

Taboos Associated with Traditional Healing System of Apatanis of Arunachal Pradesh

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ABSTRACT

Taboos form an important component of tribal society. In the Apatani society too taboo is known as Anyo-Nii and it is essential in their religious life. The member of family, lineage and sub-clan observes Anyo-Nii according to the prescription and advice of the Nyibu (priest). This is done according to the nature of ritual and sacrifices. There is a version regarding the origin of food crops and restrictions of having some foods during observation of the taboos. According to the priestly version of the myth the Apatani, eatable items came from two Gods- Hintii and Arii. Ambi.

Introduction

Among the various indigenous tribes and sub-tribes of Arunachal Pradesh, the Apatanis are considered as one of the major tribe. They were variously named as *Onka Miri, Anka, Apatang and Tanang* by early British visitors into the valley. In early 1944-45, C.V.F Haimendrof an anthropologist employed by the colonial state to visit known them as 'ApaTani'. It was from that time, the Apatanis have been named as 'Apatani'. This word is derived from the two words-*Apa* and *Tani*. The word 'Apa' is prefix to the word 'Tani' and it is a mark of regard and affection which can be used against any name. The word 'Tani' means human being. The word 'Tani' has been derived from the earliest ancestor Abotani. Here, again the word 'Abotani' is derived from two words that are 'Abo', which means father and 'Tani', which means name of human race. The original name of Apatani or *Tani* alternately spelled as 'Tanii'; but while writing in English it has been spelled as '*Tani*'.

The term "Traditional Healing System" can refer to the long standing indigenous system of health care found in the developing countries particularly among the indigenous people. It is tending to have a more holistic approach to health than the approach taken in most western models of medicine. The traditional healing system includes the use of herbs, animal parts,

minerals as well as non-medication therapies which includes the acupuncture, manual therapies and spiritual therapies which may involve incantation to appease the spirits as in the case of Africans.

The traditional healing system among the Apatanis can be defined as a set of beliefs and practices used by the people through various rituals and rituals for wellbeing of humanity and health. It also includes the taboos and use of herbs as medicine to complement the rituals. On the other hand, it can be defined in simple term as logical transformation from sickness to wellness and the transformation of self to meaningful aspects of the environment.

Traditional healing system among the Apatani is old as evolution of the tribe itself. In the Apatani society, any kind of diseases, suffering and misfortunes were attributed to wrath of spirits. The traditional healing system among the Apatanis is totally influenced by their religious belief where spirits and deities are considered responsible for all ailments.

Taboos Associated with Traditional Healing System

In traditional healing system of Apatanis, taboos are mandatory to observe. Without observation of taboos, any kind of rituals and rites that performed are incomplete and it is not effective. Therefor one has to observe taboo strictly. There is a version regarding the origin of food crops and restrictions of having some foods during observation of the taboos. According to the priestly version of the myth the Apatani, eatable items came from two Gods- *Hintii* and *Arii*. *Ambi*. *Eamo* (rice), *Takung* (pear), *Taki* (ginger), *Tale* (onion type vegetable), *Taku* (cucumber), *Tanyi* (maize), *Siya hama* (*Houttunynia cordata*) etc came from god *Hintii*. The food crops like *Perung* (bean), *Tape* (Pumkin), *Gyiyang* (mustard leaf), *Iengi-Ienge* (yam), *Hula* and *Lase* (a kind of root crop) etc. came from god *Arii*. It is believed that the food crops that came from god *Hintii* are considered to be good and pure. This food can be taken during a ritual taboo (*ude anyo* or *uie anyo*). But the food crops that came from *Arii* are not considered to be as pure. Therefor it is not taken during taboo period. Eating of food that came from *Arii* may cause suffering from *doli-achi* (fever), goiter, *Tarsii* (corn), *Saring* (cough) and cold known as *Sahu-saring*. When the taboo is breached by eating these crops, corn is formed in any part of the body which is known "*Diiho Sinii*". These systems have been practiced since the time of *Abotani* and it is still practiced today.

According to D.N.Majumdar and T.N.Madan:

Like totem, taboo is not an English word; it has been derived from the Polynesian *tabu* meaning 'to forbidden' and 'forbidden'. Taboo is designated as all the restrictions communicated through verbal do's and don'ts generally associated with ritualistic behaviour, which a member of a primitive society has to submit to

In the Apatani society too taboo is known as *Anyo-Nii* and it is essential in their religious life. The member of family, lineage and sub-clan observes *Anyo-Nii* according to the prescription and advice of the *Nyibu* (priest). This is done according to the nature of ritual and sacrifices. However, *Anyo-Nii* is more stringent on the concerned family, especially bounden on the patient. They are basically restricted from movement, work and diet. Concerned individuals have to confine themselves within the house and are not allowed to cut any trees and grass.

D. N. Majumdar and T.N. Madan in their book *An Introduction Social Anthropology* further state that

Taboo has been called the unwritten law of savage society, but society does not deal cases of violation. The culprit himself becomes the chastiser and thus taboo avenges itself when violated. The culprit fears a calamity; therefore, taboo may said to have a supernatural, or magical sanction behind it.

Similarly, the Apatanis believed that if anybody deviates from any traditional line of taboos, he or she would be punished known *Uie Kaho*, a mistake, which will rebound as suffering according to its degree of its intensity. Therefore, the rigidity and taboos are strictly followed since from the time of *Abotani*.

There is a variation in injunction that is imposed on the concerned individual, lineage and sub-clan. In case of *Tiigo Uie* like *Subu-Mrung* rituals, taboos are to be observed more elaborately, that is for three-five months. Secondly, they are not allowed to eat anything that is brought from outside. Thirdly, they are not allowed to go outside the village till the *Nyibu* (Priest) permits them to go.

In *Gyuniyang Uie*, the taboos and restriction of movement is observed in the most strict manner. They are not allowed to eat potato, tomato, onion, garlic, pumpkin, meat of wild animals except *Takhii* (squirrel) and birds particularly *Pengu* rather these are considered as to be sacred. In *Tiigo Uie* movement is not restricted but the duration of taboos is more with regard to restrictions. In *Tiigo Uie*, restriction on edible items is more elaborate than the *Gyuniyang Uie* because it is very expensive and hence, cannot be performed repeatedly. In this ritual both priest and the person who initiates the rituals equally observes the taboos. There is a restriction on person from entering into the performer's house if he or she has attended a funeral. Even performers are not allowed to attend a funerary ritual.

Taboos and restrictions are also observed when person is bitten by snake known as *Hallu Aniyo*. The entire clan of the person bitten by snake have to observe the taboos for three days without touching the knife, *dao*, and spade. They are also not allowed to go to paddy fields and forest. It is believed that such observation of taboos will help to decrease the intensity of poison. The

taboo *Hallu Aniyo* is also observed when person dies unnaturally through murder, suicide, and accident.

Conclusion

Discussion in this article reveals the importance of taboos in traditional healing system among the Apatanis that have been practiced since from their ancestor, *Abotani* time. In every world of the Apatanis there is a full of spirit that influence every activities of mankind. These spirits are *Gyuniyang, Tiigo and Yallu* spirit. The observation of taboos in every rituals and rites is the important component of Apatani religion. Nature worship in the form of plants, animals, sun, moon, stars, rivers and mountains etc. are considered to be sacred and abode of numerous spirits. The sacred structure denotes the spirits and sacred centres are located within the premise of a house, outside the residential premises and outside the village boundary. Hence it is important and mandatory to observe the taboos after every rituals and rites in traditional way of healing.

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