

BARTER TRADE PRACTICE IN INDO-TIBET BORDER: A CASE STUDY OF DAMIN, ARUNACHAL PRADESH

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The practice of barter trade has been part of the culture of *Nyishi* tribal community of *Damin* area in the State of Arunachal Pradesh (India) since very early times. Initially, *Nyishis* of *Damin* started barter trade in the Indo-Tibet border, to meet the need for rock salt. Today, their primary objective is to acquire Tibetan ornaments, which are regarded as traditional ornaments of the *Nyishi* community and are of significant cultural value. Moreover, the barter trade has contributed to bettering the economic lives of the people. It has also potential for formal cross-border trade, if the government takes the initiative and provides for proper infrastructure. The present paper highlights the history of informal cross-border trade, its current scenario, and the impact of barter trade among the traders in the study area.

Keywords: barter trade, cross-border trade, *Damin*, *Nyishi*, Tibetan ornaments

Border trade or informal cross-border trade in general, across land or sea, refers to the flow of goods and services across the international borders between jurisdictions. In this sense, it can be part of normal legal trade that flows through standard export/import frameworks of nations. Where border trade is done for tax evasion or trading of illegal goods, it is informal and forms part of the underground economy of both jurisdictions (Mohamadian & Abdel, 2015). As per the meaning assigned to informal cross-border trade by Mohamadian and Abdel, the barter trade falls under the purview of such trade. The barter system for exchange of goods and services dates back to many centuries. In most cultures, barter system was used before the monetary transaction system was created. People who had specific items or services to

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sell would exchange them with others for the things they needed. As the currency system was invented, the tradition of barter system lost its glory (Sudzina, 2011).

Arunachal Pradesh is a land-locked state and is strategically located with the Tibetan region within the Chinese territory in the north, the Royal Kingdom of Bhutan on the west, and Myanmar to its east. The southern part of the state runs into the plains of Assam, an Indian state. It has a long international boundary with Bhutan to the west (160 km), China to the northeast (1,080 km) and Myanmar to the east (440 km), with a total international border area stretching 1,680 km. Arunachal is abundant in natural and cultural resources. This provides an ample opportunity for development of cross-border trade in the state. Arunachal Pradesh has taken up some ambitious projects for re-opening border trade with the neighboring countries such as Bhutan, Myanmar, and China (Bhattacharjee, 2000). In the past, the people of the state residing in the border areas maintained trade relations with the neighboring countries in traditional and unregulated manner. People inhabiting the border areas with Bhutan and Myanmar continue to maintain unregulated trade relation until this day, though trade relation with China was discontinued after the Sino-Indian conflict of 1962 (Abo, 2014). Interestingly, barter trade across Indo-Tibet border is still in function. The Kurung Kumey district of Arunachal Pradesh borders with Tibet and people residing in this district under the Damin circle are engaged in barter trade with their Tibetan neighbors. Barter trade has been an important source of their socio-economic lives.

Need for the Study and its Objectives

During ancient times, due to the non-existence of the system of monetary transaction, barter of one's personal goods with others for the goods lacked or desired was the transactional system of choice. Such system still continues in various parts of the world. Livestock was often used as a unit of exchange around 9,000-6,000 BCE. Later, as agriculture developed, people used crops for barter (Tyler, 2010). The exact origin of barter is not known, but it is believed to have been practiced from the earliest times in various parts of Ethiopia (Tadele, 2000), and was known there as *Limac*, an Amharic term for barter, referring to the process of transaction in which objects were exchanged without the use of paper currency. Sudzina (2012) describes it as

a process in which goods or services are directly exchanged for other goods and/or services without a common unit of exchange (without the use of money). Barter means the direct exchange of goods or services without money changing hands. The contents of this basic definition are widely accepted within anthropologic and economic literature (Williams, 1996).

Riddi (2002) highlights the history of *Kbore* (trade activities) of Tagin tribe of Arunachal Pradesh. Prior to 1950, all the essential items were imported from Tibet, either by direct contact between the Tagins and the Tibetans or through the Ramos (another tribe) of West Siang district as intermediaries. Large part of the Tibetan goods, mainly textile, salt, and weapons such as swords, reached the villages of Kamla Valley through the Tagin middlemen of Sinik valley. The Tagins living in Tibetan border had advantages for monopolizing trade with Tibet. Shoren (2002) provides a retrospective survey of trade relations that existed between the *Nyishi* hills and plains of Assam and Tibet and China mainland. Since early times, the Nyishis developed trade relations with the people of Tibet. There were a number of trade routes to Tibet and China mainland through Arunachal Pradesh. According to tradition, trade with the neighboring areas of Assam was carried on through annual fairs and some small markets along the foothills of the northern bank of the river Brahmaputra. In the absence of a monetized economy in this part of the region, the whole system of trade and commerce in the olden days was based on barter.

Much research has been done on the history and the prospects of cross-border trade in Arunachal Pradesh. However, no much research has been undertaken on the barter trade in Kurung Kumey district (Shoren, 2002). It has been observed that people residing in the trans-border of Tibet are still maintaining trade relations especially with two villages, namely, Sarli and Huri of Kurung Kumey. A study was conducted on cross-border trade issues, such as the prospective border trade routes, level of infrastructural development in the trading region, and the items of import and export along the border of Royal kingdom of Bhutan, China, and Myanmar. However, it failed to cover the Indo-Tibet border of Kurung Kumey district. It is also reported that the barter trade stopped after the Indo-China war in the year 1962 (Abo, 2014). However, Riddi (2002) has drawn the conclusion that there are still some Tibetan items for which Indian markets have not find substitutes and hence, are being bartered, such as *maji* [Tibetan bell], *koji* [Tibetan bangle], *riokse*

[Tibetan sword], and *tassang* [beads]. Given such contradictory views, it is necessary to do further research on the barter system in the area mentioned. The present study was an attempt to find out if the barter trade was still active in Indo-Tibet border, and if active, its present mode of functioning and the effects.

Hence, the objectives of the study were as follows:

1. To explore and document the history of barter trade and its current scenario at Damin.
2. To assess the implication and effect of barter trade in the region.

Method

In this study, traders from Damin under Kurung Kumey district, who were engaged in cross-border barter trade with the people of Tibet, were the target population. Damin was chosen for the study as the people of that area were known to have engaged in barter trade with Tibet since ancient times. Convenience and judgmental sampling techniques were used to select the sample that consisted of 25 traders as well as four key informants. The method of choice was face-to-face interview aided by a semi-structured schedule. Key insights were also gleaned via informal discussions with the trading community. The semi-structured schedule covered topics such as the demographic details of the barter traders, their socio-economic status, history and present status of barter trade, implications and effects of barter trade on the society. Some secondary data were also collected to verify and substantiate the findings. The sources for the secondary data were articles, governmental reports, theses, dissertations, and official websites of various organizations.

Profile of the Study Area

Damin is a 'circle' under Kurung Kumey district and is situated in the western part of Arunachal Pradesh. It has a total population of 5,755 and is one of the least populous circles in the district. Of these, 2,850 are males and 2,905 are females. Ninety-seven percent of the population is tribal, whereas three percent is classified under general category. The literacy rate of Damin is only 24 percent. There are 1,044 households in the circle, spread across 53 villages, with Damin village as the headquarters of the circle and

has the highest population of 660 people. Damin village has more than 200 households (Census, 2011). Surrounded by snow-capped mountains, Damin is situated in the extreme northern part of Kurung Kumey district and is bordered by Tibet. The area is inhabited by the *Nyishi* tribe. The people of Damin are hospitable and friendly. They are simple and hardworking, and depend on the agriculture and forest resources available in the area for their livelihood.



Figure 1. The Map of Kurung Kumey district. (source: www.mapsofindia.com)

The inhabitants of Damin face a tough life, as the area is cut off from the rest of the state. It is one of the remotest villages in the state. It has poor infrastructure. Connectivity by road with the rest of the state is still a distant dream. They have to walk for more than six hours to reach Hugu point, from where there is road connectivity to the outside world. They still have to carry goods on head to move across places. The cost of living is high due to the difficulties in procuring and transporting from outside the necessary items for living. Often, they are dependent on helicopter service by the government for receiving their supply of (“ration”) food materials. Such debilitating conditions have made their lives tough and challenging. The people are economically backward, though they have rich forest resources. In such context, barter trade serves as a lifeline for their livelihood.

History of Barter Trade in Damin

There has been a trade relation between the *Nyishis* and people of Assam and Tibet from the earliest times. The trade relations and the goods exchanged were determined by age-old customs and traditions. *Nyishis* constitute the major tribal population in the state. The *Nyishis* living along the southern slope of the Himalayas were economically dependent upon Assam and those living around the international frontier had trade relations with Tibet and China (Shoren, 2002).

The *Nyishis* of Damin had been trading with Tibet since ancient times. Many trade routes along the China border were stopped after the Indo-China war of 1962, but the people living near the trans-border in Kurung Kumey district are still maintaining barter trade with Tibet province of China. There are no formal records regarding the actual date when the trading started between the regions or as to the volume of export and import. The researcher was totally dependent on the oral reports of the elders of Damin, about the early history of trade with Tibet. There was a trade center called *Nyam-Neyapa* (Tibet) or *Migyitun* close to the Indo-Tibetan border. People enjoyed a peaceful and open trade with the Tibetans until the war of 1962. Initially, people started barter trade in the Tibet border in search of rock salt. In those times, people living in this part of India were not formally recognized by the Indian government and hence, they were deprived of various essential goods, salt being one of them. So people from different parts of Kurung Kumey district especially of Damin area, used to travel to Tibet border for obtaining rock salt. Over the years, mutual demand has grown in terms of variety and quantity of items. Tibet remains cold almost throughout the year. Hence, the Tibetans need raw materials for making warm clothes, shoes, and caps. They also require raw materials for preparing baskets and a plant called *tamin* (dye) used for coloring baskets and other materials (Field Study, 2018). Thus, *Nyishis* started exporting animal hides and skins, cane sticks, and *tamin*. In exchange, they sought rock salt, woolen clothes, brass vessels, Tibetan bells, swords and plates, beads and cymbals which are of cultural importance among *Nyishis*.

The traders of Damin travel to Tibet province of China three times a year, between the months of June and October. Rest of the year, it is not possible to travel due to the extreme weather conditions and heavy snow fall. Earlier,

very few people used to travel as few were aware of the trading opportunities across the border, but now a days, more than 50 traders travel to the border every year. They are not allowed to carry cameras or electronic items such as mobile phones, or else they will be suspected to be Indian spies. Such restrictions are also due to the Chinese claims of certain regions of Arunachal Pradesh as part of China. The Chinese government has ensured that there is road connectivity up to the border on the China side, and has provided their citizens with good housing, free education to children, pension for senior citizens, and job opportunities for the young. The informants of the study shared that the living situations in the Tibetan side were no different from those of Indians in the past; however, today they are far more developed than the Indians in Damin, who are still waiting for governmental initiatives to better their situation. This has created a sense of insecurity among the people of Damin and has made them feel isolated from the rest of India.

Present Status of Barter Trade in Damin

Traders gather the articles for trading in advance, as they have to brave inclement weather and a difficult terrain, and from distant places as well as via hunting. It takes them roughly two to three months for preparation. Travelling to the border has always been a challenging experience for the traders, as they have to pass through rugged forest areas and climb across rocky paths and snowy mountains. It takes them around a week to reach the border. They usually spend nights in caves or in camps made out of banana leaves, which they carry with them for the purpose. They carry along with them food for their journey. The food includes cooked and uncooked rice, meat, and other local spices. They also carry along with them bamboo cut into small pieces for the purpose of cooking. All these add up to the luggage they need to carry on their shoulders, which often discourage many from the barter trade across the border. Yet, due to some developmental works, though slow and incremental, has made the journey to the border far easier than earlier times. The traders are now able to carry with them lighter and processed food items such as bread, biscuits, and other packed food, as well as carry lighter camping materials such as plastic. Today, the experienced traders reach the border in less than one week. These days, there is a greater interest among the young to engage in border trade.

Once they reach the border, they need to cross over and enter Tibet. Generally, there is no issues crossing over to the other side of the border.

Krigsang is the first Tibetan village near the border. As they reach the border, the *Nyisbi* traders send notice to their Tibetan counterparts, who would pick them up. If the traders are unable to contact them, they catch a bus or a taxi and go to their hosts. The Tibetan villages where the trading takes place are Nyire and Hupa. People of these villages are friendly and respectful towards their trading guests and provide them with free board and lodge. The Tibetan traders are fair in dealings and exchange process. The barter of items depends on the quality of the items and the demand for them by either party. If any items remain brought over from Damin are left untraded initially, the Indian traders seek to reach out to more households around to have them bartered for whatever items they require.

Table 1. The Age and Gender Distribution of the Indian Traders

Age group	Gender		Percentage (by age group)
	Male	Female	
20-30	2	1	12
31-40	3	1	16
41-50	4	6	40
51-60	3		12
61-70+	5		20
<i>Total</i>	<i>68%</i>	<i>32%</i>	<i>100%</i>

Source: *Field Study*

Table 1 provides the age-wise and gender-wise numbers of traders who engaged in cross-border barter trade in the year 2018. The age span of the traders has a wide range of 50 years, though 40% of them, understandably, fall within the 41-50 age groups. Yet, it is surprising that around 20% of the traders are slightly aged, being in the age-group of 61-70. The presence of elders facilitates a continuity and cordiality of relationship with the Tibetans. As one would expect from the grueling demands of the travel to and from the border, there is a predominance of men in the trading group (2:1 male: female ratio). However, it is to be noted that women also share the trade work that precedes the travel, in terms of gathering and preparation of goods for barter.

Major Items of Barter

Though the cross-border barter trade was suspended due to the Indo-China War of 1962, within a few years, it was revived and it continues unabated until today. Both countries are blessed with abundant natural resources, which have kept the mutual barter interests going over the years. In the earlier years, the barter covered only a few items such as dry bamboo shoot, *tamin*, animal hides, and dry chilies (Shoren, 2002). However, today the situation has changed and there are a variety of items traded with the Tibetans. Table 2 provides the list of items and the ranking in terms of their demand and volume. The Figure 2 provides a visual clue to the number of traders engaged in offering each item.

Table 2. Items for Barter by the *Nyishis* of Damin

Items Bartered Out	Ranking	Items Bartered Out	Ranking
Green chilly & Ginger	1	Animal paws (preferably of bear and deer)	7
Crabs	2	<i>Kastoori</i> (Deer musk pod)	8
Knives	3	Spices & silver ornaments	9
Animal hides and skins	4	<i>Tamin</i> (plant used for dyeing)	10
Cane	5	<i>Mithun</i> (<i>Bos frontalis</i>) horn	11
Animal <i>Pi</i> (Bile) preferably of bear	6	Handicraft items	12

Source: Field Study

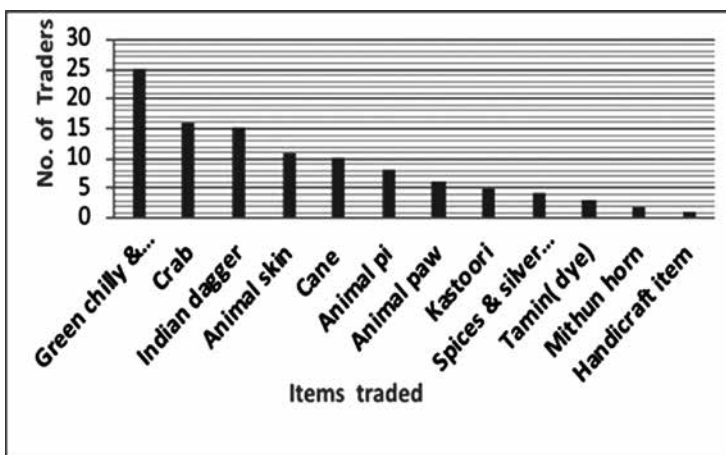


Figure 2. Comparative numbers of *Nyishi* traders involved in the barter of items specified (Source: Field Study)

As is evident, the ranking of the items is determined by the demand for a given item by the Tibetans. They generally sought items for household consumption as well as for further commercial purposes among themselves. Nearly 100 percent of the traders offered green chili and ginger, closely followed in the list crabs and Indian daggers. Handicraft item is of the least demand. Besides the above items listed, there was also demand for other kinds of knives and locally made sheathes for daggers.

Table 3. Items Procured by the Nyishis of Damin from the Tibetans

Items Bartered In	Rank	Items Bartered In	Rank
<i>Kari</i> (Tibetan Dꞑi beads) ལྷོ་ <i>Tallu</i> (Bell crash cymbal)	1	Clothes and ghee	6
<i>Nyimechapchup</i> (ornament) ལྷོ་ <i>Dangse</i> (small cymbal)	2	<i>Hughi</i> (cymbal), <i>Rillum</i> (ornament) & Medicine	7
Tibetan sword & Tibetan bell	3	Chinese blanket and Thermo-flask	8
Corn flour & other eatables	4	Tea leaves and Burma shoes	9
Pearls	5	-	-

Source: Field Study

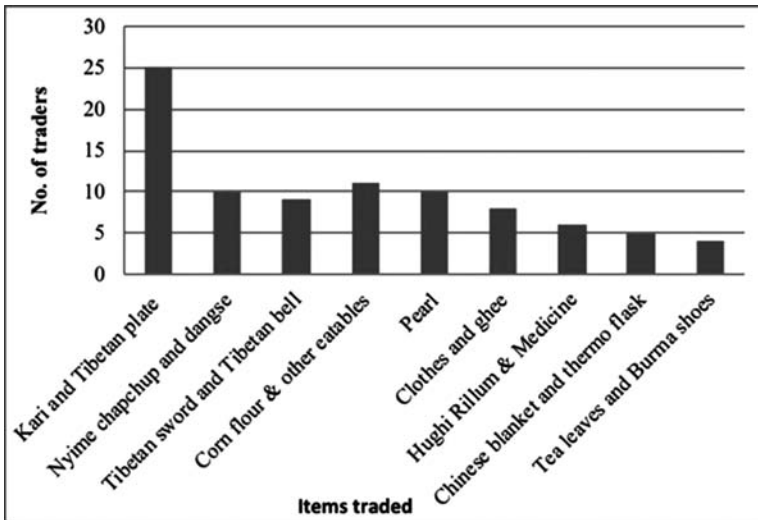


Figure 3. Comparative numbers of Nyishi traders who sought to obtain a given item (Source: Field study)

Table 3 and Figure 3 show the various items that are being traded from Tibet. As per table, Tibetan Dzi beads and bell crash cymbals are the items mostly traded as they are easy to exchange. They are closely followed by demand for *chapchup* and *dangse*. The eatable items are the least traded ones as the economic status of Damin people is better off these days and they do not have much difficulty in acquiring food items for their family. Their main objective of the barter is to acquire ornamental items. Although the *Nyishis* have developed their own bells, cymbals, and bangles, Tibetan bell (*Maji*), Tibetan cymbals (*Bellang* and *dangse*), and Tibetan bangles (*keoji*) are still valued highly by the people of Damin.

System of Valuing the Barter Goods

Though the essential system of exchange of items between the traders has not changed drastically, the change in demand for more and newer items has brought in changes in the volume and values of specific items traded. Earlier, *maji* (Tibetan bell) was largely imported to Damin, as an index of a person's wealth was measured in terms of the number of *maji*'s he or she possessed. *Maji* was generally for bear or deer skins. *Pechang* (cooking vessel) was exchanged for tiger skin with tail and claws. One set of *hugbi* (small Tibetan cymbal) could be procured for one deer hide or one load of cane or of red dye called *tamin*. The most important of all the imported items was the *mbapp-aallii* (rock salt) found in plenty in Tibet, and which was exchanged for half a basket of *iyupp* (dry bamboo shoot) or dry chilies (Shoren, 2002).

At present, the change in demand for various items among both the group of traders can be seen in the table below. The demand for Indian dagger is very high at present across the border. Some other new demand includes *Kastoori* (deer musk pod), silver ornaments, horns of *mithun* (*Bos frontalis* or *gayal*), spices, etc. some of new demand in imported items are pearls, *chapchup* (ornament), and *kari* (Dzi beads).

Table 4. The Comparative Valuation of Barter Goods.

Sl. No.	Value of items exchanged between the Nyishis of Damin and the people of Tibet			
	Indian goods	Quantity (in nn)	Tibetan goods	Quantity (in nn)
1.	Indian dagger	1	Tibetan bell (<i>maji</i>)	1
		1	Small cymbal (<i>Hugbi/ dangse</i>)	5
		1	Large cymbal (<i>Bellang</i>)	2
		1	<i>Rillum</i> (ornament)	12
		1	Food items (corn flour, soybean, <i>churpi</i> (traditional cheese), ghee	-
		2	Bell crash cymbal (<i>tallu</i>)	1
2.	<i>Kastoori</i> (deer musk pod)	1 (good quality)	Tibetan sword (<i>Ryugre</i>)	1
		1 (low quality)	Bell crash cymbal (<i>tallu</i>)	2
3.	Sambar deer skin	1	Bell crash cymbal	1
		1	Tibetan bell	2
		1	Tongueless Tibetan bell (<i>Junghang</i>)	6
		1	<i>Nyime Chapchup</i> (ornament)	12
4.	Bear skin	1 (best quality)	Tibetan sword	1
		1 (normal good)	Bell crash cymbal	2
		1	Tibetan bell	3
5.	Bear <i>pii</i> (Bear bile)	3	Tibetan sword	1
			Bell crash cymbal	2
			Tibetan bell	3
6.	Bear paw	1	Bell crash cymbal	1
			Tibetan bell	2
7.	Crab	1 basket	Beads	10
8.	Cane	2	Tibetan bell	1
		4	Bell crash cymbal	1
9.	Mithun horn	1	Tibetan bell	1
		2	Bell crash cymbal	1
10.	Handicraft item	1	Tibetan Bangle	3
			Tibetan bell	1
			Large cymbal	2
11.	Spices	1 (bamboo)	Bangle, Dzi beads, Cymbal	-
12.	Silver ornaments	1	Pearl, Dzi beads & <i>dumping</i> (<i>Head gear</i>)	-

Source: Field study

The table above shows the system of valuing the imported and exported items among the traders. It shows the type and number of items that can be exchanged for the type and number of items from the trading partner. Altogether 13 exported items are shown which can be exchanged for Tibetan goods. Most of exchanged goods happen to be ornamental goods which are of great value to the Damin traders. The most expensive bartered good is *kastoori* (deer musk pod) and it is exchanged for Tibetan sword. Possession of this sword is regarded as a prestige symbol among the *Nyishi* community of the state. Indian dagger has the potential of highest number of exchanged items. Altogether 6 items can be exchanged for the dagger, such as Tibetan bell, *Hugbi/dangse*, *Bellang*, *Rillum*, Tibetan plate (*tallu*) and food items such as corn flour, soybean, traditional cheese, and ghee).

Table 5. Value of Tibetan goods in Arunachal Pradesh, in terms of Indian Currency.

Sl. No.	Tibetan Goods	Value in Indian Currency (Rupees)
1.	Tibetan bell	10,000- 1,20,000
2.	Small cymbal	500 – 2,000
3.	Large cymbal	700 – 3,000
4.	Rillum (ornament)	1,500 – 5,000
5.	Bell crash cymbal	15,000-1,50,000
6.	Tibetan sword	1,00,000- 6,00,000
7.	Tibetan Dzi beads	1,000-3,000
8.	Dumping (Head gear)	1,000 – 3,000
9.	Tongue less Tibetan bell	1,000-50,000

Source: Field Study

In Table 5 above, the values of Tibetan ornamental items are highlighted, in terms of current market value in Indian currency. Tibetan ornamental items are of high value in the state especially among the *Nyishi* community. The possession of these ornaments shows the prestige and status of an individual in the society. A person having a large number of these goods is regarded as very rich and is respected by all. People of Damin are known for holding large number and good quality traditional ornaments. Thus, their main objective

of barter trade is to get hold of these Tibetan ornamental items which have come to be known as the traditional ornaments of the *Nyishi* community. The *Nyishi*'s of Damin supply such traditional ornaments to the members of the *Nyishi* communities in other parts of the state. They also sell these ornaments to the various retailers of traditional ornaments in the state.

Implications and Effects of Barter Trade

It is important to identify the implications of any activity that influences the livelihood of the people. Barter trade has been an important part of the socio-economic life of the people of Damin. They have made barter trade a significant part of their lives and they believe that it will continue until they are prevented from going to the border. They are deprived of proper road connectivity, adequate medical facilities, good schooling, and other developmental givens of other parts of their own state and India at large. Few people are engaged in government jobs, the rest are engaged in agricultural activities, and barter trade has become the most significant commercial activity for them.

Socio-cultural Implications

The cross-border barter system has remarkably influenced the socio-cultural life of the people of Damin. As mentioned already, the possession of the ornamental goods imported from Tibet is a significant index of the social standing of a person and his family. They form the major items of exchange during marriage ceremony. The ornamental items are gifted to the groom and his family as bride-price in exchange of *Mithuns*, which the groom offers to the bride's family. The ornamental goods are also used for offering as gifts during cultural celebrations, as well as peace offerings to solve inter-family conflicts. During cultural festivals, the ornaments have decorative value; the womenfolk use them to adorn themselves as well. People feel happy and proud to showcase their ornamental items, thus encouraging the families to purchase more of them for display at such occasions. They also love and wear the Tibetan dress, which is locally known as *reja* along with hats and other items, during marriage ceremony, social functions, and cultural festivals.

Economic Implications

Barter trade has been embraced as a crucial commercial activity among the people of Damin. As the Tibetan ornamental goods are highly regarded by

the Nyishi tribe of the state, for many traders, engaging in such barter trade to procure such ornaments for sale in local and state markets is a definitive and steady source of income. The local and state politicians, high ranking officials, and societal leaders are eager to buy items of high ornamental esteem such as, Tibetan sword (*nyugre*), Bell crash cymbal (*tallu*), and *maji*. The traders also supply the ornaments to the women retailers of traditional ornaments in the state capital complex market, which is a hotspot for business.

Table 6. An estimate of profit from the sale of Tibetan ornamental goods bartered for Indian goods

Details of Indian goods		Details of Tibetan goods		Expected profit (inINR)
Indian goods	Rate of procurement (in INR)	Tibetan goods	Rate in AR market (minimum)	
Kastoori (Deer musk pod)	45,000	Tibetan sword	1,00,000	55,000
Bear hides	3,000	Tibetan plate	15,000	12,000
Bear bile (2nn)	30,000	Tibetan sword	1,00,000	70,000
Cane	500	Tibetan bell	10,000	9,500
Crab	500	Tibetan <i>Dzji beads</i> (10nn)	10,000	9,500
Indian dagger	700	Small cymbal (5nn)	10,000	9,300

Source: Field Study

Table 6 above shows the expected profit from the sale of Tibetan ornamental items in the Indian market, by comparing their prices with the expenses incurred on procuring local goods for bartering with the Tibetans. These prices refer to direct sales to the customers; when the items are sold to the retailers, understandably the rate of returns would be lower; however, still the traders are able to make significant profit. As is evident from the table, it shows that the *Tibetan sword* has the highest price tag in the Indian market.

Another economic outcome of the barter trade is the generation of income among the *Puroiks* under Damin. The *Puroiks* are the least developed group of people in the district, who were once slaves of the *Nyishis*, but today are independent and free of slavery. Their livelihood is dependent upon forest

resources and their earnings from labor work. Barter trade has also become a means of significant earnings for the *Puroiks* as well. The *Nyisbi* traders have often much material to carry on the way to the borders and hence, they hire the services of *Puroiks* on payment of wages as well as a share of ornaments as gifts. Given the many benefits, the people in general are averse to the proposal of converting barter trade into a formal cross-border trade, as they are afraid that they would lose their cultural and societal traditions of the *Nyisbi* way of life.

Negative Impact of Barter Trade

Barter trade is an important part of the socio-economic lives of the people of Damin. It has contributed significantly to their welfare. However, the system has also had a negative impact in the community. As shown in table 2, among the items bartered by the traders, there are items which are derived from wild animals such as bear and deer skins and hides, paws of bear and *kastoori*. Hunting animals for the sake of deriving the above goods has threatened wild life, on which the ecology of tribal life itself is highly dependent. Moreover, procurement and sale of these items are illegal activities, that has far reaching consequences. Given that there is high demand for such items, the prohibition has only encouraged smuggling under cover. Hence, the continuation of barter in such items may in the long run deplete the wild life resources as well as peace and harmony of the social fabric. It is up to the people and the civil authorities to find a viable solution to the needs of the people and the preservation of ecology.

Conclusion

The ambiguity about the continued prevalence of barter trade between people of Arunachal Pradesh across the border with Tibet (Abo, 2014) can be safely put to rest on the basis of this study. Though there was a disruption and temporary suspension of barter trade activities as a result of the Indo-China War of 1962, the present research has proved that the barter trade resumed shortly and continues to thrive, at least between the *Nyisbis* of Damin and their neighbors across Tibetan border. There are no formal records regarding the actual date the barter trade began nor of the volume and kind of export and import during the early times. Tradition points out that the initial reason for barter was the desperate need for rock salt by the *Nyisbis*. However, over the years and as of now, the barter involves a variety of goods, with

the Tibetan ornaments topping the list of priorities for the *Nyishi* traders. The ornaments traded from Tibet have significant cultural value among the *Nyishis* who use them as symbols of prestige, items of exchange at marriage customs, personal adornment, gift purposes, settling conflicts, and other socio-cultural purposes. They have also been a rich source of economic benefits as well. However, barter trade also has some negative implications, especially related to the hunting of animals for the procurement of wild life products. Prohibitive orders have led to illegal smuggling activities as well, threatening the social fabric of the society. Nevertheless, the residents of Damin believe that any stoppage of barter trade would lead to the loss of their cultural traditions.

The present study was exclusively focused on the barter trade with the Tibetan people, by the *Nyishi* tribals of Damin in the Kurung Kumey district of Arunachal Pradesh. Hence, the study has a highly circumscribed applicability and cannot be generalized to other areas and people engaged in barter with neighboring countries across the many borders of India. I hope further research will explore these areas and their implications for the socio-cultural-economic-political fabric of the people.

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