

Categorization of Types of Death in Adi Tribe of Arunachal Pradesh

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ABSTRACT: The word Adi is a generic name of a large number of ethnic communities which included the Padam, Minyongs, Komkars, Milangs, Panggi, Ashing, Karko, Shimong, Bori-Bokar and Pasi. It is one of the major ethnic groups among the 26 major ethnic groups in the state of Arunachal Pradesh, India and occupy the central zone of the state which is a home of 110 sub tribes and there are said to be about 26 major ethnic groups in the state. In Adi, death means Sinam. The separation of soul and body is considered as death of a person. But according to western concept of death in clinical term, death means unlive. The death is like a thing that direct opposite of life. Phenomenologically, death is nonbeing. The essential nature of life entails activity, purpose, and making order from disorder. Death is the antithesis of life. Nonlife is inactive, and despite its stillness, death is chaos. Life generates its own meaning. In contrast, on its face death appears devoid of meaning and value. This paper deals with the types of death, rites and rituals associated with the Adi tribe of Arunachal Pradesh.

KEYWORD: Arunachal Pradesh, Adi, Sinam, Taleng/Nyipong, Urom, Uyu.

Introduction:

The word Adi is a generic name of a large number of ethnic communities which included the Padam, Minyongs, Komkars, Milangs, Panggi, Ashing, Karko, Shimong, Bori and Pasi. It is one of the major ethnic groups among the 26 major ethnic groups in the state of Arunachal Pradesh and occupy the central zone of the state which is a home of 110 sub tribes and there are said to be about 26 major ethnic groups in the state. In Adi, death means *Sinam*. The separation of soul and body is considered as death of a person. But according to western concept of death in clinical term, death means unlive. The death is like a thing that direct opposite of life. Phenomenologically, death is nonbeing. The essential nature of life entails activity, purpose, and making order from disorder. Death is the antithesis of life. Nonlife is inactive, and despite its stillness, death is chaos. Life generates its own meaning. In contrast, on its face death appears devoid of meaning and value.”

In the context of Adi, unnatural death is called *Taleng/Nyipong* and natural death is *Urom*. Those who died according to *Runa Pina* (creator) are called natural death. They believed that *Runa Pina* gives natural death to each and every one while creating them but due to interference of malevolent spirit they became victim of unnatural death. The malevolent spirits are very much in need of human soul as it is believed that unlike human domesticate the animals, malevolent spirits also domesticate

human soul. For such purpose they captured the soul in a various way. Thus, the deaths of a person caused by malevolent spirit are regarded as unnatural death. But According to the western concept of unnatural death definition, unnatural deaths are deaths due to accidental, suicidal, homicidal or undetermined. Accident applies when an injury or poisoning causes death and there is little or no evidence that the injury or poisoning occurred with intent to harm or cause death. Suicide results from an injury or poisoning as a result of an intentional, self-inflicted act committed to do self-harm or cause death of one's self. Homicide means taking of the life of one person by another by any mean. Undetermined deaths are a term used when information pointing to one manner of death is no more compelling than one or more other competing manners of death.

In Adi, there are three types of death, *Uyu*, *Taleng/Nyipong* and *Ori*. If the cause of death is due to the old age or suffering of long illness are called *Uyu* but cause of death is due to *germang* (accident), *petnam* (murder), *petsunam* (suicide) are called *Taleng* and if the mother dies while childbirth is called *Nyipong* which is believed to be the victim of malevolent spirit *Nyiji Nyipong* (female spirit). Those souls who die in an accident, kill by animals, snake, suicide, murdered etc. are believed to ascend to *Taleng Among* (place beyond the blue). Their souls are believed to be tortured by malevolent spirits *Lesi Letang*. The *Nyiji Nyipong Urom* is believed to be the ghost of women who dies during pregnant. These female spirits can create a trouble during the time of delivery and sometime hunt pregnant women. Sometime this spirit hunt man also by possessing them. Such death is considered as the *Nyipong/Taleng* (Unnatural death). The *Ori* is also regarded as unnatural death which means stillbirth. They use the term *Nyipong* for the unnatural death of women and *Taleng* for men.

The benevolent spirits of the Adi are the *Epom* (Jungle Spirit) who is believed to be residing at the *Rotne* (name of a tree) which looks like Banyan tree. The stem of the *Rotne* is covered with the root of another species of tree. It is said the *Epom* used to kidnap human by choosing. For them there is a particular person to kidnap which is still unknown about the purpose of kidnaping. Therefore, the Adi consider *Epom* as a human hunter. This spirit reacts if anyone make extreme noise in the forest by slapping on the face which can cause spot death and may die when reach at home. Such incident happens very rare in different Adi inhabitant area which is popularly known as *Epom Pinam*. But certain remedies are suggested against such eventualities cases. When such an incident occurs in the village, the person's maternal uncle can only rescue the victim from fatal result. It is believed that *Epom* is very wary of the maternal uncle. To be rescued from the situation, it is the duty of the maternal uncle to cut the *Rotne* trees with the help of villagers until the *Epom* gives back the hijack person. The Soul Priest through an act of divinity would precisely direct the people towards a particular *Rotne* tree which has to be cut down. Sometime those who don't have maternal uncle are killed by the *Epom*. When the person has been killed by the *Epom*, this incident is called *Teyong* which is regarded as unnatural death in Adi.

The *Nyipong*, spirit is considered as very adamant and it is said that once they possess body, never leave until take the soul. They can create disturbances at childbirth and also cause abundant and nonstop menses to the girls. A remedy is suggested in case of difficult in delivery and if the presence of a disturbing *Uyu* is suspected, armed men surround the house, hold up their weapons while shouting and strike the walls with ferociousness. In the same way, when fire strikes in Adi villages, armed men climb on to the roofs and brandish their swords to stop the blaze. The villages themselves are defended by a magic enclosure; each entering path is barred by an imposing gate, equipped with bows and arrows, and on which carcasses of pigs and dogs hang. And the shaman (priest), first intercessor with the invisible forces, never officiates without his sword and dagger hanging on his

belt. In this way Adi resist such spirit. But those who became victims of *Nyipong* are called *Nyipong pe Sikai* which is regarded as unnatural death in the society.

The *Uyu* attack man in various ways. According to their nature, they strike with disease, weapons, create accidents, prevent the birth of children, suck blood, seize "souls", or possess people in flesh and bone. At least they represent economic competitors, depriving men of their means of subsistence, in particular by monopolizing game. Another characteristic of the spirits, quite revealing, is that they use various tricks to entrap men, thanks to their capacity to take all kind of animal and human forms. The Adi believed that *Uyu* is the main responsible for the accident and they are the responsible for the rising of vehicle accident in present day-to-day life. The malevolent spirit *Banji Banmang* (blood thirsty spirit) attack them in another way like fall down from trees or any high place. Whenever the person became the victims of *Banji Banmang* then it is also regarded as the unnatural death.

According to Biomedical perception the work of B.R Sharma, *Unnatural Deaths In Northern India A Profile*, reveal that the other means of unnatural deaths include hanging, drowning, jumping from height etc., for suicidal purposes. This is so because methods used by individuals bent on self-destruction depend upon the availability of the lethal instruments. But in the context of indigenous tribal specially in Adi, the hanging, drowning, jumping from high, etc for suicidal purpose are believed to be done by spirit. Behind the suicide, there is a hand of *Lesi Letang* spirit. Therefore, they blame the *Lesi Letang* spirit for suicide case. They believed that this spirit encouraged the soul and force physically to do such activities for suicide. They also believed that this spirit chose that particular person who is always misery, troubled etc. for the suicide. Such kind of death is regarded as unnatural death among them.

The Adi believed that sometime people fall down in water which is cause by the spirit *Biri Biak* (water Spirit). But every people are not the victim of *Biri Biak*. Some of the people fall down into the water by own mistake. But they can easily recognize the victim of *Biri Biak*, because the death body possesses an axe sign on forehead which indicates the act of *Biri Biak*. Such kind of death is also known as *Taleng*. *Dimu Taya* is the spirit of the mountain. Sometime they used to go for *Apta* (hunting), collecting *Emo* (aconite) and *Ramang* (stick) etc. during the time *Dimu Taya* spirit move the head backward and kill by pushing the neck. Many people used to die in such cases which is also regarded as unnatural death.

In Adi villages, sometime the soul of the dead person *Urom* (ghost) possess to a person that cause trouble and death which is called *Urom pe sikai*. In such case many people became victim of *Urom*. It is believed that the *Urom* sometime take the soul of a person. This is the one of important characteristic of unnatural death. Likewise, many people also die of *Gamsi*. *Gamsi* means when any one affectionately thinking and remembering. The *Gamsi* is generally done by the soul of the ancestor. Many people die of *Gamsi*, even though there are certain remedies. Those who dies of *Gamsi* is also regarded as unnatural death. *Ori* is also an unnatural death. *Ori* means stillborn and it is believed to be caused by the *Nyiji Pojik* (female spirit). They believe that *Nyiji Pojik* also require baby that is why they kill the baby during the time of birth and take the soul. Sometime baby because of immature, defects die in a womb of the mother. In such case also the Adi blame the *Nyiji Poyik*.

When the person dies of unnatural death, in such case the dead body is not allowed to be brought inside the home. The corpse of unnatural death is kept in the *Tunggu Guton* (outside the home). Even the dead body is not allowed to be kept for one day. Within one or two hours the corpse must be disposed off. The unnatural burial system is very much different to that of natural death. When *Taleng* death occurs in a village, first of all, the corpse is brought back to village and kept outside of the house for the family to see. After being seen, the corpse by the family, the corpse has to be

disposed as soon as possible. When the *Nyipong* occurs in a village, the corpse of the *Nyipong* also buried as soon as possible. The *Nyipong* too are not kept inside the house. When the person dies of *Nyipong*, the corpse is kept at *Tunggu Guton* for one hour to two hour and then the corpse is buried. There is a separate place of burial for both *Nyipong* and *Taleng* (unnatural death. Both are buried far from the village). Their graveyard is called *Nyipong/Taleng Yupom*. In case of *Ori*, the corpse of the baby is kept under the gourd and within one hour the corpse of the baby is disposed. In such case, there is no burial system. After keeping the corpse inside the gourd, it is hanged on the tree.

Conclusion:

In tribal society, it has been observed that traditions and culture are one of the main factors which bind the society together in order to maintain the social solidarity. It has been found two major factors why the traditions should be maintained by Adi. At the first place, it helps them in keeping their societal bond strong and maintains social solidarity. When a person converted into other religion like Christianity, he or she tends to leave behind his or her traditions and customs as it is the principle of Christianity to leave behind his or her past life after converting into Christianity. In such cases, they breach the social solidarity and create a gap and distance among their own society. So, one should clearly understand what exactly 'tradition and culture' is and should know how to maintain it parallel to their religion irrespective of whatever their religion is. As B. Madhok has rightly stated; 'culture is not in religion but in society'. Secondly, tradition is important to be maintained in their society as it acts as their identity amidst the world.

Their belief and the way they categorize death, funerary and burial system as per the category of death, their mortuary system, and things put with the corpse, the taboos and sacrifices that follow the death etc. all are unique in its place. Hence, They are privileged with unique and valuable traditions as their identity which are hard to find in this 21st century and it would be a responsible on each and every individual of their society to value and maintain their tradition. Thus, it has been seen that the Adi has enormous mythologies regarding the origin of things like death, beads and ornaments, deities, sacrifices etc. Since there are no written records, there are a very less possibilities of all these myths to be true.

In the three types of death in Adi, *Uyu*, *Urom* and *Ori*, the funerary rites are also different. The rituals are done according to the death of the person. If a person died of natural death, then the rites and rituals would be performed accordingly with natural manner but in case of unnatural death and rites and rituals will be performed in a very unnatural manner.

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