Customary Law And Indigenous Governance: A Historical Study Of The Adi Kebang Institution

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Abstract : The Kebang institution of the Adi tribe in Arunachal Pradesh represents one of the most enduring forms of indigenous governance in Northeast India. Rooted in oral tradition, clan-based deliberation, and ecological ethics, the Kebang functions as a customary assembly regulating social order, dispute resolution, land management, and ritual practice. This study examines the historical evolution, structural organization, and contemporary functioning of the Kebang within the broader framework of legal pluralism and indigenous jurisprudence. Employing a qualitative research design grounded in historical-institutional analysis and recent regional scholarship, the paper situates the Kebang within theoretical debates on restorative justice, oral jurisprudence, and decentralized governance. The findings demonstrate that the Kebang operates not as a residual cultural relic but as a dynamic and adaptive normative order coexisting alongside statutory legal institutions. Its restorative orientation, consensus-based decision-making, and integration of law with ritual and ecological responsibility challenge dominant state-centric models of governance. At the same time, processes of modernization, constitutional discourse, and socio-political transformation introduce new questions regarding gender inclusion, jurisdictional coordination, and institutional reform. The study argues that recognizing indigenous institutions such as the Kebang is essential for understanding India's plural legal landscape and for developing culturally responsive governance frameworks in frontier regions.

IndexTerms - Adi tribe, Kebang, customary law, indigenous governance, oral tradition, Arunachal Pradesh, Northeast India

1. Introduction

The Adi tribe of Arunachal Pradesh constitutes one of the principal indigenous communities inhabiting the foothills and river valleys of the Eastern Himalayas. Concentrated primarily in East Siang, Upper Siang, West Siang, and parts of Lower Dibang Valley, the Adis have historically maintained a distinctive socio-cultural identity shaped by ecological adaptation, clan-based organisation, and customary governance systems. Their social life is structured around community-centred institutions that regulate interpersonal relations, land tenure, ritual obligations, inheritance, and conflict resolution (Ayang, 2016).

Unlike societies where formal written legal systems emerged as early instruments of political organisation, Adi society developed through customary norms transmitted orally across generations. Oral traditions—comprising myths of origin, ritual narratives, genealogical accounts, and deliberative practices—have functioned not merely as cultural expressions but as normative mechanisms of social control. As Bagra (2014) observes, indigenous knowledge systems in Arunachal Pradesh operate through collective memory and lived practice rather than codified documentation. This oral mode of transmission has enabled the continuity of customary law despite the absence of written statutes for centuries.

At the institutional centre of Adi society stands the **Kebang**, the traditional village council that serves as the primary decision-making and dispute-resolution body. The Kebang is not simply an administrative assembly; it embodies the moral authority of the community. It deliberates on matters concerning land ownership, inheritance, marital disputes, theft, compensation claims, ritual violations, and inter-clan conflicts. Decisions are generally reached through consensus rather than adversarial procedures, reflecting a restorative model of justice (Mibang, 2000). Social equilibrium and communal harmony are prioritised over punitive sanctions or individualistic assertions of rights. Scholars have characterised the Kebang as a community-centred justice institution grounded in collective responsibility and indigenous epistemology (Tsering, 2009). Unlike formal courts operating through codified law and procedural technicalities, the Kebang emphasises reconciliation, restitution, and restoration of social balance. This distinctive orientation situates it within broader discussions of legal pluralism, where customary law coexists alongside state-administered legal systems.

Contemporary research conducted within Arunachal Pradesh further affirms the continued vitality of the Kebang. Datta-Roy (2022), in his ethnographic study of hunting practices among the Adis, documents how traditional village institutions regulate resource extraction and enforce ecological norms. The study demonstrates that governance authority remains embedded in customary assemblies composed of respected elders. Similarly, Datta-Roy, Sheth, and Leisz (2025) highlight that despite agricultural transitions in Upper Siang district, customary institutions such as the Kebang continue to mediate land-use decisions and communal disputes. From a narrative perspective, Scheid (2024) illustrates how Adi oral traditions depict the Kebang as a cosmologically sanctioned institution that restores moral and natural order. In these accounts, deliberation is not merely procedural but ritualised, reinforcing the inseparability of law, morality, and cosmology. Ramya, Charu, and Taboh (2025), examining funeral practices among the Adi tribe, reveal that life-cycle rituals remain regulated through customary norms recognised by Kebang authority, underscoring its embeddedness in everyday social life.

Historically, the Kebang must also be understood within the broader political evolution of Arunachal Pradesh. During the colonial period, British frontier administrators acknowledged indigenous institutions under indirect rule arrangements. Following the integration of the North-East Frontier Agency (NEFA) into the Indian Union, statutory courts, police administration, and codified legal frameworks were introduced. This produced a condition of institutional coexistence, where customary authority and formal state law began to interact within overlapping jurisdictions. In many rural areas, the Kebang continues to resolve disputes efficiently at the local level, often preventing escalation to formal courts. However, changing socio-economic conditions—including expansion of education, urbanisation, political decentralisation, and exposure to constitutional rights discourse—have influenced perceptions of customary institutions. Younger generations increasingly engage with both modern administrative systems and traditional councils, creating an ongoing negotiation between tradition and modernity. The significance of studying the Kebang extends beyond the Adi community. Customary councils across Northeast India—such as Naga village councils and Khasi dorbars—demonstrate the resilience of decentralised indigenous governance structures. In the Adi context, the Kebang represents not only a judicial institution but also a symbol of identity, autonomy, and collective memory. Its procedures reflect indigenous epistemology, where law is inseparable from ritual practice, morality, and ecological ethics.

At the same time, critical questions arise regarding its contemporary adaptability. Issues of gender representation, codification of customary norms, compatibility with constitutional safeguards, and interaction with formal judicial mechanisms require careful analysis. While the Kebang emphasises community harmony, it must continuously respond to the evolving complexities of modern governance.

Therefore, this study examines the historical evolution, structural organisation, and contemporary functioning of the Kebang institution among the Adis of Arunachal Pradesh. It seeks to analyse how customary law has been preserved, adapted, and transformed in response to socio-political change. Employing a mixed-method research design that combines qualitative historical analysis with quantitative survey data, the study evaluates community perceptions regarding legitimacy, effectiveness, and present-day relevance of the Kebang. By situating the Kebang within broader debates on indigenous governance and legal pluralism, this research contributes to scholarly understanding of customary law systems in Northeast India. More importantly, it argues that indigenous institutions such as the Kebang should not be viewed as relics of the past, but as dynamic and living governance systems that continue to shape social order, cultural identity, and collective responsibility in contemporary Arunachal Pradesh.

2. Review of Literature

The study of customary law and indigenous governance in Arunachal Pradesh has evolved from descriptive ethnography to analytically grounded discussions of legal pluralism, ecological governance, and narrative legitimacy. Early scholarship on the Adi tribe primarily documented social organisation, clan systems, and ritual structures (Ayang, 2016; Mibang, 2000). These works established foundational knowledge regarding the functioning of the Kebang as a village-level decision-making body rooted in consensus and communal morality. Bagra (2014) emphasized that indigenous knowledge systems in Arunachal Pradesh operate through oral transmission and collective memory rather than codified legal texts. This insight is critical for understanding the epistemological foundation of the Kebang. Customary norms are not fixed statutes but living principles negotiated through deliberation. Tsering (2009) conceptualized traditional councils in Arunachal Pradesh as community-centred justice institutions prioritizing social harmony over adversarial legalism. His analysis situates the Kebang within restorative justice traditions, where compensation and reconciliation are central.

More recent scholarship (2018–2025) shifts the focus toward the continued relevance and adaptability of indigenous institutions. Datta-Roy (2022), in his study of hunting patterns among the Adis, demonstrates that customary institutions regulate wildlife extraction and ecological ethics. His work confirms that governance authority remains embedded within traditional assemblies composed of elders. Datta-Roy, Sheth, and Leisz (2025) extend this argument by examining swidden agricultural transitions in Upper Siang district. They observe that despite socio-economic transformation, customary institutions such as the Kebang continue to mediate land-use decisions and communal disputes. Rather than collapsing under modernization, these institutions adapt to changing contexts. Scheid (2024) introduces a narrative dimension by analyzing Adi oral traditions. She argues that the Kebang derives legitimacy not merely from social consensus but from cosmological sanction. In Adi narratives, the assembly restores natural and moral order, linking governance to spiritual cosmology.

Ramya, Charu, and Taboh (2025) further demonstrate the institutional embeddedness of the Kebang in life-cycle rituals. Their research on funeral traditions reveals that customary norms governing ritual conduct are recognized and enforced through Kebang authority.

Collectively, the literature indicates three major trends:

1. The Kebang operates within an oral jurisprudential framework.
2. It functions as an ecological governance institution.
3. It persists within a plural legal order alongside state institutions.

However, despite increasing scholarly attention, there remains limited integrative analysis combining historical evolution, theoretical grounding, and contemporary empirical evaluation. This study seeks to address that gap.

3. Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored in four interrelated theoretical perspectives: Legal Pluralism, Restorative Justice Theory, Indigenous Ecological Governance, and Oral Jurisprudence. These frameworks collectively provide a multidimensional lens through which the Kebang institution can be examined not merely as a traditional council but as a complex normative order embedded within socio-cultural, ecological, and political realities of Arunachal Pradesh. Rather than applying theory externally, the present study uses these perspectives to interpret how the Kebang functions historically and contemporarily within a plural legal landscape.

3.1 Legal Pluralism

Legal pluralism recognizes the coexistence of multiple normative and juridical orders within a single political territory. In postcolonial contexts, particularly in frontier regions such as Arunachal Pradesh, state-administered legal systems often operate alongside deeply rooted customary institutions. These systems do not exist in isolation but interact, negotiate, and sometimes compete for legitimacy. In Arunachal Pradesh, customary law and statutory law function simultaneously. The Kebang operates as a non-state legal system deriving authority from tradition, clan consensus, and communal recognition rather than constitutional codification. Its legitimacy emerges from social embeddedness rather than bureaucratic enforcement.

Following the integration of the North-East Frontier Agency (NEFA) into the Indian Union, formal courts, administrative hierarchies, and codified procedures expanded across the region. However, contemporary research (Datta-Roy, 2022; Datta-Roy et al., 2025) demonstrates that customary institutions continue to regulate disputes and resource use at the village level. This coexistence illustrates normative pluralism, where indigenous and state systems interact without complete displacement.

Importantly, legal pluralism in the Adi context is not merely institutional duality but functional differentiation. While statutory courts handle criminal and complex legal matters, the Kebang remains central in civil

disputes, land conflicts, marital issues, and ritual violations. Thus, the Kebang represents a localized juridical sphere embedded within a broader national legal structure, negotiating boundaries while retaining autonomy. his framework enables the study to interpret the Kebang not as an informal adjunct to state law but as a parallel normative authority sustained through community legitimacy.

3.2 Restorative Justice Theory

Restorative justice theory emphasizes reconciliation, restitution, and relational repair over punitive sanction. Unlike retributive justice systems that prioritize punishment proportional to wrongdoing, restorative models aim to repair harm and restore social equilibrium. The Kebang's dispute-resolution mechanisms align closely with restorative principles. Rather than incarceration or coercive penalties, the institution relies on compensation in livestock, agricultural produce, ritual offerings, or negotiated settlement. Social harmony and communal cohesion are valued above individual vindication (Mibang, 2000; Tsering, 2009). Contemporary ethnographic observations (Ramya et al., 2025) reveal that ritual governance reinforces this restorative orientation. In cases involving ritual violations or inter-clan disputes, the resolution process includes symbolic acts of reconciliation, reaffirming communal bonds. Justice is therefore not abstract legality but relational restoration.

Furthermore, restorative justice within the Kebang is deeply collective. Responsibility extends beyond the individual offender to clan and kinship networks, reinforcing the communal nature of accountability. This collective dimension distinguishes indigenous restorative mechanisms from individualized Western models. Through this framework, the Kebang may be understood as an indigenous restorative justice institution embedded in collective ethics and social responsibility, rather than a simplified customary court.

3.3 Indigenous Ecological Governance

Indigenous ecological governance refers to systems where environmental regulation is embedded within customary norms and social institutions. Among the Adis, law is inseparable from ecological stewardship. Hunting restrictions, land-use cycles, swidden practices, and forest access are governed through customary assemblies. Recent scholarship (Datta-Roy, 2022; Singh et al., 2020) highlights that traditional institutions regulate resource extraction through culturally embedded norms. The Kebang functions as the deliberative forum where such regulations are discussed, enforced, and modified. This ecological dimension expands the understanding of the Kebang beyond judicial authority. It serves as a socio-ecological regulatory institution integrating environmental ethics with governance practices. In the Adi worldview, land is not merely property but ancestral inheritance and cosmological space. Decisions affecting land use therefore carry moral and ritual significance.

By applying the indigenous ecological governance framework, the study demonstrates that the Kebang performs sustainability functions long before the emergence of modern environmental law. Governance is thus holistic, encompassing legal, ritual, and ecological responsibilities within a unified normative order.

3.4 Oral Jurisprudence

Oral jurisprudence refers to legal systems where normative principles are transmitted through oral narratives, ritual chants, and collective memory rather than written statutes. In societies without codified legal texts, legitimacy arises from repetition, performance, and communal recognition. Scheid (2024) illustrates that Adi narratives portray Kebang deliberations as sacred acts restoring cosmic balance. In these narratives, the assembly is not merely administrative but morally and cosmologically sanctioned. Law is embedded within mythic frameworks and ancestral authority. The absence of written documentation does not indicate institutional weakness. Rather, oral transmission allows flexibility and contextual interpretation. Norms evolve through deliberation, yet continuity is preserved through ritualized storytelling.

This framework positions the Kebang within a legal epistemology where legitimacy emerges from storytelling, ritual authority, and shared memory. Law is performative and relational, not codified and impersonal.

Understanding the Kebang through oral jurisprudence challenges dominant legal paradigms that equate written codification with legitimacy.

Theoretical Synthesis

Taken together, these frameworks allow the Kebang to be interpreted as:

• A plural legal institution operating within overlapping jurisdictions

• A restorative justice mechanism prioritizing reconciliation over punishment

• An ecological governance system regulating environmental practices

• An orally transmitted jurisprudential order grounded in collective memory

This integrated theoretical approach moves beyond descriptive anthropology and situates the Kebang within broader debates on governance theory, socio-legal studies, and indigenous political thought. It enables a comprehensive understanding of the Kebang's historical continuity and contemporary adaptation, demonstrating that indigenous governance systems are neither static nor oppositional to modernity, but capable of negotiated transformation within plural legal landscapes.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research design grounded in historical-institutional analysis and interpretive socio-legal inquiry. Given that the Kebang operates as an oral, community-embedded, and customary governance institution, qualitative methodology is particularly appropriate for examining its structural organization, normative foundations, and contemporary transformations. Quantitative abstraction would inadequately capture the relational, ritual, and consensus-driven dimensions that define the institution. The research design is informed by interpretivist epistemology, which recognizes that social institutions derive meaning through lived practice, narrative transmission, and community recognition. Rather than treating the Kebang as a static legal mechanism, the study approaches it as a dynamic normative order embedded within social memory and ecological ethics.

The research integrates:

• Historical analysis of the evolution of Adi customary governance

• Interpretive review of ethnographic and regional scholarship

• Thematic examination of oral traditions and deliberative practices

• Analytical synthesis of recent (2018–2025) Arunachal-based research on indigenous governance

This layered design enables a contextual and historically grounded understanding of institutional continuity and adaptation.

4.2 Data Sources

i) Primary Sources

Primary insights are derived from informal community interactions and contextual understanding of Adi customary practices. These include:

• Informal discussions with members of the Adi community

• Interactions with village elders and youth representatives

• Observation-informed reflections on customary dispute resolution processes

These engagements provide contextual grounding, enabling interpretation of scholarly findings within lived community realities. The study does not claim statistical generalization but aims for interpretive depth and socio-cultural accuracy.

ii) Secondary Sources

The study relies extensively on secondary data drawn from:

• Scholarly works on Adi customary law and governance

• Ethnographic and socio-legal studies conducted in Arunachal Pradesh

• Recent research (2018–2025) addressing indigenous institutions in Northeast India

• Historical accounts of NEFA administration and post-independence legal integration

The triangulation of historical and contemporary scholarship ensures analytical reliability and theoretical coherence.

4.3 Analytical Method

Data were analyzed using thematic and interpretive analytical methods. The analysis focused on four principal dimensions:

1.   Institutional structure and authority patterns within the Kebang

2.   Normative foundations of customary law and moral regulation

3.   Interaction between customary governance and statutory legal systems

4.   Adaptation of the institution within modern socio-political contexts

The findings are interpreted through the theoretical frameworks of:
• Legal pluralism
• Restorative justice
• Indigenous ecological governance
• Oral jurisprudence

This interpretive approach enables a holistic understanding of the Kebang as a living governance system operating within layered normative realities. Rather than isolating legal function from cultural practice, the methodology recognizes law as embedded within social, ritual, and ecological structures.

5. Analysis and Discussion

5.1 Institutional Legitimacy and Normative Authority

The analysis reveals that the Kebang continues to derive legitimacy from collective recognition rather than formal state endorsement. Its authority is grounded in clan consensus, moral credibility of elders, and the continuity of oral tradition. The institution does not rely on coercive enforcement mechanisms; instead, compliance emerges from shared social obligations and communal accountability. From a legal pluralism perspective, the Kebang represents a parallel normative order functioning within overlapping jurisdictions. While statutory courts maintain formal supremacy in criminal matters, the Kebang retains jurisdictional relevance in civil disputes, land-related issues, marital conflicts, and ritual violations. This coexistence reflects negotiated pluralism rather than institutional subordination.

5.2 Restorative Justice Orientation

The Kebang's dispute resolution mechanisms embody a deeply restorative orientation grounded in communal ethics and relational accountability. Rather than emphasizing punitive sanctions or adversarial adjudication, the institution prioritizes compensation, reconciliation, and the restoration of disrupted social equilibrium. Justice within the Adi customary framework is not conceptualized as the imposition of retribution but as the rebalancing of relationships among individuals, clans, and the wider community. Disputes are typically resolved through negotiated settlements facilitated by elders, where symbolic restitution—often in the form of livestock, material compensation, or ritual reconciliation serves to repair social fractures. This process underscores a collective understanding of wrongdoing as a disturbance of communal harmony rather than solely an individual offense. Responsibility frequently extends beyond the individual actor to kinship networks, reinforcing the relational fabric of Adi society.

This restorative orientation sharply distinguishes the Kebang from adversarial judicial systems that prioritize procedural formalism and individual culpability. By cantering reconciliation over punishment, the Kebang sustains social cohesion and prevents long-term communal fragmentation. In this sense, it functions not merely as a dispute-settlement forum but as a moral institution safeguarding collective continuity. Its enduring relevance in community-cantered governance lies precisely in its capacity to maintain equilibrium within a closely interdependent social structure.

5.3 Ecological Governance Dimension

Beyond its judicial role, the Kebang performs significant socio-ecological regulatory functions. Customary norms governing land inheritance, forest access, hunting cycles, and swidden cultivation practices are deliberated and reinforced within Kebang assemblies. These norms are not external environmental policies imposed by administrative decree; rather, they are culturally internalized obligations embedded within the Adi worldview. The ecological dimension of the Kebang reflects a holistic governance model in which environmental stewardship is inseparable from moral responsibility. Land is regarded not merely as an economic asset but as ancestral heritage and cosmological space. Decisions concerning resource use therefore carry ethical and ritual implications that extend beyond immediate material concerns. This ecological embeddedness illustrates that indigenous institutions serve both judicial and sustainability functions. Regulation of resource extraction, maintenance of seasonal balance, and mediation of land disputes contribute to long-term environmental resilience. Through deliberative consensus, the Kebang ensures that ecological practices align with communal welfare, reinforcing the integration of governance and environmental ethics. The socio-ecological character of the Kebang challenges narrow definitions of governance that restrict institutions to legal adjudication. Instead, it exemplifies an integrative regulatory order where law, ecology, and social responsibility intersect.

5.4 Negotiating Modernity

The operational sphere of the Kebang has evolved in response to contemporary socio-political transformations. Expansion of formal education, increasing awareness of constitutional rights, administrative decentralization, and greater interaction with statutory institutions have reshaped community expectations regarding governance and justice. While the Kebang continues to address civil disputes, land conflicts, and intra-community matters effectively, more complex criminal cases increasingly fall within the jurisdiction of formal courts. This jurisdictional differentiation reflects negotiated adaptation rather than institutional erosion. The Kebang has not been displaced by state law; instead, it has recalibrated its functional scope within a plural legal environment.

The negotiation of modernity is characterized by selective continuity. Core principles—consensus-based deliberation, restorative justice, and moral legitimacy—remain intact, while procedural adjustments accommodate changing socio-legal realities. This adaptive resilience demonstrates that indigenous governance systems are capable of transformation without forfeiting foundational identity.

Rather than perceiving modernization as a linear process of institutional replacement, the Adi case illustrates dialogic coexistence between customary and statutory orders. The Kebang's endurance lies in its capacity to evolve within structural constraints while preserving communal authority.

5.5 Challenges and Reform Debates

Despite its continued relevance, the Kebang faces emerging challenges that invite critical reflection. Debates surrounding gender representation highlight concerns regarding the limited formal participation of women in deliberative processes. Although women exert influence through kinship networks and informal channels, greater inclusivity may be necessary to align customary governance with contemporary egalitarian expectations. Procedural transparency and documentation also present complex questions. While oral flexibility enables contextual adaptation, absence of written records may create ambiguity in inter-jurisdictional coordination with statutory institutions. Balancing oral tradition with administrative clarity remains a delicate issue.

Jurisdictional boundaries between customary and state legal systems require clearer articulation to prevent conflict or confusion. Furthermore, compatibility with constitutional safeguards—particularly in areas concerning equality and fundamental rights—demands careful negotiation.

These reform debates do not signal institutional decline. Rather, they reflect the evolving normative environment within which the Kebang operates. Institutional sustainability may depend on calibrated reform that strengthens inclusivity and clarity while preserving foundational customary principles., The Kebang's future viability thus rests not on rigid preservation but on adaptive reinterpretation. Its continued legitimacy will depend upon its ability to reconcile inherited traditions with emerging socio-legal expectations.

6. Conclusion (Refined for Qualitative Design)

This study has examined the Kebang institution of the Adi tribe as a historically rooted and dynamically adaptive system of indigenous governance in Arunachal Pradesh. Through qualitative analysis grounded in contemporary scholarship and foundational ethnographic insights, the research demonstrates that the Kebang is neither a symbolic remnant of pre-modern society nor a declining customary relic. Rather, it represents a living and evolving juridical order embedded in oral tradition, communal ethics, and ecological stewardship.

The findings affirm that the Kebang operates within a framework of legal pluralism, coexisting alongside statutory legal institutions while retaining localized authority and social legitimacy. Its restorative justice orientation—centered on reconciliation, compensation, and restoration of harmony—offers a substantive alternative to adversarial and punitive models of dispute resolution. In doing so, it challenges dominant assumptions that equate modernity with codification and bureaucratic legal formalism.

Beyond its judicial function, the Kebang embodies an indigenous epistemology in which law, morality, ritual practice, and ecological ethics are inseparable. Governance within the Adi context is not merely procedural but cosmological; authority is derived from collective memory and social recognition rather than statutory enforcement. This integrative model contributes to broader theoretical debates on oral jurisprudence, decentralised justice, and community-based governance systems.

At the same time, the study acknowledges that the Kebang operates within an evolving socio-political landscape. Processes of modernization, constitutional rights discourse, educational expansion, and political decentralization are reshaping expectations of governance. Questions of gender inclusion, procedural transparency, and jurisdictional compatibility require careful negotiation if the institution is to maintain long-term legitimacy. The future of the Kebang therefore lies not in rigid preservation but in adaptive continuity.

From a wider academic perspective, this research contributes to scholarship on indigenous governance in three significant ways. First, it provides a regionally grounded case study that strengthens understanding of

customary law systems in Northeast India. Second, it demonstrates how restorative and community-centered justice mechanisms remain functionally relevant in contemporary settings. Third, it highlights the necessity of recognizing indigenous institutions as dynamic governance systems rather than static cultural artifacts. For policymakers and legal scholars, the study suggests that meaningful engagement with customary institutions is essential for inclusive governance in culturally diverse regions. Rather than imposing uniform legal frameworks, governance models must acknowledge the legitimacy and practical effectiveness of indigenous deliberative systems such as the Kebang.

In conclusion, the Adi Kebang exemplifies the resilience of indigenous governance in the Eastern Himalayan frontier. Its continued operation underscores that customary law remains a powerful regulatory force in shaping social order, ecological responsibility, and collective identity. Recognizing and critically engaging with such institutions is not merely an anthropological exercise; it is central to understanding the plural legal and political realities of contemporary India.

7. Implications and Future Research

7.1 Theoretical Implications

This study advances theoretical discussions on indigenous governance by demonstrating that customary institutions such as the Kebang function as dynamic and adaptive legal systems rather than static cultural relics. By situating the Kebang within frameworks of legal pluralism, restorative justice, and oral jurisprudence, the research challenges linear assumptions that modern state law inevitably replaces indigenous systems. The findings suggest that legal pluralism in Northeast India is not merely a transitional phenomenon but a stable structural condition. Customary and statutory legal systems coexist through negotiated boundaries rather than hierarchical absorption. This has broader implications for understanding governance in culturally diverse and frontier regions where centralized state authority interacts with deeply rooted local institutions. Additionally, the study contributes to restorative justice scholarship by providing a non-Western example of reconciliation-based dispute resolution embedded in indigenous epistemology. The Kebang illustrates that restorative principles are not contemporary innovations but historically grounded practices within many tribal societies.

7.2 Policy Implications

The research highlights the need for policy frameworks that recognize and engage with customary institutions in culturally plural contexts. In regions like Arunachal Pradesh, governance strategies that ignore indigenous deliberative systems risk weakening local legitimacy and community trust.

Rather than attempting codification that may rigidify flexible oral systems, policymakers should consider:

- Strengthening consultative linkages between statutory courts and customary councils
- Providing institutional support without undermining autonomy
- Encouraging inclusive participation, particularly gender representation
- Establishing clearer jurisdictional coordination mechanisms

Recognizing the Kebang as a functional governance partner rather than an informal parallel structure may enhance decentralized justice delivery in rural areas.

7.3 Socio-Legal Implications

The continued functioning of the Kebang demonstrates that justice in indigenous societies is relational rather than individualistic. Law is embedded within social obligations, ritual practices, and ecological ethics. This challenges dominant legal paradigms that prioritize procedural formalism over community harmony. The study therefore calls for broader socio-legal scholarship that moves beyond codified frameworks to engage with lived legal cultures. Indigenous institutions such as the Kebang provide valuable insights into alternative conceptions of justice, accountability, and authority.

7.4 Limitations of the Study

While the study provides a comprehensive qualitative analysis, it is limited by its interpretive methodological design. The absence of large-scale quantitative data restricts statistical generalization across all Adi-inhabited districts. Additionally, intra-district variations in Kebang functioning may require deeper micro-level ethnographic investigation. Furthermore, issues such as gender participation and youth perspectives warrant more focused empirical research to understand emerging generational shifts.

7.5 Directions for Future Research

Future research may explore several critical areas:

i. **Gender and Customary Reform**

Detailed investigation into women's participation in Kebang decision-making and potential models for inclusive reform.

ii. **Codification Debates**

Examination of whether partial documentation of customary law strengthens or weakens institutional flexibility.

iii. **Comparative Tribal Governance**

Comparative studies between Adi Kebang, Naga village councils, and Khasi dorbars to understand regional patterns of indigenous legal pluralism.

iv. **Youth Perception Studies**

Empirical research assessing how younger generations perceive customary institutions in relation to constitutional rights discourse.

v. **Customary Law and Constitutional Compatibility**

Analytical studies on the interface between tribal autonomy and constitutional safeguards in Arunachal Pradesh.

vi. **Digital Transformation and Indigenous Governance**

Exploration of how modernization, communication technology, and administrative reforms influence traditional deliberative systems.

The Kebang stands at the intersection of tradition and transformation. Its continued relevance suggests that indigenous governance systems are not incompatible with modern democratic frameworks but require dialogic engagement rather than institutional displacement. Future scholarship must therefore move beyond documenting customary practices to theorizing indigenous governance as a vital component of India's plural legal landscape.

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