

Philanthropy and giving in tribal society: A study among the Apatani Tribe of Arunachal Pradesh

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Abstract

Giving and its fitting receiving is the basis of establishment of any relationship in human society. We have evolved various systems to contextualise giving and it has been at the core of many studies to understand social relations and their contracts - and modern laws. This study attempts to look the forms of giving that exist in communitarian tribal society - where giving is a form of sharing. Based on this study among the Apatani society of Arunachal Pradesh, this study tried to look at what are the different forms of giving that exist in this society? What motivates this giving? How is this giving organised or regulated? In what way does the communitarian way of living affect giving and sharing practices in their society? This study found that the kinship system is at the core of this giving and reciprocity, and that it is the care and shared vulnerability that reproduced such systems. And finally, that as the community is going through drastic transformations, the system of giving and sharing is further evolving instead of dying. This paper presents both - the unique and obvious aspects of giving among Apatanis.

Keywords: giving, informal giving, customary giving, care, community welfare, reciprocity, rituals, kinship, social relation

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Glossary of terms

Uru Family, single or joint

Halu Clan

Ari Depending on the usage within a specific occasion, it could mean a gift or a price of something

Aku-bo Affinal uncle

Oho-bo Affinal nephew

Baro Brothers

Bulyang/Buliang Traditional village head or leader

Nyibu Traditional priest

Gaonbura or *Gaonburi* Government appointed village leader(s)

Ditung-Potung Customary laws

Ajing Friend

Riitu Pinii, *Eli Banii*, and *Mida* Traditional ceremonies associated with consummation of marriage

Myoko, *Murung* and *Dree* These are important annual Apatani festivals

Ari Diin These are family members of the bride who receives marriage gift

Kobu-Koro, *Gyasi*, *Lyio-Panyia* and *Kuting* These are affinal kins/uncles, categorised by the generation distance respectively

Mithun/Subu Scientifically known as *Bos Frontalis*, is considered as a sacred animal and valued as a property

1. Introduction

We have been giving and receiving gifts and are obliged by this transaction to continue this cycle throughout our lifetime. Through the customs and social norms of exchanging gifts to religious doctrines and teachings, through philanthropic mobilisations and call for charity, and marketing tactics that capitalise on social events, one is constantly initiated into the obligation to give and reciprocate. So pervasive is the practice of giving gifts in our daily life that rarely do we unpack them. We assume that we understand what gifts mean, what they do for us, and why we give them. Is the gift a mere material object that is being passed on or is it a symbol or a physical embodiment of intangible relations, emotions and customs?

Marcel Mauss¹ in his path defining work in understanding the 'gift' and its contexts among the Melane-sians and Polynesians, sheds light on the origin of what we understand as conventions, laws, and morals of justice. He argues that a 'gift' never exists by itself but rather it is manifested through the entire web of socio-cultural conventions and beliefs that invoke the rules and contracts of that exchange/transaction, where not only giving, but also receiving becomes an obligation. Following from these traditions of thoughts, more recent works have started revisiting the notions of gift-giving and are trying to understand what it means to the act of philanthropic giving. According to Alain Guery, what separates gift-giving and philanthropic giving is that the former is an act which has the 'inseparable triad' of a sequence of 'giving-receiving-reciprocating' built into it with a motive to build a relation.² While philanthropic giving has a different set of motives built into it, that is the intentionality of transformative welfare at the end of the receiver. Here, the giving is expected to be one directional without the triad of 'giving-receiving-reciprocating'. In the spectrum of philanthropic giving, at one end is the 'impact philanthropy' which is intended at bringing structural transformation with more focused and intended impact in the life of the receiver (individual or community).³ On the other end could be the 'impulsive giving'⁴ that is non-organised or non-institutionalised giving that is practiced on a daily basis by regular and everyday people on the streets, in their neighborhood, including other social and religious giving. The meta-intention and virtue of philanthropic giving are always the welfare and care of another fellow in need. Brian Duncan argues that it is this intentionality of bringing change in or having an impact on the life of others that sets philanthropic giving apart from exchange, trading or other forms of gift-giving.⁵ There is no obligation on the part of the receiver to return the gift, or even to enter into any relation with the giver.

Philanthropic giving materialises within a pre-condition of existing inequality in a society. This non-reciprocal giving occurs between people who are in need of help and people who have some excess to spare or share. This sets it apart from the 'gift' giving based on reciprocal giving as established by Marcel Mauss, where inability to reciprocate might lead to loss of honor or life-long servitude out of obligation.⁶ While at the core of one giving is the establishment of relation and contract, the other

1 Mauss, Marcel. 2002. *The Gift: The forms and reasons for exchange in archaic societies*. London: Routledge.

2 Guery, Alain. 2013. "The Unbearable Ambiguity of the Gift. Translated by Katherine Throssel."

3 Duncan, Brian. 2004. "A theory of impact philanthropy."

4 Bornstein, Erica. 2009. "The impulse of philanthropy."

5 See Brian Duncan's nuanced and theoretical formulation of a model for impact philanthropy. (Duncan, 2004).

6 Mauss, Marcel. 2002. *The Gift: The forms and reasons for exchange in archaic societies*. London: Routledge.

provides a breakthrough from the triad and obligations by bringing the intentionality of welfare and care at the core.

This paper is an attempt to revisit these different conceptualisations of giving based on a study among the communitarian society of the Apatani tribe of Arunachal Pradesh. The exploratory research was conducted to understand the forms of giving in a traditional and communitarian tribal society. Based on this study, a few observations are made such as - that the communitarian way of life is an instituted tradition of constant exchange of gifts and help. These exchanges are mediated through their complex and cohesive network of kinship system. The kinship relations and traditional conventions make this giving/helping obligatory - an obligation to 'give, receive and reciprocate' the help when the other kin need help. It is this 'inseparable triad' by Alain Geury,⁷ that defines this giving as 'gift-giving'. There is a continuous exchange of resources throughout the life cycle.

However, what sets the giving and sharing in Apatani society apart is that here both the intentionality of welfare of receiver and building/maintaining of relationship are at the core. Here, reciprocity is obligatory, and traditionally giving and sharing took place only within the kinship lines. Also, the giving does not take place between perceived unequals. One is helping out kin in need (due to fire accident, sickness, care of orphans, elders, organising of rituals, ceremonies, etc.) with an expectation of reciprocation when it is their turn. Thus, the giving and sharing in Apatani society is actually a circulation of resources motivated by the shared vulnerability and shared value system of care and compassion.

This working paper is an attempt to discuss forms of giving, exchange, and reciprocity in a communitarian society. In the communitarian tribal society of the Apatanis, giving is a tradition of compassion-empathy and mechanism of building social cohesion and a security net as part of the communitarian way of living.

⁷ Guery, Alain. 2013. *"The Unbearable Ambiguity of the Gift. Translated by Katherine Throssel "*.

2. The field and the methodology

This study was conducted among the Apatani tribe in Arunachal Pradesh in the Northeast of India. The Apatani community is one of the prominent tribes of Arunachal Pradesh despite their relatively small population of 43,777 (22,523 female and 21,254 male population).⁸ They are well known for their high-energy efficient sedentary wet rice cultivation,⁹ natural resource management,¹⁰ unique and densely organised traditional villages, their unique cultural practices, and their picturesque homeland called the Ziro valley. It was only in the late 1940s, that the Indian government established its base in Ziro proper. With that the valley was opened to the outside world as the new district headquarter was established in Ziro. Within a few decades, the valley saw tremendous transformation with all government amenities, a new mini secretariat, a sprawling marketplace, several educational institutions and higher educational institutions, multi religious places, and several tourist amenities. While the urban town's population is made up of different communities - both tribal and non-tribal, the traditional villages which are located some five kilometers away from the towns are inhabited only by the Apatanis. These modernisation and development activities have several impacts on the traditional way of living and life situations of the community as we shall discuss later.

Apatani society is a close-knit endogamous society divided into 74 exogamous clans. There are five main traditional village clusters which are further sub-identified into smaller village groups and then into clan villages. The society is patriarchal, patrilineal, and patrilocal with a subjugated position of women in the social and political spheres.¹¹ They have their own customary laws and belief systems which they have maintained despite several erosions due to the coming of new governance and judiciary systems, and new organised religious groups.

While in the past, agriculture, animal husbandry, and small trade were the main economic activities, many Apatanis have now taken up government jobs, run businesses and engage in different occupations such as driving tempos/trackers, handlooms, clinics, contract work, farming, poultry, selling vegetables and meat in local markets, etc., which were not available earlier. However, a large number of households continue their traditional rice cultivation in their fields and maintain their kitchen gardens, bamboo gardens, pine groves, and forest patches for subsistence as well as for household needs.¹² Apatanis have their own traditional belief system but in the past few decades, a significant number of Apatanis have converted into different sects of Christianity and Hinduism, and have started associating themselves with Doni Poloism (an institutionalised form of religion based on the traditional belief system of the Tani group of tribes of Arunachal Pradesh, as a result of the revitalisation movement).

⁸ Government of India. 2011. "A-11 State Primary Census Abstract for Individual Schedule Tribes."

⁹ Ramakrishnan, P. S. 2000. "Apatani wet rice cultivation: An example of highly evolved traditional agroecosystem."

¹⁰ Kala et al., 2008. "Land use, management and wet-rice cultivation (Jebi Aji) by the Apatani people in Arunachal Pradesh, India: Traditional knowledge and practices."

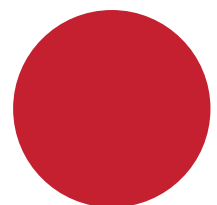
¹¹ Understanding the status of women in tribal society has become convoluted in recent times, especially in Arunachal Pradesh. For a more detailed discussion, refer to Tadu, Rimi. "Engendering Tribal Land Rights for Gendering the Land: A Case Study among Apatani and Nyishi Communities."

¹² Kala et al. 2008. "Land use, management and wet-rice cultivation (Jebi Aji) by the Apatani people in Arunachal Pradesh, India: Traditional knowledge and practices."

As mentioned earlier, the community is going through substantial transformation with the coming of new governance and administrative systems, which introduced modern education, changes in the economic structure, changes in attitude and worldview due to exposure and interaction with the outside world, and introduction of modern technologies and media. However, despite all this the community has still managed to maintain most of its age-old traditions, and the integrity of its identity. Several factors such as the integrity of their ancestral land and territory, their belief systems, oral traditions and traditional memories and ancestral cultural practices, closely tied kinship lineage system, social institutions and constant transactions of resources through these linkages, play the important role of maintaining the social cohesion of the community.

This study tried to understand the complex and unique realities of the community. Therefore, to understand the giving in this community it is important to understand the traditions of both past and present. Different forms of giving - formal, customary, and informal were analysed. How are these practices mediated? What motivates people to give? What are the customary traditions, belief systems, and institutions that regulate these forms of giving? And how have these traditions changed in contemporary times when different forms of social welfare benefits and activities are carried out by government bodies and other non-government organisations within the community? While traditional institutions, customs, and kinship lineage systems have been studied to understand their role behind sustaining community traditions and practices of giving, understanding the emergence and role of new or modern institutions in villages and local towns such as various voluntary organisations, development committees, and associations that are formed within the villages, and the large number of clan and kinship-based fund groups in the community, is also important.

Therefore, purposive sampling was done to interview community members from different socio-economic backgrounds. The sample comprised both men and women who held different positions in both traditional institutions such as the village heads of village councils called Bulyang, and modern institutions like the Gaonburas and Gaonburis, i.e., the village advisors appointed by the administration, members of community based organisations such as the village development committees, Apatani Youth Association (AYA), Apatani Women Association of Ziro (AWAZ), Supung Bulyang Council and Hong Biodiversity Conservation Committee, and other community members.



3. *Giving mediated by tradition and kinship*

According to Liagi Tapa, the Bulyang (village head) of Liagi village and an executive member of Supung Bulyang Council:¹³

All the giving in Apatani society is mediated through the traditional relationships shared by individuals. Therefore, to understand the context of giving and reciprocity one must first understand the traditional social organisation of relations and different roles and responsibilities ascribed to these relations.

The items which are presented as gifts, such as rice, meat, bamboo, wood, firewood, ropes, canes, animals, necklace beads, fabrics, cash or different forms of labour and skill services, are both material and non-material resources which are shared across in times of need. Thus, these resources are constantly circulated through kinship networks.

Kinship Organisation: To understand Apatani society and the flow of gifts (Ari) and physical help (Miiibo-Lubo) as resources, one needs to understand the structures of relationship and kinship networks. It is their complex network of relationships with different entitlements, roles, and obligations or responsibilities towards each other, that makes Apatani society a very close-knit society. Every social and customary occasion throughout an individual Apatani's life cycle requires an invocation of these relationship ties. They also maintain this close relationship with their ancestral spirits, other benevolent and malevolent spirits, and deities who dwell along with them in their social and natural landscape. During every ceremonial event and annual festival, they call upon their respective relatives and spirits to visit their respective clan villages to receive gifts and feast and give blessings in return. These blessings are reiterations of promises of protection and support during and from untoward incidents, disease or sickness, natural calamities, and conflicts. In this way, each of these relationships functions as a support and care network within the community.

The relationships in Apatani society are formed by three means:

1. By virtue of birth within a clan. As a patrilineal society, the clans are organised on the male line (Agnatic). This agnatic group of relatives forms a clan (Halu), and each clan constitutes a separate village (Lemba) named after a common male ancestor whose name is also shared as the surname of each clan member. Within the clan, each member is a clan brother (Ate) or sister (Ata), except for a sister-in-law (Achi) who comes from another clan village. Each household (Ude) is a nuclear family, which along with the immediate families forms the family (Uru), family group (Halu-Uru or Tulu) and so on. For all purposes, the clan is the main social unit and identification.¹⁴ Clan villages can be further grouped into larger village clusters or the main village. These village clusters are then further grouped into collectives of villages who act as political and social allies (Asso). Each of these diversify

¹³ For a more detailed discussion on different kinds, roles, and responsibilities of Bulyang, and on the present condition of the status of Bulyang, please read Sohkhlet and Lalyang (*Significance of Bulyang*, 2013).

¹⁴ Also see for more detailed discussions and descriptions on clan formation and rituals, Haimendorf, 1962. "The Apa Tanis and their Neighbours," and for more updated version, Haimendorf, 1980. "A Himalayan Tribe: From Cattle to Cash."

2. By marriage or affinal kinship. Relations formed outside the clans are formed through marriage as each clan practices strong clan exogamy. Care is taken that marriage does not happen between close cousins either; descendants of up to six generations are considered as relatives (Henii-Myanii) forbidden from matrimony, as discussed below, though not rare. Thus, relations are formed with the furthest villages which spread the kinship network wider.
3. By forming a ceremonial friendship. This is a very special relation of friendship formed between two individuals of far-off villages through special ceremonies and exchange of gifts. Takhe Kani lists two such friendships - Bunii Ajing and Piinyang Ajing. They take the oath of looking after each other's safety and well-being and help each other through thick and thin. However, in the past, such friendships were formed only between wealthy and powerful individuals. These relations are so important that a father divides these Ajing (friends) among his son(s) like property.

Fig.1.¹⁵ is a simplistic chart to show the flow of the kinship descent line along the affinal and agnatic line. While the descent line is identified on both male and female lineage lines, it is the maternal line of kinship and relations that plays a more significant role in following affinal relations, roles, and responsibilities. The female member's brothers and her maternal uncles play a significant role throughout a woman's and her children's lives. This maternal and affinal kinship relation descent is traced for five generations on both Ego 1 and Ego 2's descent line as shown in the chart. Cross marriages between or across these relations and kinship units are prohibited as they are close kin.

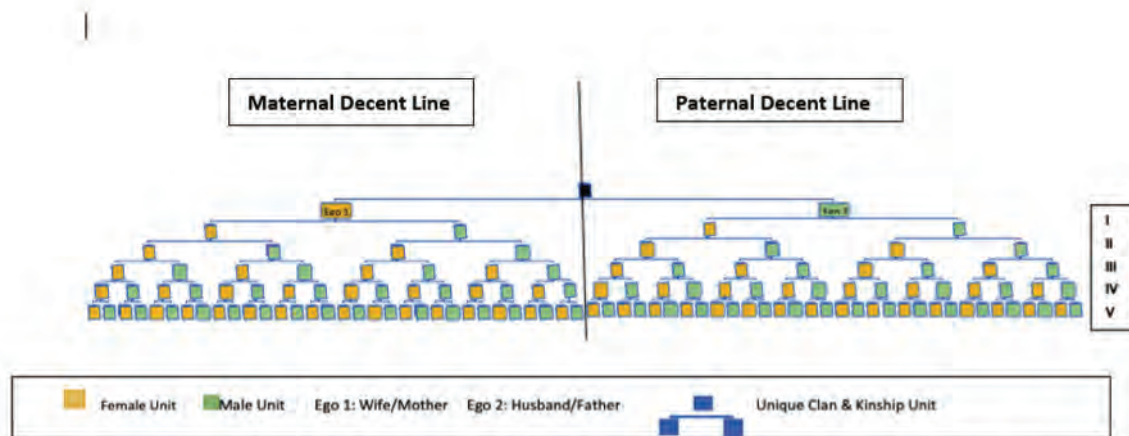


Fig. 1. Chart showing the double decent system of kinship relations till the fifth generation of kinship line.

Giving and Reciprocity in the Kinship Line: As mentioned earlier, gifts and resources are circulated across and through these kinship lines of both affinal and agnatic clan relations. The entitlement of these gifts depends upon the nature of relation, order of age and occasion or cause of situation which necessitates the giving. For instance, a marriage is consummated with the giving of 'Ari'¹⁶ (loosely translated here as marriage gift). These gifts are presented by the groom to the family, clan members

¹⁵ The chart is derived from and is a modified version of the chart by Dr. Radhe Yampi. Yampi, Radhe (2011). "Double descent system: As prohibition rule and binding force in Apatani society."

¹⁶ The term 'Ari' has multiple meanings based on its usage. It could mean both ritual gifts associated with certain ceremonies such as marriage, as well as the relational value or meaning of a relation. For the general purposes of this study, Ari indicates a ritual gift.

and kin members of the bride depending on the group of the gift receiver (Ari Diinii). Accordingly, there are three groups of relations - the Diirang, are the parents of the bride who receive the lion's share of the gift, the Lache, are the brothers or close family brothers or clan brothers, and the Mechu, the selected close relatives or clan relatives who receive marriage gifts. It is through this giving and receiving of gifts that two different clans enter an affinal kinship relation contract. While these select gift receivers are entitled to similar gifts and services in all future events from now on, they also become responsible and obliged to look after the well-being of the couple, particularly the wife and her progeny. This group of gift receivers shares these responsibilities as a collective. For instance, the Diirang are responsible for organising traditional ceremonies such as Riitu Pinii, Eli Banii, and Mida (discussed below in detail), for the couple at different stages of life, to propitiate blessings from spirits; Lache and Mechu members help the Diirang in organising these events.

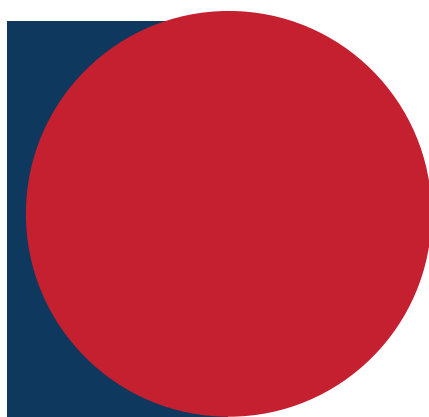
Further, depending on the generation and distance in the kinship relation, the select maternal uncles (usually and including the Lache and Mechu) are also identified into four categories. They are entitled to receive specific gifts of meat portions of any sacrificial animal, voluntary labour services, and alliances during every festival or during times of need. These relations are named after the name of the gift itself. The close or select maternal uncles who receive the most prized portions of the meat are called Alii, next is the Kobu-Koro - the closest or immediate uncles who received their mother's Ari (marriage gift), then Gyasi, the maternal uncles of the second or next generation, and then the Lyio-Panyi of third or fourth generation. The remaining more generic relatives are grouped as Kuting, who usually receive a smaller portion of the gifts. To receive and be entitled to gifts is a matter of honour and responsibility. Often one is responsible for more than one relative. They provide support in times of conflict, unnatural events or famine, in organising festivals, some expensive rituals, or in organising ceremonies during the time of birth, marriage, death, construction of houses or during times when someone needs help in the form of labour or taking up the responsibility of orphaned kins. Having these large groups of assigned kinship relations helps in sharing responsibility. These kin are the first set of relations who are directly concerned with the welfare and wellbeing of a person.

Similarly, during the entire life cycle the close kin would always be around to help each other. When a child is born, the maternal uncles of both the parents pay a special visit with gifts of valuable items such as traditional beads and metal necklaces, and preserved bacon which used to be considered the most valuable meat. In this way, the new baby is introduced to and acknowledged by their uncles and aunts, and a new bond of kinship is established. When a couple is married, several ceremonies at different stages are organised, such as Riitu Pinii and Eli Banii, where the close kin and clan kin of the wife fill the rice granaries of the couple. In the past, rice grain was also used as currency for trading. Apatani believe in the continuation of their life journey even after death when one continues to live in Neli (loosely translates as the world of departed/dead people). Therefore, at the funeral of a dead person, all the close kin, relatives and friends would once again bring the best of gifts such as food items, alcohol, shawls, traditional swords, sacrifice of valuable animals, as supplies for continuation and starting of life in another world.

Other non-kin giving: Throughout the year, Apatanis hold several festivals and religious observations, each of which are closely tied to their agricultural cycle. Apatanis are known for their unique and resource efficient agriculture practices which had allowed them to become sedentary settlers, unlike other neighbouring tribes which practice shifting cultivation. Therefore, according to Apatani

belief, each festival plays an important role in the success of their cultivation where they make animal sacrifices which are offered to spirits through rituals and to kin and clan members according to the relations mentioned above. The Dree ceremony is organised just after the paddy plantation to appease the spirits of earth/soil to protect the paddy from infestations; similarly Yapung ceremonies are organised before the harvesting to appease the spirits of the sky to protect the crops from natural calamities such as hailstorm or heavy rain and several other clan-based rituals and ceremonies such as Si-Myoro (protector spirits) against epidemic diseases (Tabun Doli - smallpox, Ilchang Doli - dysentery, and similar diseases), which are annually organised for protection, preservation, and welfare of its village and community. These are common ceremonies for which the entire village contributes in both cash and kind to the Gora (the initiator of rituals) and the Nyibu (the village priest) to organise and perform the rituals.

Another occasion when such collective help and resource pooling takes place is whenever there is a fire, which used to be a common occurrence. Traditional Apatani houses used to be built entirely of bamboo and wood, so whenever there was an outbreak of fire, the entire house would get burnt to ashes in no time. However, the entire workforce and resources were immediately pooled to help the unfortunate kin or friend. The clan brothers (Baro-Atang), the maternal uncles (Aku-Bo) and nephews (Oho-Bo), across the valley would come and help the family to rebuild the house and provide all necessary supplies such as wood, bamboo, cane, cement, tin sheets, etc., while the women folk would bring food items and rice grains, as well as refreshments for the people who were working. It is a social norm that the Bunii Ajin would not leave till the house was ready to be occupied again. Such collective help in the form of labour and material resources without asking, relieves the burden of the unfortunate family. Today various community-based organisations and village associations such as the Apatani Youth Association (AYA), Apatani Women Association of Ziro (AWAZ), Church organisations, village development committees, student unions, etc., also contribute from their respective funds and in their personal capacity.



4. Giving Today

In the previous sections, we have seen how the community has a traditionally inbuilt system and network of kinships and close relations that works as a safety net for its members. In times of need, these relations entitle and oblige the members to help, care, and support. Today, these systems have metamorphosed into much more organised networks of kinship and other social groups. For the sake of better understanding, these groups have been categorised into the following three groups based on the purposes they serve and how giving is mediated there:

Need based and support groups: Following from the logic of the kinship support system, i.e., helping one another in times of need and also sharing the responsibilities of helping, many fund-based small groups have emerged in the past two decades. Most of these 'fund' groups are formed by women and are formed along the kinship line that is mostly along the affine groups. At the outset, it might give the impression that these are SHGs and income generating groups, as these groups are usually named as 'so and so *fund* group' (e.g. 'Patang-Ajin Fund', 'Anu-Ami Fund', 'Uru Fund', etc). However, these groups are more than mere financial fund groups. According to Tadu Rillung, in recent times when people have started moving out of their villages to different parts of the state and the country, it has become difficult to keep track of each other, especially for female members who marry outside the village. While brothers and maternal uncles stay in touch through different social occasions, sisters and maternal aunts get dispersed across community villages. Tadu Rillung, who is a member of more than four kinship fund groups, argues that money is a good incentive for people to stay in touch. Most of these fund groups hold an annual audit, especially around the annual festivals such as Myoko, Murung and Dree when community members return to the valley for the celebrations. In the case of Anu-Ami (Sisters) Fund, members would bring their daughters to introduce them to their sisters and cousins. This way the younger generation is integrated into the group. The member can take loans at minimal interest rates. Further, the fund money is also used to support each other in times of crisis such as fire or any accident, death, medical treatment or other events such as marriage ceremonies, to fund the higher education of a daughter - each member is entitled to donations and help from the group.

While money might be the important facilitating factor, it is the emotional ties connected by kinship relations that form the meta narrative of these fund groups. Considering the complex and tightly-knit kinship system, it is common for a person to be a member of at least three such fund groups. Today, roughly the number of such kinship and relation-based groups within the community is in hundreds. Similar to the kinship and relation-based fund groups, there are various other fund groups which are based on different associations, formed for the same purpose of having a common fund which can be used by members in times of need. Some examples could be church based groups, friends' groups, SHGs, farmers group, Patang Ajing groups, etc. Having such groups allows one to have a common pool of money, accessible to all members, for the purpose of helping each other.

Development Activity Groups: As mentioned earlier, each village or each related village group has a village development committee, which is responsible for taking up village level development and maintenance activities. Apart from preserving the traditional practices and customary laws, law and order, planning developmental activities, dealing with village level issues such as boundary or land conflict with other villages or tribes, etc., these committees also initiate activities such as maintenance of water wells, footpath and drainage, construction of footbridge, annual fencing (Subu Lut), lighting of villages, etc. For most of these activities they approach different government departments and the Panchayat, whenever possible; for activities which are a part of customary practices and common village causes they collect donations from members from time to time. Meha Pello, during the golden jubilee celebration took up the responsibility of repairing the village government school and construction of the village entrance arch. For this and for the grand celebration, they collected donations from member clans and organised games to generate funds.

Similarly, the Biodiversity Conservation Committee of the Hangu Village Development Committee, has initiated several modifications in customary practices for the conservation of biodiversity and managed to mobilise community support for many of their activities. For instance, during the annual Myoko festival, each clan village has to kill and sacrifice a monkey at the sacred altar (Nago) - a sacred tradition being followed since time unknown in symbolic remembrance of a victory. The committee through several awareness and consultation meetings has managed to convince the community to allow the committee to organise this hunting of monkeys, whereby only one monkey would be killed and its meat would be divided among all the clans of the Hangu village group. According to Tilling Amer, an active member of the Biodiversity Conservation Committee of Hangu Village Development Committee, the committee members took the responsibility for anything untoward happening as a result of being cursed by spirits. However, it has been three terms since the new rule has been followed. She expresses her surprise that it is the elderly who helped convince the younger generation to change an age old tradition.

Apart from these village level committees, there are several other group initiatives which have been taking up activities for common causes. Better Ziro Initiative, formed in 2018, took up the task of repairing an 8 kilometre stretch of a main road after years of seeking help from both, government departments and the local MLA. A group of government officials started the work on their own and were soon joined by like-minded people. They pooled their own money and did the physical labour for two months. Those who had their houses near the road and could not contribute any money, helped by working on the road and serving tea and snacks when the work reached their stretch. Similarly, there are different initiatives like Clean Kley River by Apatani Youth Association which has now been joined by many other groups, orientation-cum-training workshops organised by SMILE-Ziro for State Civil Service aspirants, and so on.

Rights and cause based groups: These are the formal groups such as Tanii Supung Dukung (Apatani apex body), Apatani Women Association of Ziro (women's apex body), Apatani Youth Association (one of the earliest community based organisations in the State), and many other smaller associations, unions, bazaar committees and societies, like church based societies, student unions, Tempo Driver's Association, etc., which are formed to look after the common cause of the community or of their respective interest based causes. These groups are known for being one of the important philanthropic groups who would give contributions to different causes and make donations to NGOs, hospitals,

and to villages. For instance, the Tempo Driver's Association is known as one of the most organised and prompt groups that makes generous donations and provides voluntary labour if there are fire accidents in the village. Student unions of all schools collect donations from each student and provide voluntary labour in reconstructing the houses damaged due to fires; every year, they undertake cleanliness drives in the villages before important festivals.

These groups are a reflection and replication of what traditional institutions and customs of kinship have been doing since time unknown. Such collective forms of giving reduce the burden of responsibility from individuals to a group or community as a shared responsibility. Further, most importantly for the Apatanis, it somehow shields the dignity of a person from turning into a mere passive helpless receiver. One receives what one gives; as a member of a collective, one is obliged and entitled to help, help that comes not from a benevolent giver but from someone who is obliged to give and might be at the receiving end one day.

One important case study to illustrate these changes and new trends emerging in the community would be the efforts of the Apatani Women's Association of Ziro (AWAZ) to reduce the expenditure during traditional ceremonies. This group, under the leadership of Dr. Kunya, was formed in 2015, as a platform for women to come together and speak as a common voice to empower women, and for the larger welfare of the Apatani society. After its formation, AWAZ held a meeting to understand the main issues being faced by the community. During this meeting, the villagers indicated that performing traditional ceremonies had become expensive for them. A few wealthy community members had brought in new modifications and trends, which had put pressure on people to spend, even if they could not afford to. For instance, in the past, during the feast of newborn baby (Niipo Aping) celebration, only the clan women and close maternal kin of both the parents (Diiran, Lache, Mechu), the priest, the women who cut the umbilical cord, and immediate sisters would visit with their gifts. There would be around 30 to 60 guests for the feast during the assigned 10 days. However, today, the number of guests invited ranges from 200 to 700. These trends have become more of a public demonstration of prestige and wealth, and status and power.

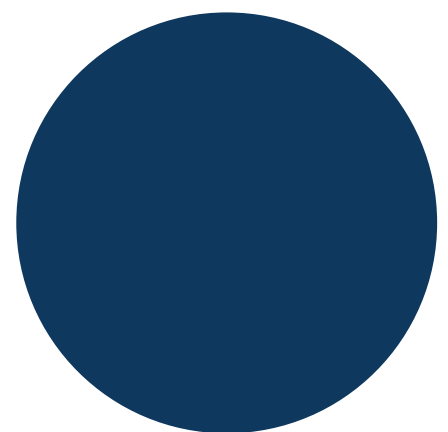
Traditionally, at every feast, either at the birth of a baby, ceremonies held for married couples, festivals and similar events - boiled meats of Mithuns, cows, pigs, and eggs were served along with rice, traditional chilly flake-powder, boiled vegetables and other items, and traditional rice beer were served. Each guest was gifted raw meat pieces when they left, depending on the occasion. But today, serving of foreign liquor, both cold and hot drinks, chicken, mutton, fish, sweet dishes, pickle, Indian and continental dishes, has become a common practice. Post-ceremony parties for merry making have become a trend. Guests from across the state and country are invited and arrangements according to their convenience are made. The traditional attire is modified to make it look more fashionable and new fabrics such as Muga silk are being incorporated which makes it very expensive. According to Lyagi Aniya, the current General Secretary of AWAZ,¹⁷ during the village-to-village meetings, the village members shared that simple and close-knit celebrations like Niipo Aping, and other marriage ceremonies (Mabo Inchi, Eli Banii, Mida), community festivals such as Murung and Myoko, etc., have lost their original meaning and become an occasion for grandiose celebrations. There is a notable setting of aspirational trends because of which there are shifts in many socio-cultural practices. As a result, these traditions have become inaccessible for people who are unable to afford them. Gradual-

¹⁷ She was the General Secretary when she was interviewed; a new executive body has been elected and they will take over in November 2021.

ly the class differences have become a visible site of growing inequalities, indifference towards their fellow community members, and superficiality of performing traditions.

One needs to remember that it is these ceremonies, rituals, festivals, and kinship ties that facilitate and provide the base for these exchanges of gifts and obligate the reciprocation. What is at stake is the very basis of the gift itself - to see and treat the other fellow as worthy of receiving the gift and return this gift. According to John O'Niell, what concerned Mauss is that 'the privileged might neglect the return gift of poor'¹⁸, that one may become indebted forever through these gifts which they never can afford to return or repay. In many ways there is a transaction of honors.

This visible public display of one's wealth and power by the rich and wealthy members of the community and the invisible realisation and disguised humiliation for being poor or incapable has not gone unnoticed by the community. Like AWAZ's initiative, many other community-based organisations like village community development committees, Meha Pello, councils of Gaonburas, including the earlier attempt of putting such a cap on expenditures by the Apatani Cultural and Literary Society (ACLS), have raised this issue in different forums and documents of Ditung Potun (Customary Laws) have been framed. These documents attempt to bring the original practices back and impose fines on people who break these rules set by the village Ditung Potung. Within the clan village, the social and cultural norms and customs are a leveler of this wealth status as one must still take up the same roles and perform the same responsibilities and share the space with their same clan members, and respect the traditional status based on age and traditional institutions. Further, it is important for the sustenance of communitarian and collective society that its members are able to participate in the resource sharing and exchange process organised through these ceremonies and mediated through kinship lines. Therefore, the community members feel it is necessary to bring in some restraint and some regulations into how their society is changing and developing.



¹⁸ Komter, Aafke E. 2005. *Social Solidarity and the Gift*.

A large red circle is positioned on the left side of a dark blue rectangular background.

5. Analysis

Based on my observations, I found that the communitarian way of living, the unique environmental setting, complex and yet closely knit social relation and kinship system, and the unique socio-political policies adopted by the state for the tribal development are the main elements that make the giving in Apatani society unique.

Following are the main analyses of practices of giving in the Apatani tribal society:

Patterns/Forms of Giving: There were different forms of giving observed among the Apatanis during the study. First, the giving that is obligatory where one engages in giving through the sanctions of customs. For instance, the Ari (marriage gifts) giving, that ties both the giver and receiver into the obligation of kinship, and giving and reciprocation of gifts/resources, blessings, protection, goodwill, and labour and services whenever required. This giving is carried out throughout the different stages of life and on different traditional and cultural occasions. Some of these gifts are entitlements reserved for elders or the seniors in the order of the kinship network from their younger kin.

The second form of giving is the voluntary giving, giving that is not obligatory by formal customary sanctions. This form of giving is rather set by social norms and normative practices set by traditional value and virtue. For instance, taking care of elders or being concerned about their well-being and serving them, not only by the immediate family (Uru) but the clan family (Halu), and by the kin. One learns such values from seeing and learning from the daily behavior of others. So, often one would provide voluntary labour in the fields, collect firewood, feed the children, take care of elderly persons or orphans and similar other services if someone is ill or unable to do any physical work. Such practices of helping each other are observable not only in a traditional setting of villages but also in urban and more contemporary or modern settings.

The third form is the giving that is collectively organised. Many respondents shared that there is a practice of collectivisation of efforts and giving among the tribal people. They believe it comes from their communitarian way of living and traditional settings where most of the work is labour intensive. In the past, in the absence of modern tools and technology and unavailability of surplus paid labour, one had to depend on other fellow members to perform certain tasks. Collective maintenance of community forests, land and sacred groves, collective labour groups (Patang), collective decision making, collective hosting of festivals, maintaining community fence, conflict resolution, etc., all require collective effort.

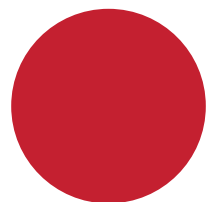
Today this attitude and practice of collective work has evolved into newer institutions as discussed in the previous sections. Monetary gifts or contributions are given collectively through fund groups or societies, or groups of friends and relatives. For example, if there is a wedding to be organised, or if there is an expensive medical treatment required - these groups collect money to help the members or persons in need. Since it is a close-knit society, the condition and struggles of a family are known

to their kin. I have also listed out the number of collective efforts put in by community members through their own collectives for common services such as road construction, repairing of schools, cleaning of rivers, conservation work, money free election, etc., without the help of, or rather in the absence of help, from NGOs, or government bodies.

Such formalised, collectivised, and shared giving reduces the burden on an individual giver and makes it less awkward or dehumanising for the receiver.

Motives of Giving: Aafke E. Komter in his book on social giving of gifts lists six psychological motives of giving - positive feeling, insecurity, power and prestige, reciprocity, equality, and hostility, hate, contempt.¹⁹ His own formulation is based on the models given by Susan Fiske and even Marcel Mauss.²⁰ However, in almost all these models of motives, one is missing out the more social and human aspect of the desire to give. What is more important to understand in this 'desire to give' is its other constitutive factors such as the compassion and the care for another fellow person. Also, there is a shared empathy generated out of a shared experience of struggles and vulnerabilities to unpredictable situations.

Giving, not out of surplus: One of the striking observations during the study was the near absence of terms or concepts of philanthropy in the community. At the outset, all the respondents felt that there is nothing like philanthropic giving in tribal society - that 'no one gives for free'²¹ or no one gives a 'gift'. It is upon further discussions that they would explain that those items or resources that are given are given because of tradition - the tradition to look after the well-being of your kin; one is entitled to such giving. There is always an expectation to give and to receive, and to return the favor. The giving always takes place as giving to a person - not to a society, even when there are contributions made as a collective for the benefit of self - as a member of that collective. Bringing in another layer of discussion, some respondents felt that it is not possible for any philanthropic giving to take place in Apatani society because people do not have enough to 'give away'. The traditional giving is not out of surplus but from the saving for subsistence. One is constantly aware that one might be in a similar situation, or it might be their turn next to need similar help and support. Therefore, this giving is a communitarian sharing of resources that circulates across to build a social security net for times of need without building dependency or creating impoverishment.



¹⁹ Komter, Aafke E. 2005. *Social Solidarity and the Gift*.

²⁰ A phrase that was constantly expressed by many respondents.

²¹ A phrase that was constantly expressed by many respondents.

6 Concluding Discussions on Giving in Apatani Society

To understand the nature of giving in Apatani society, one has to understand the unique kinship relations, and customs and conventions which regulate the resource sharing and resource flow in the society. This giving is so enmeshed with conventions, customs, and kinship relation that it is not identified as a gift, but as a tradition itself and an entitlement of care and support that is shared and reciprocated. At the core, the main motive behind this giving is the care for the welfare and well-being of fellow kin. One is giving out of their subsistence-based resource pool and not from surplus. These traditions of giving and sharing, and circulation of resources worked as the safety net for the community. In other words, this is an alternative model to the existence and requirement of philanthropic giving in society. Here, in Apatani society, it is a system which has for long preserved the community from falling into absolute impoverishment or vulnerability. One is not only receiving and benefitting from collective resources, but also giving in collectivised form; thus, the giving never becomes burdensome for anyone.

However, like most societies, the Apatanis are also witnessing tremendous changes and transformation in their way of life which has affected their traditional practices and at the same time opened up newer opportunities. New governance systems and welfare policies targeted at poverty alleviation and economic empowerment, coming of new religion bringing different attitudes towards giving, introduction of NGOs, increased usage of money as the main currency for exchange and increasing economic gaps within the community are some of the changes that have affected giving. Further, there is a growing number of non-locals and non-tribal population in Ziro, who are competing for resources and employment opportunities. Necessities are growing - medical and educational expenses, having a pucca house, need for electricity and supply of drinking water, and material aspirations for mobile, vehicle, televisions, etc. The educated younger generation is moving out to other places for higher education and for jobs. People are moving away from an agriculture-based economy or a subsistence-based economy to a commercial and capitalist economy. As a result, there are increasing stress factors and there is a growing dependency on government funded welfare activities and subsidies. Many respondents felt that people have become more and more individualistic.

The communitarian and collectivised efforts are continuing and even evolving as people have found innovative ways to address these issues. Similarly, the apex organisations such as AWAZ and AYA are trying to bring in some checks and balances into the society which is going through a lot of upheaval. Organisations like village committees are working towards collective work for village development. These are new ways in which the community members are trying to get a hold of their lives and finding ways to self-help and stay self-reliant.

This study is an early attempt at understanding the communitarian society and different forms of giving that take place in a tribal society. The giving and sharing in Apatani society traditionally took place within the community and was mediated only through the kinship lines. Today, the scope of giving has expanded - there are newer actors such as the government departments and different non-government organisations; community members have started giving for causes that are not restricted only to within the community but across the state and the country. For now, the takeaway from this initial study would be that Apatanis have the background of traditions and customs of com-

munitarian living that taught them how to collectively share responsibilities and benefit from them. They have the traditional mechanisms of kinships and other relations that secure the channels for sharing and reciprocating. These materials and rituals are only reflections or symbols of the much deeper inherent virtues of sharing and caring; these may or may not be framed as philanthropic giving or gift giving, but as an alternative unique model. This paper is an attempt to open up the discourse and invite further studies and discussions on the forms of giving in a tribal or indigenous society, which for the longest time has been understood from the framework set by Marcel Mauss.

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