

Religious History of Arunachal Pradesh



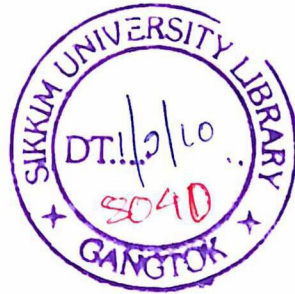
Editors

Dr. B. Tripathy ■ Prof. S. Dutta

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RELIGIOUS HISTORY OF ARUNACHAL PRADESH



Editor

Dr. B. Tripathy and Prof. S. Dutta



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Religious History of Arunchal Pradesh

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Preface

The book has grown out of a National Seminar on the “Religious History of Arunachal Pradesh”, organized jointly by ICSSR, Shillong and Department of history, Rajiv Gandhi University, Itanagar on 5th October, 2005. A number of eminent scholars and researchers from different disciplines participated in the Seminar and presented their valuable papers. As many as twenty seven papers were presented, which dealt with tribal religion, Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism, as well as Brahmanical remains in the foothills area.

For the sake of convenient, clarity and depth, the volume has been divided into three parts: (i) Tribal Religion (ii) Buddhism (iii) Pan-Indian Culture. The part first deals with various aspects of indigenous religion prevalent among various tribes of Arunachal Pradesh, with reference to spirits and deities, sacred performances, sacred specialists, tribal festivals etc. Part Second discusses some aspects of Mahayana and Theravada Buddhism, which are noticed among few tribes of the State. It includes five papers, dealing with history of Theravada Buddhism, Mahayana Buddhism, Bon Cult, etc. The Pan-Indian religious Culture, reflected from a few archaeological remains in the foothills of the state, is discussed in four articles, dealing with Brahmanical remains in the form of temples, sculptural art, myths and legends, impact of Neo-Vaishnavism on some tribes of Arunachal Pradesh.

The work, perhaps, is the first to document the religious culture of the people of Arunachal Pradesh. The book, it is hoped, will prove useful for scholars as well as general public interested in the subject. The work is of regional as well as national importance

as it throws light on the little known aspect of religious culture of Arunachal Pradesh in particular and of India in general.

The volume would not have been possible without the support and co-operation from various persons, quarter and institutions. The editors are grateful to the ICSSR, Regional Office, Shillong and UGC (SAP) DRS-I Department of History, Rajiv Gandhi University for providing financial assistance for the Seminar. Prof. Atul Sharma, Vice-Chancellor, Arunachal University (now Rajiv Gandhi Central University) gave academic advice and material support in organizing the Seminar. We are thankful to him. We are extremely thankful to Prof. Tamo Mibang, Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Rajiv Gandhi University for his learned Key Note Address and his keen interest in the Seminar. The learned contributors have spared their valuable time and precious researches, which have gone into the making of this volume. Thanks also go to our colleagues in the Department of history for their cooperation in organizing the Seminar. Our thank goes to Mr. Balaram Saha who typed the manuscript within a short period.

Place: Itanagar
Date: 16.10.2007

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1

Key Note Address

Tamo Mibang

Esteemed Chairman, Director of the Seminar, distinguished participants and ladies and gentlemen.

It is my pleasure that on the programme, it has been stated that I would deliver a Key-Note Address to the Seminar. After hearing the whole spectrum of the religious history from the Director of the Seminar, I feel that there is hardly any more to add in my keynote address. At the same time, I may say that the key and the note to the Seminar are with the learned participants who are present here to make their presentations on various aspects of religious history of Arunachal Pradesh.

I would like to begin with a story of Lord Buddha. Lord Buddha was one who went from place to place preaching his sermon with dedication. There was a man, purportedly from the people who wanted that Buddha should be denigrated and believed in mudslinging. He abused Buddha, but Buddha did not respond to it and went further. Then the man went to another square, caught hold of Lord Buddha there, he gave him, more vulgar abuses and still Lord Buddha did not respond and went further. Finally, he thought that Lord Buddha must be taught a lesson. With chosen words, he tried to abuse Lord Buddha; and still Lord Buddha smiled at him and blessed him and said 'my dear child why are you doing all this'? He found that Lord Buddha was not perturbed at all, and

he fell at his feet and said, 'I am sorry; someone had asked me to do this work for denigrating your personality and I am sorry I did not do it on my own'. Then Buddha said, 'nothing wrong has happened. If you give me a mango fruit and I don't take it; what will happen'. The man said, 'it would remain with me'. Then Buddha said, 'same is with abuses and mudslinging. You are trying to offer those to me, I am not accepting them. They remain with you', and Lord Buddha marched ahead with his pilgrimage, with his mission, and established a new Dharma on this earth.

Therefore, whenever good things take place or when change is brought about in society, there are bound to be critics, mudslinging and character assassination. But these are to be ignored and we continue with our good work which is beneficial to the society. This is an important lesson of religious history.

The religious history of any society is found to be interesting and challenging as religion is deep-rooted in culture. As a matter of fact, it is not so easy for one to do justice on the wide range of religious history of the people of Arunachal Pradesh within a limited time.

Every society has beliefs, faiths and practices. The rites and rituals vary from culture to culture. But everywhere they relate to supernatural powers. So religion is defined as any set of attitudes, beliefs and practices pertaining to supernatural powers, whether that be forces, gods, spirits, ghosts or demons. Religion has been a universal experience of mankind. Archaeologists claim that they have found signs of religious beliefs and practices associated with homosapiens who lived at least 60,000 years ago. People then buried their dead and many graves contain the remains of food, tools and other objects that were probably thought to be needed in an after life. (Bhagabati, p.2). Personnel belongings such as cloth, pots and other trophies were also found in the graveyard. Such pre-historic grave sites have been excavated in many parts of the world.

Herodotus (484-425 BC) of Greece had travelled widely and recorded the life style of some fifty different people or societies. He found similarities among their Gods and pointed out evidence of diffusion of religious worship. He also formulated the idea that all people are ethno-centric that is they consider their own way of life superior to all others, and they judge other life-styles in terms of the norms and values of their own. (Whiten and Hunter, p.4).

After the fall of Rome in the 5th Century A.D., it was not until renaissance emerged in the fifteen century, that European scholars began to re-discover the treasure of classical learning and also started to investigate the natural environment and human societies on their own terms. (ibid).

Sir Edward Tylor, one of the earliest anthropologists, was more concerned with culture. He defined culture all inclusively as "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, moral custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man a member of society". With this, he proposed a theory of the origin of religion. This is called animism that is belief in the existence of a free, psychic and invisible soul in men, animals and trees, and even in inanimate objects and natural phenomena. Whatever its origins and purposes, whatever its beliefs and rituals, religion serves to satisfy psychological and social needs common to all people.

Animism is the belief in the existence of living soul power in all being, objects sand natural phenomena- and animatisms, that is belief in the existence of impersonal force, in and around human habitats are the bases of nature worship widely prevalent among the tribal societies. In Arunachal nature in its varied manifestation is the object of inspiration, reverence, often of awe and fear, worship and supplication. People belonging to central zone of the state have evolved their own faith based on Donyi-Polo-the Sun and Moon. However, these celestial object are not the object of worship but these are the symbols of divine and creative supreme power. The rites and rituals are almost found to be similar. Rites, rituals, incantations, prayers, sacrifices and offerings hold true in the religious life of the most of the communities of the state. It is not so easy to prepare an ethnography of religions of the various group of the state.

The people celebrate festivals such as Solung, Mopin, Dree, Si-Donyi, Boori-Boot, Nyokum, etc. to ensure good health, prosperity, peace and happiness. Indigenous faiths sustained by customary sanction and rituals provide the required moral and mental strength to copy with the trials, and tribulations of life. Various types of dance such as ritual dance, ceremonial dance, war dance of many of the non-Buddhist group, pantomimes and dance-drama of the Monpas and Sherdukpens are associated with their religious life. The myths of the Adis, Tagins, Wanchos and Noctes

explain the origin of the war dance. The myths of the Sherdukpens tells how the Ajilamu pantomime was created to facilitate the construction of a bridge over a river linking two village. A Monpa legend tell how the monastic dances of the Monpas was first performed to facilitate the construction of a monastery. An Adi legend tells how Tani, the first human started to perform war dance to get rid of evil spirits.

It is difficult to trace the evolution of faith in God, but it is interesting to explore how our forefathers had developed the concept of God. They might have developed a feeling of the presence of a potent power in their surrounding; at the same time a sense of fear and security for which they submitted themselves to that unseen power. Thus they had developed rituals to bring themselves close to God; to propitiate the omnipresent, the mysteries of the universe beyond the grasp of their control. That is the first experimental science of mankind with his surrounding. It was proved to be working to appease the unseen power and thus the beginning of the rites and rituals. To carry on the experiment gifted one was born in the society. That is the beginning of the religious functionaries; the priests, who has become the physician in his own right. He sings, dances, and performs rituals to divine the cause of a disease. He falls in trance, travels to the land of the spirits to establish commutation through invoking hymns. He is considered to be a person with supernatural powers. When the invoking song is in full swing, the patient on the bed enjoys the melody and it jerks the psyche of the patient, which treat him psychologically.

All the tribes have their own priests to conduct religious ceremonies. Among the Adis, the Nyishis, the Tagins, the Wanchos, the Mishmis, etc. there are certain gradation of priests whose assignments differ according to rank and position. Among the Wanchos, the *gampa* or *gipa* or *rami* is regarded as principal priest. Next to him, is the *aupa* or *opa*, a village diviner. Then follows the *ngopa*, a household diviner and then the *rampa*, who performs the obsequies. The last is *aje*, a medicine man, who is also capable to falling into a trance. Among the Tangsa, he is called *Tingwa* in Moang, *dingwa* in Lungri and *yogli*, *changnate* in Ronrang and *thatang* in Khemsing. Among the Adis he is called *Miri*, the Nyishis, the Tagins, the Galos and the Hill Miris call him as *nyibu*. The Singphos call a village priest *dumsa*.

The characteristic feature of tribal religion is the observance of the divination before embarking on any important task. For instance, selecting site for construction of a house, setting out on long journey for business transaction, community hunting and fishing, sowing in the field, organizing festival, performing religious rites, etc. are examined through chicken liver, eggs or pebbles. However, different tribes apply various methods.

Donyi-Polo is the common nomenclature of the Adis, the Nyishis, the Galos, the Tagins, the Hillmiris, the Sulungs, the Apatanis and the Mishings of Assam, who usually call themselves as Tani (human being) and also claim Abo Tani or Donyi Nibo, the legendary figure as their common ancestor. The Mishmis call Donyi-Polo as Nanyi-Intiya and the Tangsas, as Rangfrah with same faith and practices. All their practices revolve round it. As per their belief, the almighty God is being represented by Donyi, the Sun and the Polo, the Moon, the two separate entities is called as Donyi Polo faith. His two physical representations illuminate the earth.

The Tani people have, now, started the Donyi-Polo Movement to uphold their age-old faith and practices. There is no denying the fact that with the advance of time and influence of social factors, there are instances of belief system undergoing changes-Hinduism to Buddhism, Hinduism to Islam, indigenous faith to Christianity and so on by way of conversion. The process of conversion of the innocent tribal people has become very active in Arunachal during seventies of the twentieth century. That awakened the people to preserve and promote own cultural heritage. The people took up the problem of conversion of innocent people at various forum. At this juncture, it may not be out of context to recall a line of Chicago address of Swami Vivekananda, who said, 'Christians must always be ready for good criticism, and I hardly think that you will mind if, I make a little criticism. You Christians, who are do fond of sending out missionaries to save the soul of the heathen-Why so you not try to save their bodies from starvation? In India, during the terrible famines, thousands died from hunger, yet you Christians did nothing. You erect Churches all through India but the crying evil in the East is not religion-they have religion enough but it is bread that the suffering millions of burning India cry out for with parched throats. They ask us for bread, but we give them stones. It is an insult to a starving people to offer them religion; it is an insult to a starving man to teach him metaphysics.

The State Government of Arunachal Pradesh has finally enacted a bill in the Legislative Assembly which has come to be known as Arunachal Pradesh Freedom of Religion Act, 1978. As per the Act, "Indigenous Faith" means such religious-beliefs and practices, abstinence, customs as have been found sanctioned, approved, performed by the indigenous communities of Arunachal Pradesh from the time these communities have been known and includes Buddhism as prevalent among the Monpas, Membas, Sherdukpens, Khambas, Khamtis and Singphos, Vaishnavism as practised by Noctes, Akas and Nature worships including of Donyi-Polo as prevalent among other indigenous communities of Arunachal Pradesh.

The main objective of this Bill is to prohibit conversion from one religious faith to another by use of provocative forces or by fraudulent means and various other matters connected therewith. The Government of Arunachal Pradesh may make rules for the purpose of carrying out the provision of this act. This Act created a hue and cry in some states of North-East India. However, it received the assent of the President of India on 25th October, 1978.

It is under this backdrop, probably, under the patronage of some local intellectuals, the Donyi Polo Mission was set up at Itangar in 1979 in order to ensure the preservation, consolidation and upliftment of the traditional culture, moral values and indigenous faith and thereby promoting the traditional simplicity, unity and solidarity of the people of Arunachal Pradesh, and also to popularize the cult of Donyi-polo among the tribal people for evolving an acceptable religion of their own. Two representatives – Mr. R.K. Patir, then Secretary, Donyi-Polo Mission, Itanagar and Talom Rukbo, Secretary Adi cultural and Literacy Society, Pasight, represented Arunachal to International Association for the Religious Freedom (IARF) at Delhi in 1985 and registered the Donyi-Polo faith of the people of Arunachal with that world. Religious body; impressed the international community about the deep-rooted cultural heritage. Rukbo spearheaded the Donyi Polo movement. His mission has been to protect and promote Arunachal's cultural and religious intently. He sacrificed his time and efforts. The first Donyi Polo Day was celebrated at Solung ground, Pasighat on 31st December 1993. Since then, the people observed 31st December as Donyi-Polo Day.

After the day long programme at Solung Ground, in the same night, he had a dream, that Bapi, the lofty mountain north of Pasighat collapsed and the whole northern zone became clearly visible to him, as if there was no hills, but plains, only plains and a clear horizon. He was terrified. What has happened? He woke up from his deep slumber and found himself within the four walls of his bedroom. In the next morning he told his friends about his dream, whether he himself would die or some great men were to die.

As a layman, I said, “nothing is going to happen as apprehend. You are going to succeed in your mission”. Dream plays an important role in the socio-religious life of the Adis. Dreams deal with a whole range of problems in the most fascinating and mysterious way. In this context, it is interesting to note that Egyptians also believed in dreams. In ancient Egypt, a sick or a disturbed person would sleep in the temple after swallowing a potion to foster dreaming. In the morning, the temple priest would interpret the dream and administer the cure prescribed by it. Later, the Greeks too began to focus on dreams and the problems of healing and used dreams for diagnosis and cure of chronic physical complaints. So dreams are symbolic messages, which arise from the knowledge hidden in the centre of being; a forecast of things to come. Rukbo’s dream turned out to be a good omen. He could institutionalise the faith in Donyi-Polo as a religion. He systematized the mode of worship and prayer in Adi speaking areas of East Siang, Upper Siang and a part of West Siang District, Dibang Valley and some part of Mishing dominated areas of Assam. In the process, Ganggings have been constructed in many Adi villages, where the people worship Donyi-Polo every Saturday.

The Rang-Frah movement of the Tangsas also focuses on the preservation and promotion of their traditional faith and practices and thereby to promote a value-based society. And also to resist the current inroad of alien religion into their social fabric.

Buddhism, founded about 2500 years ago by Siddhartha, who attained enlightenment at Bodhgaya, has entered Arunachal Pradesh from the North during 7th century AD. The people called Bonpas, accepted this religion and adapted it with their own religion, which later on became an admixture of animism. Monpas, Sherdukpens, Membas, Khambas, Meyors are belong to this

Mahayana sect of Buddhism. To some extent Mijis, Akas and Nahs are also influenced by Buddhism due to contiguity of their habitat with the Buddhist group. The Tawang Monastery in Arunachal Pradesh and the Stok Monastery in Leh are towering testimonies for the legacy of knowledge.

The Monpas believe in the Gelukpa sect of the Mahayana division of the Tibetan Lamaist form of Buddhism. Prior to the advent of Buddhism in the area, they believed in the traditional religion of Bon, which was also the belief pattern in Tibet in those days. The Pangchepa though a sub-group of the Monpas is the only community that do not follow the Gelukpa sect but are the believers of Nyingmapasect. Bhutanes of the neighbouring Bhutan are also the followers of Nyingmapa and may be the pangchepa on being fascinated by the Bhutanese became the followers of Nyingmapa. There is no chronological events of growth of Buddsim among the Monpas but it can be tacitly summed up that they were converted to Nyingmapa Buddhism during 8th century A.D. (Sarkar, p. 14).

The conversion of the Monpas to Buddhism was probably started by Padmasambhava in the eight century and the Nyingmapa had a good followers and established three Nyingmapa temples of ugyeling, Sangling and Tsorgeling. However, with the establishment of Tawang Monastery in the seventeenth century, the Gelukpa sect established its supremacy over the Nyingmapa Buddhism. Before the Tawang Monastery, there were Nyingmapa of red sect. (Nanda, p. 68).

Buddhism gained firm ground in the Monpa area with the establishment of Tawang Monastery in 1680-81. This was the period, when a centralized polity was emerging in Tibet under the political religious network of Gaden, Sera, and Deprung monasteries with the absorption of the elements of feudal hierarchy and uniting the area under the complex of whatever was sacred. Gelukpa sect established the traditions of Buddhism and reformed Bonpaim prevalent in the area and also for the networking of the Tawang Monastery with the people. Lamas were appointed for sacred centers and services in the villages, food were provided from the monastery. One boy preferably middle one from every household was recruited for studies and initiation as Monk. For sustenance of the Monastery and its sacred centres, people were required to pay Kharai or tax regularly. The Tawang Monastery produced religious specialists to maintain religious faith. (Dreama, p. 70).

This way, Tawang Monastery emerged as a Seat of sacred complex. At the same time, still Bon religion has survived with some rituals as many elements of this religion has been absorbed in the Buddhism professed by the Monpas. Continuity of the rituals in the festivals of the people in some areas indicates the process of assimilation of two different religious faiths. There are women who possess the power of practising black magic which is in no way fall within the purview of Buddhism. One more instance can be mentioned. That is the practice of disposal of the dead. The Panchenpas, as per their custom, cut a dead body into 108 pieces and throw into the stream. It is done by a male member (Dhar, p. 80)

Khamtis, Singphos and Tikhaks are Buddhists belonging to Hinayana sect, who follow the abstract principles of Buddhism. The Khamti who speak a language of Chinese-Seamese family, had began to migrate from their original land Bor Khamti to Assam from 8th century A.D. gradually pushing the Chutias and occupied territories on the Lohit and Dibang. "The source of its inspiration can be traced to South India. In the 5th Century A.D., Indian missionaries from the eastern coast brought Theravada to Burma. Later in the 8th century, the Khamti and the Singphos brought it back to India. Thus the present formation of Buddhism in Arunachal is a result of varying historical circumstances" (Raikar, p. 103). The Khamtis maintained close relation with the Buddhist monasteries of Burma in earlier days.

Buddhism is characterized by its concern with Kammatic goals as nibbana and rebirth. Secondly the Nibbanic and Kammatic Buddhism differ in their interpretations but both agree that meditation, morality and giving comprises the instruments of nibbana. Thirdly, they believe that none of these instruments involves the aid of a supernatural being but nibbana is achieved only by unaided effort of the religious devotee. The Khamtis believe in the existence of one who is supreme and powerful; he is lord Buddha. They believe in the attainment of Nirvana (Salvation) of human soul by following the eight fold noble path (Astashila). They are religious and influenced by the Buddhist ethics and morality. They offer prayer at least twice a day. (Baruah, p. 97) A Bhikkhu, Buddhist monk is a man of great importance in the society. He controls socio-religious life of the people. Equally, women enjoys a better position in religious sphere.

As regard to Singphos, it is said that a monk named Dingla Chrato was the first to introduce Buddhism among the Singphos about a century ago. The monk who is said to have come from the Hukawang valley of Burma visited Buddhagaya and built the Buddhist monastery at Phakial village near Margherita. The Singphos call the temple Samuksing where they go on pilgrimage. The Singphos have however, not given up their old Shamanistic beliefs even though they are Buddhists. They believe in a host of spirits called nats, who are malevolent and responsible for causing miseries to human beings. There are quite a good number of such nats, who are worshipped on a number of occasions and regularly propitiated with sacrifices of bulls, cows and chickens (Gazetteer, p. 53).

The Noctes believe in the existence of a supreme being whom they variously call Jauban, Jongban or tesong. He causes miseries as well as bring happiness and prosperity to human beings. They also believe in a number of benevolent and malevolent spirits. They believe that after death, the soul called *mang* or *ja khang*, returns to *ulim* or *balim*, a place in the sky. It may take the shape of a kite and appear in the day when the dead body is disposed of. So sometimes, when such an object is seen flying over the house, the relatives of the dead pour water on the ground for the departed soul. In early days they used to dispose off corpses on platforms which was also prevalent among certain American Indians (ibid).

The Noctes came under the influence of Hinduism through Vaishnava movement in Assam. They are Vaishnava devotees of the Chaliha Bareghar Sitra on Nazira in the Sibsagar District of Assam. Under the influence of the Bili Satra near Naharkatiya, Vaishnavism was carried to the Nocte area by the Naga Narutham about 250 years ago when the Ahoms ruled in the Assam valley. Naga Narutham was the name given to Lotha Khunbao, a Nocte chief. The first converts to Vaishnavism were the Namsangia and Borduria Noctes. According to the Vaishnavite tenets, the Noctes do not take beef and they cut their hair in the Satriya fashion. A Good number of Nocte pilgrims visit the Satra in Sibsagar where they offer salt and get some ceremonial costumes in exchange (Gazetteer, p. 52).

Of late it has been found that here has been influence of Hindu religion and culture on some pockets of the area, although the

influences are not directly reflected on the life of the tribal people or had any direct bearing on everyday life of the people. It is found that the excavations at the foothill areas of Arunachal has a problem to fore. The ruins of Bhisimagnagar, the Tamreswari temple, the ruins at Malinithan at Likabali of West Sinagn district, prove that these are of Hindu origin and construction. Parasuramkund, a famous place of Hindu pilgrimage in the Lohit district continues to attract numerous Hindu pilgrims from many parts of the country. There is a study, that Rishi Jamdagni sent his wife Renuka to fetch water from the Ganges for his bath but the delay in bringing water made the *rishi* very angry. He asked his eldest son to kill Renuka. But he refused to do and so the other three sons. However, the fifth son Parashuram, obeyed his father and severed the head of his mother. As a result of the crime, the handle of the axe got stuck to his hand. The father was pleased with him for carrying out his order. He then asked Parashuram for a boon. The son first prayed for bringing back his mother to life and asked how to get rid of matricide. The *rishi* told him to visit various holy places throughout the country. Accordingly, he did so and ultimately came to the Brahmakund in present Lohit district and made passage for the *kund* to come out by digging the bank of the Brahmakund. Then he bathed there and the axe dropped to the ground from his hand. The spot where axe dropped out from his hand come to be known as Parshuram Kund. A dip in the *kund* on the Paush Makarsankranti day could wash away one's sin is the belief among the people.

With regard to Malinithan, as per local tradition, Lord Krishna while going back to Dwarka with Rukmini, daughter of Vidarbha after marrying her by stratagem, rested her as guest of Lord Siva and his consort Parvati. Parvati had offered then garlands of beautiful flowers from her garden. Then Lord Krishna was overwhelmed with the charm and beauty of those flowers and addressed parvati as Malini or mistress of the mistress of the garden (Bose, p. 36).

Arunachal Pradesh is one of the regions where the tribal people still continue their traditional beliefs and practices. Among many groups as already mentioned, the movement for Donyi-Polo faith has assumed a new dimension. Whereas in some parts of the world tribal religions have been reduced to non-entity by the process of conversion to other religions.

Now, there are movements in some societies to rediscover their lost traditions. Seng Khasi is such a movement among the Khasis of Meghalaya, who were converted to Christianity many years back. Similarly, in Mizoram, some people are going back to Judaism, which is believed to be their original faith and some groups of Meities of Manipur, who have been Hindu vaishnavites for three centuries, started a revivalist movement in 1970 to restore Pre-Vaishnava nature worshipping called the Senamahi. In Arunachal Pradesh vibrant tradition of the people, which is being preserved, is to be promoted and propagated. They still continue to live as a prominent group, proud of their remarkable and distinctive culture, custom and tradition and above all the religion of their forefathers. The believers of the traditional faith and practices of the Northeast and other parts of the country should come together to promote their unique culture and religion. It is high time for self-searching where lies the soul of our identity.

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PART -I

TRIBAL RELIGION

Religious History of Arunachal Pradesh

Oshong Ering

Before touching upon the subject, I like to inform you that presentation of this paper does not base on any documentary evidence. I have not quoted from any authoritative historical book to substantiate my view. So, things may look vague and appear to be an apology for a seminar of historical scholars. But, in course of life, I have gained certain knowledge on religious movement of the people of Arunachal Pradesh. I am also a witness to some of the trends of events. Legends, myths and oral literature are the sources of my information. I do not know whether common man's views will satisfy your academic queries or not. However, it may not harm in lending your ears to me.

What is religious or religious movement? You are pregnant with definitive and historical knowledge. So, the answer to the question is left to you. I have simply seen the Hindus, Islams, Christians, Buddhists and so forth assembling and praying in religious Institutions. Rituals are conducted by the priests and the common people adhere to the preaching's. From this, I understand that religion is a faith leading to ascertainment of truth, peace and harmony in human society. Religious teaching plays a great influence in building up human character and conduct. The people

of Arunachal Pradesh are also people of religious aspiration. No doubt, they fought battles and wars; and yet, they did not kill for the sake of killing. They were guided by certain motivation. They observed religious rituals. With this background, I attempt to trace the religious history of Arunachal Pradesh.

At present, in Arunachal Pradesh, we see people professing faith in Buddhism, Vaisnavism and Christianity. The large majority of the tribe are adhering to their own age-old tradition and practices. The Monpas, Sherdukpens, Khamtis and Singphos are Buddhists. The Mishings and some people of Changlang and Tirap districts are Vaisnavite-leaning. Christianity also has crept into the state. The Adis, the Nyisis, the Tagins, the Idus, the Mijus, the Taroans, the Buguns, the Hrussos, the Mijis etc. have their own tradition.

Hinayana or Theravada Buddhism travelled with the Khamtis and Singphos to Arunachal Pradesh via Upper Sindwin and Iravadi rivers. Following the path of Sukhapa, the first Ahom King of Assam, the Khamtis and Singphos migrated to Kho-Ming Kunming or Khomong (present Vijaynagar) sometime after 1228-29 A.D. They settled down there for certain period of time. Thereafter, they migrated down to Namchoom (present Tengapani valley) and since then they are inhabiting there. They carried Buddhist religious scriptures and practiced them constructing monasteries in Pagoda design. Out of these, Chongkham monastery at Chowkham is the most prominent one. Their religious books are full of Sanskrit and Pali words. Probably, during King Ashoka and after him, Buddhist religious books in Thai and other languages of South-East to make thing intelligible. So, Hinayana Buddhism has taken a deep root in the Khamtis and Singphos of Arunachal Pradesh

A great Sanskrit scholar, called Guru Padmasambhava of Nalanda University travelled upto Lhasa via Nepal with his disciples and Buddhist religious books. Settling down there, he preached and practiced Buddhism. During his time, Gonpo or Bonpo religion was flourishing in Tibet. Tactfully, he infused Buddhistic ideology into Gonpoism. This then led to a religious assimilation. Hence, Tibetan Buddhism became a mixture of Mahayana Buddhism and Gonpoism. It worked wonder. He allowed his disciples to construct Gompas where religious rituals were

conducted. Buddhistic teaching base on philosophical and ideological conceptions; whereas, Gonpo teachings flourished on tantric fantasies. But the Guru clubbed them together. So, Tibetan Buddhism sometime called Tantric Buddhism.

Guru Padmasambhava travelled throughout the length and breadth of Tibet to spread the messages of Buddha. While moving with his disciples, he chanted "OM MANI PADMA HUM". His Tibetan disciples pronounced the same "OM MANE PEME HUM" with slight variation of tongue. While staying on the roof of the world, he thought of bringing down the roof up side down. So, he brought Patala or the world beneath the Earth to Lhasa by naming the palace of Dalai Lama as 'PATALA', but Tibetans pronounce it "POTALA" again with phonetical variation. The Guru also sent his disciples to various places of Bhutan and Mon region of Arunachal Pradesh. All of them brought under Buddhistic fold. A legend goes here. A white horse of the Prince of Lhasa strayed into Mon region. Search parties were dispatched towards all directions. The horse was discovered grazing around present Tawang area. 'TA' means horse and 'WANG' means worship. On discovery, the people worshiped the horse there. Subsequently, people went on worshipping the place annually. To commemorate this incidence, TA-WANG (present Tawang) monastery was constructed 400 years ago. Tawang monastery is one of the largest monasteries of the world. After the death of 5th Dalai Lama, 15 long years the lamas searched an incarnated soul of Dalai Lama. Ultimately, they found a boy of Urgey-Ling in Tawang area. He was shifted to Lhasa and installed as 6th Dalai Lama. Since then the people of Tawang and West Kameng districts of Arunachal Pradesh are Buddhists. They are deeply religious in character and conduct.

Vaisnavite belief, faith and practices also penetrated into the society inhabiting foothill areas of Arunachal Pradesh since 400 years ago. Vaisnavism is an offshoot of Hinduism. It is a modified and rationalized form of religious dogmas and practices. Under the aegis of "Mahapurushia Dharma", spearheaded by Srimanta Sankar Deva, Vaisnavism played a great influence on the Mishings, Noctes and Tangsas of Arunachal Pradesh. Sankar Deva and Madhab Deva along with disciples of "Bare Barania Shatras" preached and declared:

“EK DEO
EK HEO
EK BINE
NAI KEO”.
“MANUHE DEO
MANUHE HEO
MANU BINE
NAI KEO”.

“Or there is one God and no other God exist. Man himself is God to be worshiped and there is not other God to be worshiped”. This reformed religious doctrine simplified the complexities of religious belief, faith and practices of Hinduism. Vaisnavism don't encourage animal sacrifice, blood-shedding and idol worship during religious rituals. They attempt to attain human perfection by adhering to unflinching faith in one God. Respect to the Guru, love, compassion, and good conduct simplicity and universal brotherhood are the channels of religious aspiratin. The simplified form of religion was easily intelligible and acceptable to the common mass. So Arunachalees became followers of Vaisnavism. The Ahoms could not dominate the tribes with might of swords, but Sankardeva established a harmonious rapprochement with the tribes by propagating religious messages of brother-hood and goodwill. The Vaisnavite movement attracted the eyes of the British Colonial Administration. They thought of cutting short of the popularity of the Vaisnavite sect. But how? Colonial Administrators approached Gourinath Singha of Guwahati and made him an opium addict. When the king became addict, his followers also took to opium. This way, followed by the Shatradhikars and Bhaktas of Vaisnav religion, smoking of opium became a part of religious rituals. The Mishings, Adis, Noctes and Tangsas came under the smoke-screen of opium. British design succeeded. Vaisnavite movement was checked. It lost vigour. The flavour of opium addiction of Arunachal Pradesh made Vaisnavite movement a dis-flavour.

The advent of Christianity of Arunachal Pradesh is comparatively a recent phenomena. After Yandaboo Treaty, 1826, the entire Assam fell under British Colonial rule. The hegemonistic rule expanded to the foot hills of Arunachal. Soon, it extended to McMohan Line bordering China. Sometimes in the 19th century, a Baptist Missionary Church was established at Sadiya. The Church also opened-up a school there. Tribal children, mostly Adis and

Mishngs were admitted in that school. Many of them were converted to Christian Baptism. Since then Missionaries converted tribal to Christianity and the process is continuing throughout Arunachal Pradesh. Roman Catholic, Protestant, Revivalist etc. churches are coming up fast at different locations of the state. Regular sermons and religious rituals are being conducted in these churches. The present trend is that as soon a person is converted to Christianity, the people deviated themselves from their pristine traditional way of life and faith. This has put a wedge between Christians and traditionalists. A changing face is coming up. It is under historical observation.

The majority of the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh do not belong to any recognized religion of the world. But, it does not mean that they are not religious. They are regulated by their own tradition, belief and faith. They worship their own gods goddesses and deities to appease themselves. Their traditions have prescribed certain do's and don'ts. For example, not to harm, not to steal, not to use harsh language, not to incur displeasure in others etc. though shrouded with myths and superstitions. The essence of their belief and faith base on humanistic ideologies. They aspire high to ascertain human welfare society. They fought battles and wars with certain motivations. But they like to lead a peaceful and prosperous life. Once a lady scholar enquired about my religion. I answered; Nature. She then passed a remark that I was an animist. This led me to involve in a serious discussion. Ultimately, she found herself in a tight corner. I found her to be a strew floating on religious current. In this context, I like to cite an example of the Adis of Arunachal. They are ardent believer in DONYI-POLO. It is nothing, but truth and enlightenment. The existence of the Sun and the Moon in the distant sky focusing warming rays and kindly light are a truth beyond dispute. By distributing rays and light to the struggling humanity in an equitable manner the two eyes-like objects of the sky do justice of all. Observation on them for centuries and generations has guided the Adis to evolve a humanistic philosophy of truth and enlightenment. It is a religious evolution based on nature. Nature is the spring board of human religion cultural progression. The tribes are a part of nature and being so, they minutely observe the phenomenal behaviour or natural objects. Natural behaviour is given a vivid interpretation to suit human

imaginations. Imbibed with such knowledge and understanding, the people imitate nature. In course of time, they foster a channel of religio-cultural aspiration. It has come to stay as a faith.

Other tribes, like, the Idus, Mijus, Taroans, Tagins, Nyishis, Tangsas, Noctes, etc. also have their own way of life and faith. Religiously, they are growing-up on the basis of their traditional genius. Studies on their faith and practices may explore many more facts of interest.

In this regard, I hope, the History Department of Arunachal University will dive deep into the subject and pick-up some pearls for our admirations and appreciation. I will be happy if facts stated by me help the students of history in collecting data's for compiling a book of religious history of Arunachal Pradesh.

Tanii Popih (Tanism): The Religion of the Apa Taniis

Pura Tado

Introduction

The Apa Taniis believe in the existence of Gods who created the universe and gave human beings a spiritual nature which continues to exist even after the death of the body. Based on this belief the Apa Taniis believe in the existence of three worlds. They are: (a) Siichang-Miido (this world on earth); (b) Nilli Myokoh (world below this earth); and (c) Talii/Liibung Myokoh (in the sky). Based on this world view the Apa Taniis have developed a system of faith and worship. Thus, the Tanii Popih or Religion of the Apa Taniis consists of many gods and goddesses representing different pantheons. Worshiping and offering systems of these pantheons differs from one another. In this paper, the author limits himself to philosophical aspects of *Tanii Popih* or *Tanism*.

World View of the Apa Taniis

The Apa Taniis believe that there are three worlds created by the God which takes care of creatures of this world on earth even after their physical death. The first world of the Apa Taniis is this world – *Siichang-Miido*. This world is the home for all the animate and inanimate living beings.

The second world as per Apa Taniis world view is *Nilli* or *Nelli Myokoh*. This world lies beneath the earth. This world is inhabited by persons who die naturally at the end of their life. It is believed that all the souls who die natural death because of natural causes go to *Nilli/Nelli Myokoh*.

The third world that exists as per Apa Taniis world view is *Talii/Liibung Myokoh*. This world exists in the sky above the earth. The souls of those who meet unnatural death because of unnatural causes go to *Talii/Liibung Myokoh*. Thus, the *Tanii Popih* or Tanism is a religion based on the belief that there exist Gods and Goddesses who not only created the universe but gives human beings a spiritual belief that their soul exists even after death of the body.

There are two commonly held beliefs that people of Arunachal Pradesh (Apa Taniis community is one among them) practices (a) spirit worship which Christians call *satan* and (b) natural worship. Both these beliefs held by specially people from outside of Arunachal communities are not true. This misconception prevails among the indigenous person because the so-called educated persons are not interested to go into the roots of their communities religious and other traditional practices. The other reason could be their adhering to outsider's ignorant views camouflaged as blind belief and superstition. Yet another reason for this misconception could be that the outsiders get communication in a language which is not the mother tongue of the local person giving information. Hence, the locals fail to use appropriate words and terms which accurately conveys the real meaning and significance of their religious beliefs and practices. This misconception arises because of lack of self-confidence and hence places too much faith on capabilities of outsiders of their community. This is so because the indigenous people feel that the outsider scholars are more educated. In this, they effectively forget that one may have lots of degrees to prove one's education but may not have got sufficient knowledge and skill to analyze and judge a subject.

The second belief that people of Arunachal Pradesh practice nature worship mostly held by outsiders of the community and supported by many younger generation locals is also not true. The outsiders usually find that indigenous people make altars in the jungles and offerings are made there. This apparent activities

makes them believe that they worship nature. This belief is compounded by the fact that there is communication gap. Local people are unable to use proper words and terms of others languages to express appropriately to convey the exact meaning and philosophy of the religious practice.

Let me make it clear that both the above beliefs about *Tanii Popih* or *Tanism* are totally wrong. No communities of Arunachal Pradesh (Apa Tanii included) indulge in spirit worship. Spirits, as per Apa Tanii belief, are the souls of persons who met unnatural end to their life. Till rebirth of their soul (which will take long time) the spirit roams in human society. Only the immediate members of the same family may perform certain rituals for the soul occasionally. When any spirit affects a person (it is understood by symptoms of suffering) the spirit is scolded using most foul language one can think of. They are driven away by throwing objects in and around the house including burning ambers and scolding continuously. All available, traditional weapons are used as if the spirit is being attacked. Now a days, modern weapons like shot guns and crackers are used to drive the spirit away.

Apa Taniis are no nature worshipers. They respect the nature and make friends with it. They recognize that different Gods and Goddesses make their home in natural objects like Baniyan and rubber trees or very big and peculiarly foliaged trees, big stone formations, big whirlpools and gorges in a river. This is buttressed by the Apa Tanii belief that each natural area is owned by a God or Goddess called *Khalo*. A *Khalo* has his or her family residing in the area.

Hence, whenever, offerings are made to Gods and Goddesses, the altars are erected nearer the Gods or Goddesses abode. Big and peculiar natural objects are believed and accepted as the location of abodes of the Gods and Goddesses. Nearby these objects, people do not shout or sing loudly nor desecrates its surroundings.

Philosophical Bases of *Tanii Popih* (Tanism)

There are many Gods and Goddesses in Apa Tanii pantheon. It is believed, for example, that many Gods and Goddesses protect different parts of a house. Thus, there are hundreds of Gods and Goddesses in the pantheon of *Tanii Popih* (Tanism). However, these Gods and Goddesses can be broadly divided into three groups which give guidance and sustain the Apa Taniis in their day to day life.

The first group of Gods and Goddesses are the *Pinii-Sio* and *Yarnii-Gonii* (the creators). *Pinii-Sio* is supposed to have created all the creatures of this world including the universe. God and Goddess *Yarnii-Gonii* help the creatures to acquire qualities and capabilities necessary for their survival and further propagation for continuity of the species. *Pinii* and *Sio* are supposed to decide on the shape, size and structural units of a creature which ultimately decides the species of the creature thus created. Thus, all the species of living beings of the world are created by *Pinii* and *Sio*.

Every species has developed certain skills to survive well in their surroundings. These skills are supposed to be instilled in a particular species by Gods and Goddesses *Yarnii-Gonii*. There are many Gods and Goddesses who are in the pantheon of *Yarnii-Gonii*. Thus, different skills in a person, for example, are instilled in him or her by different Gods and Goddesses of *Yarnii-Gonii*.

There are different Gods and Goddesses who create inanimate items like, knives, daws, different instruments and machineries. The Gods and Goddesses who create them are called *Lomas*. There are different *Lomas*, who create different artifacts, instruments and machineries. A person endowed with skills to fashion varied instruments and machineries is supposed to be influenced by gods *Loma* as well as *Yarnii-Gonii*.

The next group of Gods and Goddesses in the pantheon of *Tanii Popih (Tanism)* is called *Myorii-Sii* (the protector). Gods and Goddesses in this pantheon are supposed to help human beings by giving their protection. In mundance terms, this *Myorii-Sii* protects the whole environment and other creatures in it. So that human beings living in that area is provided with abundane of resources. *Myorii-Sii* is supposed to own every piece of land both plains and mountains and rivers with all the resources available in them. These resources are exploited by human beings for their survival and well-being. A person is punished by *Myorii-Sii*, if he or she exploits the resources his or her necessity. Thus, wanton destruction of natural resources for including animal species is not encouraged. If one crosses the limits of laid down rules of exploitations of resources, the *Myorii-Sii* may punish with, storms, floods, even sudden death of a person. What are these limits of exploitation of natural resources, dos and don'ts related to it are transmitted orally

from one generation to another generation as told to Abo Tani the ancestor of Apa Taniis by God himself. Many of these dos and don'ts are institutionalized through different practices along with seasons and festivals observed by Apa Tanii community. In this pantheon of *Myorii-Sii* there are many Gods and Goddesses. Each of them is entrusted with responsibility to protect as well as provide resources to creatures in their domain. Thus, rivers and lakes are under certain Gods and Goddesses, mountains under another category of Gods and Goddess. Care of different animal and bird species including domesticated animals left in the jungle are the responsibility of different Gods and Goddesses.

Gods and Goddesses of *Myorii-Sii* pantheon are supposed to reside in their territory. We believe that the *Myorii-Sii* Gods and Goddesses make their abode on big and peculiar trees like banyan, rubber, big dense foliated trees, dark deep lakes and huge and peculiar stone formations. One can have fairly accurate idea about them after getting two or three practical observations in the field. Having this knowledge, the Apa Taniis do not desecrate in any manner in these places, not make noises above normal decibels.

Next in the pantheon of *Tanii Popih* (Tanism) is *Nilli-Kirii*. *Nilli-Myokoh* is the second world in Apa Tanii world view. It exists below the earth. It is the abode of human beings who had exhausted their given life on earth. The belief among Tanii people is that a person soul goes to Nilli Myokoh to reside there after his normal death on earth. Thus, the Gods and Goddesses of this pantheon are the ones who escort the souls to their respective places as per kinds of death. The Apa Taniis also believe that the kind of death a person gets is based on the creation of God *Pinii* and Goddess *Sio*.

Unnatural and accidental death as well as death by suicide is abhorred by Apa Tanii people. It is believed that souls of people who meet such deaths do not get proper place and also do not get salvation quickly. Hence, many of these souls roam around villages and towns as spirits getting all sorts of scolding and insulations. Souls of persons who die unnatural and accidental deaths are supposed to be at the third world of Apa Tanii world-view known as *Talii/Liibung Myokoh* in the sky. There is no proper assigned place for those souls of persons who commit suicide. Thus, the Gods and Goddesses in *Nilli-Kirii* pantheon does the job of escorting the souls of persons after their death to respective places assigned.

Thus, the *Tanii Popih* or Tanism – the religion of the Apa Taniis – gives philosophical, moral and ethical guidance at three levels. They are : (a) In relation to mundane life (day to day) of people; (b) In relation to environmental protection, preservation and resource exploitation; and (c) In relation to management of animal husbandry including the wild ones.

These philosophical, moral and ethical codes enshrined in *Tanii Popih* or Tanism are institutionalized in the form of customs, usages, customary practices, festivals, ritual practices and offerings. This paper is limited to only philosophical aspects of *Tanii Popih* or *Tanii* religion or call it Tanism in English language.

Aspects of Religious Beliefs and Practices of the Tribes of the Tani Group with Special Reference to those of the Galo Adis

T. Nyori

Introduction and Origin

All forms of the indigenous faiths, beliefs, and practices which are found among the tribes of the Tani group in this region constitute their religion. In recent years there has been a tendency among both indigenous and non-indigenous writers to call the religion of the tribes as Donyi-Poloism or Donyi-Polo religion, a name which has been derived from the recognition of Donyi-Polo, the combined divine figure of *Donyi* (the Sun) and *Polo* (the Moon) as their popular god. Like religion of many people in the world the origin of this religion too is shrouded in numerous myths and traditions of these tribes which are as old as the tribes themselves. From the rational point of view, however, it appears that the origin of their faiths, beliefs and practices lies in their constant attempts to adjust themselves with the environments which surrounded them and in which they lived. Because, their place of origin, the routes of migration, and their present land lie in one of the most difficult regions of the world. Besides, there are numerous natural factors

which always stand against the normal life of these tribes. They tried to adjust themselves with the nature and wanted to live in peace and free from diseases, suffering and misfortune. However, the natural phenomena remained mysterious to them. Their curiosity to know who was the creator and controller of the phenomena of the nature led them to invent a number of explanations in the form of myths which are embodied in the ballads called abangs by the Padam-Minyong Adis, *nyibo-agoms*, by the Galo Adis, etc. Thus, out of such curiosities and explanations their religion originated.

The circumstances and origin of the religions of the Tani group of the tribes are almost the same but their practices in details differ from each other. Such differences of their beliefs and practices may be studied separately tribe-wise also. In this paper such a study on the religious beliefs and practices of the Galo Adis has been attempted.

According to the Galo myths *Jimi* is the creator of the Universe including the *Medo* (the sky) and *Sichi* (the earth). Out of the union of the *Medo* and *Sichi* all things and beings on the earth and in the sky including the *Donyi* (the Sun) and *Polo* (the Moon) were born. In their popular pantheon, however, the importance of *Donyi-Polo* (the Sun-Moon God) comes next to *Jimi*, the creator. The creator becomes obscure and silent after the creation; so no sacrifice is offered to his/her name. On the other hand, they give popular divine dignity to *Donyi-Polo*, the combined divine figure of *Donyi* (the sun) and *Polo* (the moon), who is regarded as the symbol of the creator and the protector or saviour, who is always with us.

Although the *Donyi* and *Polo* can be literally interpreted as the sun and moon, they convey certain ideas having direct bearing on the spiritual and physical life of the people. As far as the physical aspect is concerned, the term *Donyi-Polo* conveys the vision of the sun and moon which give warmth, energy and benevolent light to the humanity. While on the other hand, the spiritual interpretation is based on the belief of the tribe in the supreme spiritual identity which they call *Jimi* to whom the *Donyi* and *Polo* are the pair of two searching eyes. Thus, the warming rays of the physical sun in the day and cooling light of the moon at night are the elements or symptoms of the creator. Therefore, the believers conduct

themselves in the name of Donyi-Polo to realize the highest order of truth. According to Galo myths, *Jimi*, the creator, after finishing the tasks of creation remains silent. (*Jimi* in their language means silence). But the *Donyi* (the sun) and Polo (the moon), physically and spiritually remain with the man. Accordingly, they regard Donyi-Polo as the highest divine figure. Therefore, such belief and practices based on this among the Galos and other tribes of the Tani group is called as the Donyi-Poloism or Donyi-Polo religion. The Galos Adis worship, particularly Donyi on several grounds. According to their mythology Donyi is the controller of the fate of men and giver of wife (*Donyi Mumsi/Mumdi/Mummi*) to Tani, the common ancestor of the tribe with domestic animals and birds. Donyi is also worshipped because when Taki (a cruel brother of Tani) cheated and murdered Tani after the long-drawn challenges, *Jiku-Miku/Yirku Loma* (the son of Donyi) resurrected him. After Tani's revival, Donyi (the sun god), had promised to give him sunshine, energy, favourable weather and animals for domestication. Moreover, Donyi has different names and characters in different spheres. In the *nyibo-agom* (poetic language of the priests), the Donyi (the sun) is called *Iji Ane* (Mother Iji). She has her different manifestations and a number of members of her family who help her in different activities in different spheres. The Galos make some made-belief images and offer sacrifices to Donyi. Thus, the spiritual Donyi is the popular divine figure of the tribe.

Under *Jimi* and Donyi-Polo, there are a number of benevolent and malevolent deities in the Galo pantheon. They have different names of deities. According to their belief the same deity may act as the benevolent as well as the malevolent. A malevolent spirit turns into a benevolent one when it is properly propitiated and offered sacrifices in time. One of their myths mention that many of the *uyus* (spirits) are the descendents of Taki, who was Tani's cruel brother and who cheated and took away the supernatural power (*nyigme-sabro*) of the latter. As Taki and his descendants have the super-natural power, they become spirits and can see man from anywhere, but man cannot see them.

The Priest (Nyibo) and his Functions

In Galo language, a priest is called *nyibo* or *nyibu*. He performs all sorts of religious rites and ceremonies of the tribe. He

like the *nyikok* or *gam* in the material society is the mouth-piece of the people to contact and communicate their grievances and sufferings and to request spirits for redress. Thus, he is the intermediary between the spiritual world and the human world. He performs the divination, offers sacrifices to and invokes blessings of the spirits on behalf of the people. One who shows special talents to foretell things and falls into trances in childhood becomes a *nyibo*, when he attains manhood. Some other Galo priests get their spiritual power all on a sudden as the gods ordain.

Neither election nor selection comes into play in case of their priests. The early proof of one's inherent qualities and talent or gods' will on one determines one's real qualification for the eligibility for the profession of a *nyibo*. This profession is also not hereditary. Thus *nyibos* are born and not made as the poets are born and not made.

The Galo *nyibos* are of two categories. One category is called *gumin/mumin nyibos* and the other is called the *nyigre nyibos*. Those *nyibos*, who are conversant with the ins and outs of all the religious rites and incantations, and get into touch with spirits without falling into trance, are known as the *gumin/mumin nyibos*. *Nyigre-nyibos* are those who get into *trance and become conversant with the religious rites and incantations*. A Galo *nyibo* believes that he is led by a spirit along with the right direction and that spirit advises him/her against any unnecessary sacrifices and helps the *nyibo* to divine diseases and suggest suitable sacrifices for the cure. In course of invoking and praying the spirits, it is believed that *nyibos* are guided by some spiritual attendants known as the *doyi-lulu or talo-tanya*. It is through these attendants the *nyibos* get access into the supernatural world and find our causes and remedies of misfortunes.

Their priests put on particular type of dresses and ornaments in different occasions/ceremonies. A priest (*nyibo*) does not enjoy any special privilege (except at the time of his invocations and sacrifices) in Galo society. He leads a common life with his fellow-villagers distinguished in no way from them except during the performance of religious ceremonies when he puts on special dresses and ornaments.

Causes of Disease and Death

The sickness and disease are generally believed to be caused by malevolent spirits (*uyus*). Spirits, who do not get their due share in sacrifices, may cause disease and death. When anybody encroaches jungle, the spirits of the jungle gets angry and causes diseases to that encroacher. Spirits residing in the cultivated fields when not propitiated get offended and harm the offender. Spirit of the murdered person may cause disease to the murderer. Spirits of dead relatives (*oroms*) whose burial ceremonies are not properly done and who are not remembered may cause disease to their living relatives. Incestuous and immoral sex relations and other immoral deeds may bring the severest of the supernatural punishments and sever illness and even death. They also believe that injuries or harms could be inflicted on persons by means of black magic (*romle-konam*). In a propitiatory rite called *Donyi-Bonam* some Galo *nyibos* symbolically offer the soul of a human being to Donyi in exchange for the improvement of the weather. The person whose soul is supposed to have been offered suffers from disease and dies.

Divination

The causes of diseases and death are diagnosed by divination. The *nyibo* is a conjurer as well as a diviner. He divines with the help of the spirits who he pleases with his power inherent in him. Such divination is done in several ways. One is done by a *nyigre-nyibo* which he starts by chanting incantations and prayers, requesting the spirit to be in communion with him. After he finishes his incantation, the spirit helps him in his divination. He then starts singing dancing and falls into a trance, and when he is fully possessed, he tells the cause of the disease.

Other popular methods are the divinations with egg, chicken liver and sacrificed pig's liver. Such divinations help the *nyibos* in detecting or diagnosing the diseases and the nature of sacrifices to be made. As soon as a person falls sick the *nyibo* conducts a test with the help of chicken or egg to determine the spirit which causes the sickness. He then suggests the type of sacrifice to be offered to him.

Dream

The Galos give much importance to dreams and their interpretations. While in sleep, the soul, *yalo* as they call it, of the

man finds time to establish contact with the spiritual world. It is believed that the movement or activity of the soul in spiritual life is interpreted as a dream (*yuma*) in the physical life. According to them, the material life receives prompting from the spiritual life. If the spiritual life of a person faces crisis, it reflects in the form of misfortune, or human physical suffering. It is because of this, they take dreams seriously. This also leads them to do divination and to perform various rituals to appease their deities. To them dreams foretell prosperity, sickness, health, crimes, misfortunes, etc.

The efficacy of a dream depends on the time of the dream. It is believed that dreams dreamt at daytime and in the middle hours of the night are of no great importance. The most effective are the early morning dreams. Dreams thus have influence on the psychology of the people of the tribe. They believe that the coming event casts its shadow before. So, they get the indications of the good and bad omens from their dreams and do the divinations and sacrifices accordingly.

Rites, Ceremonies and Festivals

After finding the causes of the diseases and disorders in those divinations, the necessary propitiatory and expiatory rites are performed. Besides, the Galos perform a number of rituals and socio-religious festivals. Some of these are performed individually and while others are performed on community basis. Thus *Togu* or *Sobe Panam*, *Yojir*, *Hurin*, *Ampir*, *Paka* or *kaji-Pomji*, *Pago-Palap* are their individual or family rites. Their community rites and festivals are *Mopin*, *Diri*, *Mari*, *Ampu-Yulu* and *Potor-Nyogom*.

Sacrifices

After the cause of the disease is established, and the spirit responsible for it being identified, the next step is to propitiate the spirit which is ascertained by means of divination in a rite with sacrifices of animals. Sacrifices are to be made strictly in the way as revealed in the divination. The animal plays a key-role in the religious life of the tribe. So, the Galos perform the animal sacrifice for various purposes:

First, it is performed by them to free a person from pain, misery and sorrow due to ailment caused by the malevolent spirits. That is, incantations in some animal sacrifices are pronounced to

appease the malevolent spirits (*ale-uvus*) for the cure of the ailing person from disease. The spirits are requested to leave the patient and to take an animal in his or her place.

Secondly, in the mithun sacrifice (*sobe-panam/Togu*) and other rituals of peaceful time (*apo-uyu*) animals are offered to propitiate *Donyi, Toyi-Togu*, ancestors and others, so that the soul (*yalo*) of the person concerned may reach them and live in their safe custody. In such rituals benevolent deities like *Agam, Hitum-Jore, Ite-Bote*, etc. are worshipped and sacrificed animals to being material prosperity and good health of the person. In *peka-panam*-ceremony, animals are sacrificed to *Kale, bote-Kate*, (*peka*) and others, the gods of bravery for their blessings and assistance, for courage and bravery in any difficult under-takings.

Thirdly, the sacrificial rituals are performed to avenge a wrong done or to retaliate and to get the help of the supernatural power for this purpose.

Lastly, in the Galo belief, the animal sacrifice plays another important role which is different from the ordinary propitiatory rite. They believe that after death the soul of a person goes to the next world (*uyu-moko*) where he or she enjoys the same status which enjoyed in his or her earthly existence. There he or she gets back all the properties acquired including the souls of all animals sacrificed during the life time in this world.

Taboos

The Galos have a number of taboos which are known as *aririnam/arinam*. Taboos are observed to avoid bad luck, sickness, epidemic or anger of the spirits. They observe three types of taboos after their ritual ceremonies. The first is the taboo on movement; the second is the taboo on working and third is the taboo on eating.

Death

The Galos believe that death was not the part of the original order as planned by the maker of the world. The untimely death comes on man for his disobedience to the divine order, his greediness, impatience, wrong deeds and carelessness. However, the death of an old man/woman is considered as a natural decay (*singur-dongur-ngungam*) as an old tree decays, dries and dies at its own time.

After Death

They believe that the life of a man does not cease with death; it only changes his material life for the spiritual one. They believe that there is a land beyond the grave and man continues to his existence there is a subtle form which corresponds to the concept of the soul (*yalo*). The land beyond the grave is but a shadowy replica of this material world. It is divided into several regions which are the domains of different spirits. Some believe that the soul of a man after its separation from the material body first goes to the domain of that spirit who has been the instrument of his death. However, his dead relatives bring him to their domain immediately.

They believe that the soul after death may go either to *gite* or *giche*. Those who lead a pious and kind life in this world go to *gite*, while the sinners and breakers of law invariably go to *giche*. Both these places are believed to be situated underground beyond the grave.

There are three different paths to *gite* and *giche*. The path called *dirte* is for old and invalid persons, *dirde* is for young men and women; and *yapchi-tabu*, for children. But those who die in accident or in war or inviolence (*yachi-pira*) go to *tale* (the sky). The woman who dies at the time of child-birth first goes to the *nyipo-moki* (the land of the malevolent spirit of women). It is also believed that the souls of the sinners have to go through a dangerous place where a big dangerous swine (*ene-yachi*) is waiting to punish them.

In the land of soul (*uyumoko* or *orom-moko*) they enjoy the same status in the same way as they did on the earth and lead the same way of life. They also feel the same want for the things they owned during the life time. There they find also all their dead relatives and start the same life cycle as in the earthly existence. It is, therefore, customary to dedicate the earthly possessions of a person when he/she dies.

Belief in Soul

The Galos believe that everybody has a soul which they call *yalo*. This soul may wander about as in dreams or may be dragged away by a *uyu* (spirit). The priest alone can coax the evil spirit to release it.

After the sacrifices of animals and birds in front of the images of the *uyus*, the Galo priest, with some beads tied with a string, in his hand prays to the spirits to release the *yalo* of the sickman. This prayer is known as *yalo lanam*. It is believed that if spirits are satisfied with the sacrifices the *yalo* is released which then comes to the beads and rests on them which are fastened to the neck of the sick person. In this process the soul (*yalo*) is believed to be linked with that person. If a man is sick and his soul is believed to be wandering, some rites like *jirga-yaper*, *turbosenam*, *agam-layap*, etc. (i.e. rites for calling back the soul or *yalo-gognam*) are performed by the Galo priests.

They do not believe in the rebirth. Their popular belief is that if a person invokes Donyi and other benevolent gods and goddesses regularly in his life time, his soul will reach them unfettered by the *uyus* (evil spirits). But it is found from their myths that in olden days in some occasions, the benevolent gods used to resurrect persons from their graves. A Galo myth says that when *Tani* was killed and devoured by *Taki*, *Juku-Miku* (a son of Donyi) resurrected him.

Disposal of Dead

When the sign of the death become apparent, the dying person is allowed to die at the place of confinement. Just after death, the two legs are folded over the chest, so as to shorten the body. The dead body of an ordinary person is disposed of as soon as possible, while the disposal of the dead body of a rich or an influential person may be delayed by one or two days in order to allow all his/her relatives to attend the burial. Before the burial a dirge is sung by an expert for the old and important person. Such funeral hymn is called *nene*, or *nene-poyo* by the Galos.

The grave is dug just at the outskirts of the village or at the place earlier chosen by the diseased and it is dug as per the measurement of the dead body in the proper size. The dead body is placed there with proper ritual and farewell. After that the grave is covered properly. To cover the whole grave yard a shed is constructed and decorated it in a suitable manner.

The house of the deceased becomes taboo for a few days, in some place it lasts for five days. The relatives sacrifice a mithun or a pig according to the status of the family and it is offered for the departed soul.

Conclusion

From the above discussion on the tribes of the Tani group, specially on the Galo Adi faiths, beliefs and practices, it is found that the world of their religion has some qualities which are of fundamental value and these qualities may be summed up as follows:

First, they believe in a Supreme God, the creator, *Jimi* who is just, benevolent and good. As he is silent and invisible, *Donyi-Polo* the Sun-Moon god is regarded as the symbol of the creator and the great witness in the sky and upholder of truth.

Secondly, there is in their religion a genuine emphasis on the spiritual realities behind the life of every day. They believe in an unseen world, in which gods and men, the living and the dead, are one great family.

Thirdly, their religion has the moral teachings, emphasizing that a man/woman leading the pious and kind life in this world will be welcomed and will get good treatment in the next world. But the sinners and breakers of law will get the ill-treatment and punishment in the next world after their death.

Fourthly, their religion is built up on an elaborate mythology. In the Galo myths we find that *Taki*, the wicked and *Taro*, the fool were defeated after several rounds of competition by *Tani*, the wise and the favourite of the gods and goddesses. Myth is regarded as representing metaphorically a world picture and insight into life generally and may, therefore, be considered as primitive philosophy of metaphysical thought. Thus, they also have their philosophy of religion.

Fifthly, their religion is associated with a social ethic that unites the tribe and makes it discipline to follow the truthful path, to cultivate wisdom and justice, to enjoy the warmth of equality, to cultivate selflessness, to follow path of continuity and straight forwardness, to cultivate kindness and mercifulness.

Finally, their religion gives the people power to reconcile themselves to the eternal emergencies of life. It has elements of fear, for which reason they perform sacrifices, observe a number of taboos, but it has also elements of love and truth as the other advanced religions have.

In their religion they have created a realistic picture of life; they face its problems with courage; there is some degree of fear

which gives them many propitiatory rites. The people are realistic and they approach the matter of theology from a realistic view point. They have faced the problem of death; they have not solved it as the other people, but they have devised means whereby it can be made tolerable. They also believe in a soul and a life after death, and believe that living and dead relatives continue to be united in one family, for which ground their death and separation become less painful. Thus, their religious approach is positive or optimistic.

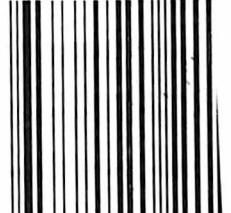


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