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ADI BEADS AND FOLKLORE OF ARUNACHAL PRADESH

Abstract

Adi people are rich in oral literature. In absence of written records, they depict their past history through tales, legend and story-telling that passed down by older generations. Hence it is not possible to trace where, when and by what bead was made. As per Adi narration, it was Misummyang born of Pedong Nane who made the beads even before the existence of Tani (human). In fact, based on the research on the beads from ethno historical and anthropological perspectives, it has been seen that beads are currently holding an important place in folklore, through which we can trace the origin of the beads culture in human civilization, with special reference to the Adi people. This paper makes a modest attempt to find out the relation between the folklores and the beads and to analyze the meaning in relation to the beads, which may lead to an ethno historical approach to find out the beads in the society of the Adis.

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Introduction

Adi people are rich in oral literature. In absence of written records, they depict their past history through tales, legend and story-telling that passed down by older generations. Hence it is not possible to trace where, when and by what bead was made. As per Adi narration, it was Misummyang born of Pedong Nane who made the beads even before the existence of Tani (human) (Nyori 1993).

Legend on origin of beads

Sedi Melo, the goddess or the creator of the universe was covered with dirt. Sedi Melo collected all the dirt and created the sky and the land out of it. Thus, the sky and the earth came into existence. Plain land, hills, vegetation, spring, streams, and later on Sedi Melo designed two suns (Mibang & Abrahan: 2002:15-16).

Sedi Melo/ Sedi gave birth to Dilling and Dilling gave birth to two

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children called *Litung* (male) and *Limang* (female), they grew up as a brother and sister and became adults. In course of time *Limang* became pregnant and gave birth to *Tuye, Yepe and Pedong*.

Genealogy

Sedi, Dilling, Litung, Tuye, Yepe, Pedong Later *Pedong Nane* gave births to many children; (genealogy not in order) *Doni, Domi, Dobi, Sili Sidong, Banji Banmang, Takom Tarii* and many others and lastly gave birth to *Robo* (the spirit of jungle) and *Nibo* (the first human). The son of *Pedong, Doni* gave birth to *Ninur (Ninurlomang)* and *Domi* gave birth to *Misum (Misummyiang)*. The son of *Pedong, Dobi* gave birth to *Bisii (Bisiyada)*. So it goes like- *Pedong- Doni- Ninurlomang and Pedong- Domi- Misummyiang*, and *Pedong-Dobi- Bisiyada*.

Ninurlomang was great metal worker and owner of *Arem* like- *Dangking, Barbang, Leeku-Lenong* (metal plates, metallic utensils and pots). *Bisiyada* was also a blacksmith and owner of *Yoksa, Eyok, Egging* (sword, dao and axe).

Misum or Misummyiang as a mother of beads

Like *Ninurlomang* and *Bisiyada, Misummyiang* who was the sister of both had contributed in the existence of beads. She was the mother of beads, all the beads possessed by the *Adi* society in *Arunachal Pradesh* and some areas of *Assam* by *Mishing* tribes are believed to be made by *Misummyiang* she was the owner of valuable beads (This information was given by *Bangkak pertin* of *parbuk*, *Ngik Perme* of *Bolung*, *Kolsul Apum* (priest) and *Katu Lego* of *Dambuk*, verified in *Mibang* and *Abraham*).

Aabang says, “Keyum pedonge nane ke, ajii dirie diname, keyum misum e mone koh, kero miyang e moyong koh, keyum misum e yokmo kela, kero miyang e rempi ke, tadok beli e piname, tadok belo e yatname, misum sumko e kuro koh miyang aanko e kuli koh”

or

“Keyum pedonge nane ke aji mambi dui name, Pedong domi misum mone ko, Misum mone me pedong nane, gomung dodung e lurung kane, noh misum yokmoem molangka, miyang rempi em pilangka, keyum pedonge nane gumii dodungem luru rodem, keyum misum e mone kuro belo em yatlen tho kuli beli em pilen tho”.

It means, “*Misummyiang* was born of *Pedong Nane* whom the goddess instructs and bestowed the capability of making beads and she worked out, hence place where *Misum* lived we found the beads *Kuro* and *Kuli*”. So *Misummyiang* made the beads herself by clay and stones. In olden days there were soft rocks that could be even eaten up by the man. After finishing the shape and the size of beads she dried it on the sun light and took it to a river

called *doggo* or *Laying Asi* where she drowned the beads for tempering. Since then bead has become hard and acquired the green and blue watery color.

Aabang says, “*keyum misume mone ke, doggo asii tesige, tadok beloem yatlen Tula misum yoggo laying asii tesig, keyum misume yokmo de yoggo parkingem rokyon Tula, doggo pargoem rokyon Tula, tadok beli e pinam dem tadok buying em buji likto, doggo langore asii langore tetor gela tadok langor e tetor gekai, doggo laying e asii laying e sising gela tadok laying e sising gekai, tadok buying em boji likto, tadok tolko e tolki lenkai*”

It means, “*Misum* the expert carry out the task and made the bead and prepared the place at the laying *Asi* where she drowned and tempered the beads, as such the beads acquired the nature of its hardness and watery blue color”.

Legend behind the possession of beads by Tani (human)

Archery competition

Pedong Nane, the mother of millions gave birth to *Robo* and *Nibo* as her youngest child. *Robo* also called as *Epom* (spirit of jungle) and *Nibo* the *Tani* (human). Genealogically, *Robo* was elder to *Nibo*. Both of them were treated equally and respected in the society. The elder brother *Robo* has been described physically stronger and less intelligent in traditional myth and *Nibo* as physically weaker but more intelligent (The story was revealed by Okur Pertin of Bolung and Katu Lego of Dambuk, verified in Antony Perme M Phil thesis).

Since *Robo* and *Nibo* married and started living separately, the question of property division aroused. In the mean time, the owner of valuable *Tadok, Misummyang* died, the society convinced *Nibo* to do burial of the death and he followed. As per the tradition *Nibo* has to take the possession of all beads. *Robo* protested and insisted that the property should be shared among the two brothers. An archery competition was arranged, on the condition that whoever could hit and stick his arrow on the target would get the property. A metal plate was placed at a distance as the target. *Nibo* was advised secretly to smear wax of the bee on the arrow. *Robo* was asked to shoot first. His arrow struck the target and broke the target partially instead of sticking on it. Next was *Nibo*'s turn. He slowly released his arrow and hit the target, which stuck on it. *Nibo* won the competition and became the owner of the property of *Misummyang* (Mibang & Abraham: 2002: 57).

Competition for possession of beads

There had been a competition between *Nibo* and *Robo* in many fields like – archery, fishing, trapping .

Aabang says, “Misum mone ke kuro beloem kuli beliem yatlen rodem, Keyum pedong nane aji mambi ko duyi kaku ne, Pedong dorob robo kolang pedong doni ko aji mambi duyi toku, pedong dorob robo mela pedong doni aji dem keyum pedonge nane gumu dodunge lurung kakune, misum bangenge lirengte misum diyenge birsing, miyang derange birtang ko, misum sumkue kuro ko misum keldenge miyang keldenge keldak, pedong dorob robo nolang pedong doni aji no, misum redengem biying redengem kuro redengem toki suto ka, pedong dorob robo biying birtang redengem tua to, pedong doni aji misum sumku kuli kuro aro dem tua toh”.

or

Misum libu buru telo, tadok kelmang em keldung em, Biying kelmang em birtang kelmang em keldung em, Pedo dorob robo biying birtang lirung em yua tho, Pedo doni aji tadok lirung em gakrek tho.

It means, “As *Misummyang* made the beads, *Pedong Nane* later gave birth to *Robo* and *Nibo*. Of the two sons, *Nibo* was younger. *Pedong Nane* informed them of treasure that kept in cave and competition was arranged between the two brothers to have the treasures. The condition was that whoever discovered the hole of treasure would get the beads. Consequently, *Robo* by mistake hold the *Biying Birtang* (small green snake) and *Nibo* fortunately got the beads that kept in. As such *Nibo* won the competition and became the owner of valuable beads”.

Legend behind why evil spirits fear beads and amulets

Misummyang was the great smith of beads and bangles and *Ninurlomang*, the smith of tools and weapons. Once, the two smiths had a dispute with *Banji-Banmang*- the spirit who torments and inflicts diseases to humans.

Having been driven to the wall by the deadly and mischievous *Banji-Banmang* and his cohorts, *Misummyang* and *Ninurlomang* in the name of the Almighty *Donyi-Polo* taught these cunning spirits a lesson for their mischief and lies! Let *Banji-Banmang sene!* Their scandalous female chief tormented by the powerful beads! Let *Banji jiri mone*, the disgraceful one be frightened by my strong bangles and sonorous and healing going! Let them fear those so that men can live in peace.

Ninurlomang also prayed, “Oh *Donyi Polo* let my swords and the *Emul*, the metal necklaces frighten away all members of the cunning tribe for good! From today, let these valuable beads tools and weapon terrify all *Banji-Banmang* so that they desist from attacking men at will.

Donyi-Polo listened to their prayer with sympathy, then, he blessed all the amulets: beads, tools, bangles and swords with healing power. He also advised *Misummyang* and *Ninurlomang* to put the amulets on the body of sick

to drive away the evil spirits.

Since then, *Banji-Banmang* and other evil spirit began to fear those amulets put on the body of human (Tayeng 2003: 37-38).

Analysis

In terms of research in beads, the first question that comes to mind is about its origin, its values, and uses, and the materials from which these are made. In order to answer these queries, research and fieldwork in anthropology alone is not enough, but we have to consult specialists from various disciplines. From scientific perspectives, beads are usually natural materials both organic (i.e., of animal- or plant-based origin) and inorganic (purely mineral origin). However, some of these materials now routinely undergo some extra processing beyond mere shaping and drilling such as color enhancement via dyes or irradiation.

The natural organics include bone, coral, horn, ivory, seeds (such as tagua nuts), animal shell, and wood. For most of human history pearls were the ultimate precious beads of natural origin because of their rarity; the modern pearl-culturing process has made them far more common. Amber and jet are also of natural organic origin although both are the result of partial fossilization.

The natural inorganics include various types of stones, ranging from gemstones to common minerals, and metals. Of the latter, only a few precious metals occur in pure forms, but other purified base metals may as well be placed in this category along with certain naturally occurring alloys such as electrum. An international team of researchers led by Oxford University has new dating evidence indicating when the earliest fully modern humans arrived in the Near East, the region known as the Middle East today. They have obtained the radiocarbon dates of marine shell beads found at Ksar Akil, a key archaeological site in Lebanon, which allowed them to calculate that the oldest human fossil from the same sequence of archaeological layers is 42,400–41,700 years old. This is significant because the age of the earliest fossils, directly and indirectly dated, of modern humans found in Europe is roughly similar (<http://www.ox.ac.uk/news/2013-09-12-dating-beads-sets-new-timeline-early-humans>).

In our present research work, data were collected from folkloristic approach, of collecting data from the priests and learned people enriched in traditional knowledge, especially Adi priests, and later, these folkloristic stories were verified in the books, journals and finally the renowned Professor of Arunachal Pradesh Tamo Mibang. In the stories, it has been revealed from a supernatural version of collection of beads and their possession by particular tribes, and these have formed a belief among them. At present, original beads are no more found to be manufactured by the Adis, rather these are

manufactured by Nepali people in nearby Assam through synthetic process. Original beads are very costly, sometimes one piece of small bead cost more than Rs 10,000 in 2020. Two small pieces of beads when verified in the Department of Geology of Rajiv Gandhi University, Arunachal Pradesh, the Department was of the opinion that these beads are quartz materials, as the broken pieces can cut the glass, which was tested and verified (personal communication with Aminul Laskar, Geology, RGU). So all these materials when observed from the perspectives of folklore, history, anthropology and finally geology, it has been found that the beads are originally natural materials, of organic and inorganic materials, but they hold a special sacred value in the Adi society. Currently, its high price, production value, and synthetic materials and artificial beads are opening a new door to the research, making us to understand the value of social change, but preserving the original value of the customs of the society. In this matter, the Adi society has formed a new relation with the people of Nepal residing in Arunachal Pradesh and Assam through trade relation of beads now. Further research may be established with the beads and their connection to the Tibetan culture too.

Conclusion

Thus, this present research shows that beads can be studied in various disciplines with various perspectives, in relation to its organic structure, materials used, stories related to it, which help us to understand the anthropological perspectives of the Adi society of Arunachal Pradesh, which is related to most of the Mongoloid ethnic groups. The continuation of this research on beads can open a new door in research of the North East Indian tribes and their connection of culture to the Tibetan plateau, as they belong to the Tibeto Burmese linguistic group, and hence, the connecting bridge between the culture, society and migration may be found,

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