eastern India and tropical rain forest of China. The animal plays an important role in the day today socio-economic life of the local tribal population. Livestock census of 2007 shows that out of total population of Mithun in India (0.26 million) 81.9 percent is found in Arunachal Pradesh followed by 12.63 percent in Nagaland, 3.8 percent in Manipur, 0.7 in Mizoram, 0.01 percent in Jammu and Kashmir and 0.01 percent in Himachal Pradesh and also found in lesser number in Myanmar, Bhutan and Bangladesh. In tribal context, the Mithun is most valuable amongst animals. The status of Mithun is very highly regarded in the majority of the tribal communities of Arunachal Pradesh. Especially in Galo society, Mithun is considered as a sacred animal and reared mainly for socio-cultural purposes ranging from sacrifices during the festivals and rituals, settling of disputes and as a bride price or bridal gift. However, the uses of Mithun in Arunachal Pradesh are largely found to be more commercial in nature than cultural. Due to limitless killing of Mithun during elections, picnics, housing ceremonies and marriage ceremonies, etc Mithun Population is reducing drastically. Since this species is considered vulnerable to extinction, proper research and in-depth study are very much required for the sustainable management of

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Mithun. The Galo people are very fond of Mithun related activities. The fact that the animal requires special natural habitat and rearing, the process of domestication would demand proper care and attention that relatively perennially led to evolution and development of a new community based, community sponsored and welfare-oriented arrangement and device, incorporating various mechanisms for sustainable utilization of the resources at the disposal of the village with particular attention to Mithun rearing. This management of Mithun rearing is called Lura in Galo, with this arrangement came into practice, the community has taken upon itself the responsibilities of management and look after of Mithun.

Objectives of the study:

1. To understand the origin and the socio-cultural and religious significance of Lura System
2. To record and textualize the oral tradition associated with the Lura System.
3. To study the organizational and functional aspects of the Lura System.

Materials and Methodology:

The approach of this research work is historical and analytical and done under the ethnohistorical method. It relies primarily on primary data available in the archives, information based on field studies and interviews and other secondary sources were also scrutinized.

A number of studies have been done so far covering some aspects of Mithun Arunachal Pradesh. The work such as- T.Riba's *The tribal and their changing environment*, T.K Bhattacharjee's *Enticing Frontier, Mithun: The pride animal of North- Eastern Hilly region of India* by M.G Shisod and others, *Management of Mithuns by Galos of Arunachal Pradesh* by Nyali Ete, Dr. Otem Moyong's article- *Commoditization and sustainable management of Mithun (Bos-frontalis) in Arunachal Pradesh, North-Eastern India, etc.*, provides good information relating to Mithun, its significance and management system. However, there is the absence of in-depth and comprehensive work on the Lura system- an indigenous traditional Mithun management system of the Galo people.

Lura system of the Galo:

Earlier there was no scientific method of animal rearing system in Galo society. The Lura system was the only way to keep the Mithun collectively. The word Lura is a Galo term, which means the big fence constructed for the Mithun by the villagers, where all the Mithun of the particular village or community are kept inside the fence for some months every year. This system has been practiced by the Galo people since time immemorial to till date and it is very much relevant in Aalo area of West Siang district of Arunachal Pradesh, most part of the Galo

dominated areas do not practice Lura system anymore, the reason might be the dwindling population of the Mithun in these areas, but they possess knowledge about the Lura in terms of oral history.

Lura system is one of the social activities which can bond and unite the community spirits among its members. Earlier there was no gender division, both male and female took part in the Lura, but nowadays only male members participate in the activities of Lura, because the work relating to Lura is very hard and tiring task, so women are given some privileges and concessions. Every adult male member of village can be involved in Lura construction, not only the owner of the Mithun but those who do not have Mithun also participate in Lura, which is a sign of social bonding. The structure of Lura covers large forest area, approximately 15-20 sq.km, depending upon the population of the Mithun and size of the village. Lura refers to a forest area within a village forest especially earmarked by the community with the main objective of harboring Mithun population of the village together, irrespective of individual ownership. It is not markedly different from rest of the forest in its vegetation type, canopy type and species composition, yet it is a separate entity in that the practice of shifting cultivation is regulated by the community. Besides such an area is so chosen wherein majority of the Mithun population of the village is found. In addition, such areas are identified and chosen for the Lura which afford best natural conditions require for Mithun and safety from predators. The reason for the construction of Lura is mainly for the agricultural production. In Aalo area agricultural activity starts from the months of April and May and harvested in August- September. During this period, Mithun is kept inside the Lura to protect the Mithun from damaging the crops, besides this Lura is very essential because maximum numbers of calves are born in the summer season, so the owner or the warden of Mithun can easily look after the mothers and the new born calves.

Lura is an arrangement evolved and developed by the Galo people in order to devise a mechanism to domesticate the Mithun and also to maintain a good proportion of population in its natural habitat during cultivation period. Lura serves not only as captivity to restrict and regulate the activities of the Mithun, but also as a breeding place where mating is facilitated by human efforts. Further, periodic visits by a group of persons of the village as mandated by the community to the area in order to inspect the condition of the Lura protects the predation of Mithun by the predators like wild dogs, leopards and tigers etc, outbreak of any diseases in the area, to provide care and medicines in case of any infection to Mithun, and so on, helps in monitoring the Lura effectively and easily, which in turn, ensure further steps towards domestication.

Evolution or Origin of the Mithun:

Mithun is believed to have originated more than 8000 years ago and considered to be descendant from wild Indian Gaur. Mithuns are found over a large area of South East Asia. Besides meat, Mithuns are reared for sacrificial purpose and or for barter trade. In some folklore, Mithun has been said to be the descendant of the Sun. Different interesting and divergent legends are available on the origin of Mithun among different tribes. Even today, Mithun is used as a holy sacrificial animal to appease the Gods and spirits by the tribesman. Mithun a

unique bovine species has a limited geographical distribution. It is mainly found in the tropical rain forests of North Eastern hilly states of Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur and Mizoram in India.

According to Galo mythology, there was a benevolent clan called *Takar-Taji*, they had a jhum field at a place called *Lok-Lote Ge Moba*. In their agriculture field they planted a plant of spherical ash guard (Pumpa in Galo). Later the plant bore fruits, when the fruits matured; a strange hissing sound came out from the fruits. Out of curiosity, they broke a fruit and there appeared something like live larvae of an insect. They tried to feed the larvae with rice and liquor but it did not work and grew unhealthy and even after a month or so its shape and size did not change. Then they fed them a green leaf called *Oik-Osik*, it showed good result and the larvae started to grow. Later they fed it with green leaves called *Tapi-Taji* and finally the larvae grew up into a fully matured state taking the shape of a very large animal which they called *Hobo* (Mithun).

Origin of Lura:

Lura is an old practice of the Galo people. As per their mythology is concerned Lura was started since the time immemorial, when *Takar-Taji's* all Larvae grew and turned into Mithun (*Bos-Frontalis*) he named all the Mithuns in the name of months, like *Pira* (November), *Rate* (Decemeber), *Desi* (January) etc. When all the Mithun had matured, these no longer could be kept at home any more. He subsequently gathered the boys of the clan for making a Lura (fence) to safely keep the Mithuns. They collected all the materials required for the construction of the Lura like *Yarbo* (bamboo), *Danyik* (pole/post), *Bumso* (cane or bamboo rope) and constructed the Lura across the jungle called *Bot-Kate Ge Yidum* to rear their Mithuns. After few years the numbers of mithuns had multiplied into large numbers. We are told that subsequently when *Takar-Taji* arranged marriage of one of his sons in big way he also sacrificed Mithuns to celebrate the occasion, even continuing at present and known as *Togu-Panam*. This was the first instance we come across of Mithun being used as a sacrificial animal.

Festival associated with Lura:

The Galo people mainly practice indigenous faith, they do not have particular religion but in recent years some sections of Galo community adopted some alien religion. Today *Mopin* is celebrated as a major festival by the entire Galo community. However, there are other festivals like *Hogam*, *Ampir*, *Mode*, *Hurin* etc, which have been celebrated from very early time.

Hogam is the festival related to Mithun and the Lura. This festival aims to promote and propagate germplasm of semi domesticated Mithun in their natural habitat and to revive the lost tradition and custom relating to Mithun. It is also celebrated to motivate the Mithun owners and also to enhance the production and improvement of Mithun breed. *Hogam* plays an important role in spreading awareness on Lura system of the Galo community.

Every Galo village used to celebrate *Hogam* festival but today, most of them do not celebrate it anymore, reason might be the dwindling population of Mithun in these areas or individualistic living of the society. The people of Aalo area still celebrate *Hogam* in their villages but in irregular manner. Time and date of this festival

is not fixed but generally the festival is held in the month of June or July because the Lura is constructed in the month of May-June, *Hogam* is the part of Lura so it is celebrated one or two weeks after the construction of Lura. The main objective of the celebration of this festival is for wellbeing of Mithuns, the ritual performers called *Nyibo*(shaman) ask to almighty *Donyi-Polo* every need of the Mithuns during the festival. Unlike other tribal festivals in Hogam there is no provision of sacrificing of cattle, pig, dog etc. chicken, fishes and dried and smoked wild meat especially of squirrel and rats are consumed during the *Hogam* celebration.

Role of Nyibo(shaman) in Hogam festival:

Nyibo plays a vital role in *Hogam*, in the very first day the *Nyibo* performs rituals at the community hall called *Bane Dere* for the wellbeing of the whole Mithun of the village for their good health, good breeding and the protection from the unwanted disease. For the festival the villagers select one family as Gamgi (main host of the festival). *Nyibo* along with his assistants locally called *Boh*, are invited in the Gamgi Naam (House of the main Host) in the first day of the festival, where he performs rituals and then he visits every household of the Mithun owners, performing rituals called *Hopik-Benam*. In this occasion every Mithun owner has to sacrifice one hen in front of the Hopik. There is no compulsion to pay the shaman in this festival but some of the Mithun owners offer him kind of fishes, squirrels and rats or any other wild meat as token of love.

This festival last for three days at the very first day the owner or warden of the Mithun collect all the Mithuns and bring them home, they also collect *Hika* (Kind of tree) for making *Hopik* (the wooden pole where Mithuns are tied with Hoa/rope made of bamboo), those who are having single Mithun elevate two Hopiks, those having two elevates four Hopiks in front of their house, here two *Hopiks* indicates per Mithun, so people can easily come to know who have how many Mithun in particular village or community.

Second day of festival is called *Timen-Alo* (a day for merry making). Here all the members of the village come together at the *Dere* (community hall) and drinks *Poka* (rice beer) and takes *Tipak* (chutney) and they perform *Hogam Ponu* (folk dance) which is folktales related to Mithun and pray the *Donyi Polo* for the wellbeing of Mithuns. Mithun owners of the village bring all the drinks and eateries for the day and feed all the members of the village. In the evening, every Mithun owner invites the villagers in their house for *Hogam Ponu*, as they believe that if they invite more people to perform *Hogam Ponu* at their house then the Mithun population will increase in the village. They serve them *Poka*, *Dopak* and also offer some cash or kind to the Lura leader for community fund.

HOGAM PONU:

HO-DELO, DELO REGO DELO, ANE GE GITE- HO DELO, ANE GE KONE- HO DELO, PITAK BE BUME- HO DELO, LUKO TEM PABE- HO DELO, DORTAK TEM PABE- HO DELO, YIRLI PE NAMME-

HO DELO, TARU GE PNTV- HO DELO, DELE KA TOKA- HO DELO, KAMRU GE PMTV- HO DELO, DELE KA TOKA- HO DELO, NESIN GE PAJURE- HO DELO, PITAK JA GOBE- HO DELO, BOMUM JA GOBE- HO DELO, DORTAK JA GOBE- HO DELO, BOMUM JA GOBE- HO DELO.

Since last two decades this festival has been celebrated in very irregular manner in the whole Galo area, some villages have totally avoided this festival, Lura is constructed every year in the study area; however, celebration of *Hogam* decreasing as it is evident from the fact that in last two decades *Hogam* was celebrated for 11 times only.

Table No. 01: *Hogam* festival celebrated in the study area in last twenty years.

SI. No.	Village	Year of Celebration	Total number of celebrations in last 20 years
1	Tadin	1996, 2001 and 2004	3
2	Kombo Tarsu Mobuk	1998 and 2003	2
3	Kombo Papak	1995 and 2006	2
4	Kombo Pomte	2002 and 2005	2
5	Kombo Raglam	Nil	0
6	Kombo Jirdin	1997 and 2012	2
		Total	11 Times

Organizational aspects of the Lura:

Lura system is also social organization which bound the solidarity of village community. This is right platform for the young boys of the village to learn social activities. Like any other organization Lura has executive committee members and advisory board. In the study area the structure of Lura committee consists of the following members-

1. President
2. Vice president
3. General secretary
4. Assistant general secretary
5. Convener
6. Chief advisor and advisors.

Generally, president and general secretary initiate all the activities of the Lura. Before the construction they conduct a pre-meeting to plan the construction of Lura, where they fix time, date and survey the place where the Lura is to be constructed. The committee members should be the owner of the Mithun except the chief advisor or the advisory board, because the owners have plenty of knowledge about Lura and know how to manage the Mithun or Lura system.

The structure of Lura and its environment:

The Mithun requires a special natural habitat and the rearing and the process of domestication would demand proper care and attention that relatively perennially led to evolution and development of a new community sponsored mechanism for sustainable utilization of the resources at the disposal of the village with particular attention to the Mithun rearing. This arrangement is called Lura, with this in practice; the community has taken upon itself the responsibility of management and look after of the Mithun. Following are the characteristics or salient feature of the Lura-

- Lura is a community forest area that is earmarked by the villagers within the community land.
- Lura is a temporary captivity in which Mithun population of the concerned village are confined for a certain fixed length of time during a particular season of the year.
- Lura is a management system of Mithun rearing as well as protection of agricultural crops.
- Lura is sustainable resource utilization with a tinge of conservation of natural eco system.¹⁸

It is an area chosen wherein majority of the Mithun population of the village is found. In addition, such areas are identified and chosen which afford the best of the natural conditions needs of the Mithun. In nutshell, Lura is the forest that is being identified, preferred and chosen with best area with its natural conditions for Mithun rearing in its natural habitat. The earmarked forest area is extensively fenced all through the boundary and finally closing the area from the rest of the forests. The fencing activities starts as soon as spring season ends and it take near about 20-30 days to completely fence the area, with entry points or gates at many locations. Every household should contribute its share in terms of labor, manpower and finance all through the fencing operation.¹⁹ However, individuals without Mithun are entitled to some relaxation in number of days for fencing and monetary contribution.

The fencing materials used are bamboo, small wooden pole, cane rope etc. after the completion of the fencing all the Mithuns of the village irrespective of individual ownership, is put or kept inside the Lura for the

period required. The mithun owners are to bring their mithun into the lura as soon as possible, wherever they may be.

Due to limitless killing and commercialisation of Mithuns their numbers are decreasing drastically, it is to noted here that in the study area also we found a relatively negative growth rate in the population of the Mithuns and also the numbers of ownership or warden is also very less in comparison to last 2-3 decades. The below given Table indicates the number of Hoto (owner) and population of Mithun according to last Lura (2016) this data was provided by the president/ General secretary of the villages of study area.

Table No. 02: Population of ownership and non-ownership of Mithun in the study area

Sl.No	Village	Total Household	Hoto/Hotin (Owner or paid warden)	Homo (Non-owner)	Population of Mithun owner in the village
1	Tadin	107	47	50	187
2	Kombo Tarsu-Mobuk	159	74	85	261
3	Kombo Papak	51	26	25	93
4	Kombo Pomte	65	33	32	103
5	Kombo Raglam	23	14	9	59
6	Kombo Jirdin	94	53	41	205

Distribution of works:

Every male member of the village can participate in Lura activities. The families without any male member are exempted from mandatory participation. Lura is made in the forest area where every work is totally depends upon man power. There are categories of workers in the Lura activity, these are *Hoto* and *Homo*. Hoto means those who are having Mithun and without Mithun is called Homo in the society. Both parties are engaged in the Lura activities every year but the work of *Hoto* is much tougher than the *Homo*. Since the activities take a month to complete the Lura, every preparation has to be done by the Hoto in advance. Homo engaged only during the fencing, material collection and monetary contribution is not mandatory for Homo. Every *Hoto* has to mandatorily collect ten bundles of *Payen* (rope made of bamboo) and 100 pieces of *Oso* (cane rope) before the start of construction work.

1. *Bumso Monam*- it is the collection of ropes before the fencing of Lura. It is mainly done by the Hoto, they collect large number of ropes from forest and dry with fire or sun light before use, to avoid the damage by *Tasi-Tako*(insect).

2. *Ludd-Panam*- this is the pre-survey or clearing the way where Lura is to be constructed. This activity is done by the Hoto, two to three weeks before the mass construction of Lura.
3. *Yarbo-Henam*- it is a group activity and it is one of the most difficult works of the Lura. It is related to the collection and spreading of bamboo and woods for construction of the fence, they place Yarbo in the whole area of the Lura where the fencing is to be constructed.
4. *Danyik-Panam*- *Danyik* is the small pole of wood or bamboo which is used in the construction of Lura. This work is generally done by the young boys, they collect the *danyik* from forest and bring it into the construction area.
5. *Aasu*- *Aasu* means the cook, there are some membr engaged as the cook to prepare food and drinks for the workers every day, members of Aasa are not fixed, Lura leader can entrust any member as Aasa during the construction work.
6. *Holu Ragnam*- this means construction of the fence. It is general activity where both *Hoto* and *Homo* collectively works. This is mostly carried out by the maximum number of old men in the village, because young and energetic members are engaged in collecting and bringing material from jungle.
7. *Payen-Ranam*- *Payen* is the rope used in Lura. It means carrying and distribution of ropes from one place to other; it is undertaken by the youngest group of the participants in the Lura. They stay in one place with number of *Payens* and supplies the same where it is required.
8. *Moko Nam*- there are strict rule and regulations within Lura committee, no member or individual of the village can break the Law of Lura. Moko means the fine imposed by the committee to absentees, there are two types of Moko- i.e Bane Moko(General) and Hoto(for owner). If any household remain absent without any valid reason, then their most important household utensil is confiscated by the committee as a fine. If they want to get back the utensil, they should send a greater number of workers in the next working day or have to pay the amount fixed by the village or the authority. Fine imposed to Hoto absentees are higher than the general one.
9. *Lura Kinam*- It is performed by the Hoto after the construction of Lura, it is related to inspection and counting of mithun present inside the Lura, they can even have idea of the number of male and female mithuns. They also trace out Mithun of other villages living inside their Lura, after that they inform every neighboring village to get their mithun away from the Lura and they send the ear marking pattern of the unrecognized and unknown mithun inside the Lura.
10. *Royup Monam*- Royups are small huts, which are constructed in the suitable places inside the Lura by the Hotos where they can rest while visiting their Mithun.
11. *Lura Modi*- This work is done by the Hoto only, it means repairing or maintenance of Lura, they repair it atleast two to three times in year, so the Mithuns could not destroy the fencing easily.

Importance of Lura:

Lura system is a very important activity and practice of the Galo people. This is one of the oldest practices and is being practiced since time immemorial. It is a social activity which helps in bonding the solidarity and unity of the community.

The conservational advantages of Lura are as follows-

- Annual head count of Mithuns is made possible through Lura
- Health status of Mithuns are monitored regularly
- It also facilitates Mithun breeding
- Mithuns are protected from predators
- Safeguards the destruction of agricultural field from Mithuns
- Conserve wild life inside the area defined for Lura by restricting hunting activities.

Conclusion:

Thus, the present study highlights how a traditional society for ages reared Mithun following their indigenous knowledge system of Lura. Though the tradition is disappearing and practiced in few villages, the study seems timely and urgent documentation of the entire system since it is linked with the people's indigenous knowledge system and rich oral traditions and rituals. Apart from the above, the importance of Lura system can be perceived as it is associated with agricultural life as well as the entire socio- cultural and economic life of the people.

Notes:

1. An extract from a personal interview with Mr. Pore Lollen (aged 74), held at Tadin Village on 16/02/2017
2. An extract from a personal interview with Mr. Hori Diyum (aged 56), held at Torsu Mobuk Village on 18/02/2017
3. An extract from a personal interview with Mr. Pinjom Lollen (aged 53), held at Pomte village on 17/02/2017
4. An extract from a personal interview with Mr. Domo Ado (aged 41), held at Jirdin Village on 20/02/2017
5. An extract from a personal interview with Mr. Mokar Bagra (aged 59) held at Tadin Village on 17/02/2017
6. An extract from a personal interview with Mr. Danyi Payum (aged 56) held at Kombo Raglam Village on 20/02/2017
7. An extract from a personal interview with Mr. Bini Ado (aged 35) held at Raglam Village on 20/02/2017
8. An extract from a personal interview with Mr. Tokar Lollen, (aged 42) held at Kombo Papak on 18/02/2017

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