

FUNERAL TRADITIONS OF THE IDU MISHMI TRIBE OF ARUNACHAL PRADESH

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***Abstract:** Funeral rituals, the last rites of every human being, play a significant role in traditional societies and reflect the traditional worldview which are orally transmitted from generation to generation and repeatedly performed. These are significant because they deal with the afterlife of the deceased and the well-being of the survivors. Almost all the traditional societies in the world follow a set of practices, customs and beliefs associated with death and funerals. These funeral rites and customs are concerned not only with the mourning, preparation and disposal of the body, but also with the well-being of the survivors and with the persistence of the spirit or memory of the deceased. A number of customs, practices, taboos, belief systems, rituals, narratives, etc. are closely and symbolically associated with funerals. This paper is an attempt to understand and document the funeral traditions of Idu Mishmi tribe of Arunachal Pradesh.*

INTRODUCTION

Ritual practices, one of the important aspects of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH), have been a focus of study for long. Edmund Leach (1968) suggested that the term “ritual” should be applied to all “culturally defined sets of behaviour,” that is, to the symbolical dimension of human behaviour as such, regardless of its explicit religious, social, or other content. For Leach, such behaviour should be regarded as a form of social communication or code of information, and analyzed in terms of its “grammar.” Ritual is thus treated as a cognitive category. Eliade (1987) mentioned that “rituals” are those conscious and voluntary, repetitious and stylized symbolic bodily actions that are centred on cosmic structures and/or sacred presences. Verbal behaviour such as chant, song and prayer are included in the category of bodily actions. Even more fundamentally, ritual is intentional body engagements in the paradigmatic forms and relationships of reality. As such, ritual brings not only the body but also that body’s social and cultural identity to the encounter with the transcendental realm. By conforming to models or paradigms that refer to the primordial past and that can be shared by many people, ritual also enables each person to transcend the individual self, and thus it can link many people

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together into enduring and true forms of community. Ritual draws into itself every aspect of human life, and almost every discipline of the social sciences and humanities has something to say about it. The body is evidently more important in religious experience than is often thought of.

Rituals are orally transmitted from generation to generation and play a significant role in tribal culture. Generally most of the rituals are associated with religion, life cycle ceremonies and agriculture. Funeral rituals, the last rite of human beings, play a significant role in the life cycle ceremonies of every culture. Among all the life cycle rituals, the funeral rites are significant because it deals with afterlife of the deceased person and well being of the survivors. Almost all the traditional societies in the world follow a set of practices, customs and beliefs associated with death and funerals. These funeral rites and customs are concerned not only with the mourning, preparation and disposal of the body, but also with the well-being of the survivors and with the persistence of the spirit or memory of the deceased. The various methods used for disposal of the body are linked to religious beliefs, climate and geography, and social status. Burial is associated with ancestor worship or beliefs about the afterlife; cremation is sometimes viewed as liberating the spirit of the deceased. Almost in all traditional societies, the corpse is prepared in some prescribed way before it is finally laid to rest. The funeral practices and rituals vary between cultures, and between religious affiliations within those cultures. A number of customs, beliefs, rituals, mourning, lamentations, narratives, chanting, and performances are closely associated with funeral rites. The customs, beliefs, practices, observances, taboos, performances associated with death are deeply associated with particular religious beliefs, and also have important psychological, sociological functions for the deceased as well as for the survivors.

Arnold van Gennep (1960) in his classic book *The Rites of Passage* discussed different kinds of life cycle ceremonies and the significance of those rituals. He pointed out that, when the activities associated with such ceremonies were examined in terms of their order and content, they can be distinguished into three major phases: Separation, transition, and incorporation. He said that "regeneration" is a law of life and of the universe: the energy which is found in any system gradually becomes spent and must be renewed at intervals in the social world through the rites of passage. He also explained in detail about the funeral rites and stated that funeral rites vary widely among different peoples and that further variations depend on the sex, age, and social position of the deceased.

Smith (1974) stated that funeral is only the first of a series of mortuary rites conducted on behalf of the spirit of the deceased. Although the funeral

has taken place, the spirit is still an unstable, dangerous, and polluted being that needs to be appeased and purified by a further series of rituals because the purification is a gradual process that ought to be accompanied by a regular series of rituals over a certain period of time. Namihira Emiko (1985) has stated that mortuary rituals function as devices to eliminate or diminish the pollution of death and finally recover a state of purity. According to Emiko, the pollution of death may be diminished by both the passage of time and the series of rituals, but the series of rituals is more important than the time taken to purify the pollution of death because pollution cannot be fully purified only by the passage of time. He further states that many factors have a bearing on the mortuary ritual: the religion of the deceased or of their family, the age at which the person died, their gender, their social status, the family's economic circumstances, and whether the death was a suicide, a miscarriage, an abortion, an accidental death, or even a violent death.

With this brief understanding, this present paper is an attempt to study and document the funeral traditions of the Idu Mishimi tribe of Arunachal Pradesh. The Idu Mishmi tribe of Arunachal Pradesh inhabit the districts of Dibang Valley, Lower Dibang Valley, Lohit district and a few pockets in the vicinity of East Siang and Upper Siang district. Empirical data for this study is collected through fieldwork by following the triangulation research methodology, i.e., observation, interview and audio-visual documentation.

DEATH, SHAMANS, AND RITUALS

Origin Myth of Death

In times immemorial, a man known as Sineru went to a village where he was summoned to stop the prevailing epidemic. Sineru was not confident that he would come back alive. Therefore he planted an *egambo* tree in his yard and asked his mother, wife and children to look after the plant. He also left *ishuru*, a bird, to communicate with his family. One day *ishuru* brought a message of death of his child. But Sineru thought it would be better to serve the people because a child can be obtained later on. The next time, the bird brought the message of his wife's death and Sineru preferred to stay and thought he could remarry. Then one day, *ishuru* brought the message of the death of his mother. Sineru's heart was broken, since he cannot get back a mother in his life again. He returned to his place and went to Athuka, a place through which every soul passes and he tried to locate if his mother's soul was passing through or not. After reaching home he hired Iruliru for chanting *anja* (mourning song) at the place to call back his mother's soul. But Iruliru was unsuccessful in the attempt. Therefore, Sineru himself, holding *kalinta tothobra* (herb) in his hand,

chanted *yah* continuously for five days. By virtue of his chants, his mother came back. But instead of earrings in her ears, she carried earth worms (signifying the grave). Sineru's second wife could not accept the form in which his mother came back. She drove her away with *aabripa* (a loom stick). Sineru was worried about this. Then an owl came and sought to keep the mother under his care.

Some days later, when Sineru came and enquired about his mother, the owl replied that she might have fallen in the mountain. Sineru enquired about this from other birds but they replied that they had never heard such sounds of falling. Sineru then saw some hair at the mouth of the owl, and a housefly came flying out. The housefly began doing all the activities which Sineru's mother did during her lifetime. He confirmed that the owl had eaten his mother. He became depressed since his mother could not come back in human form. He started chanting and wished that if his mother came back, the fish would begin climbing trees and rats would grow long teeth like tigers. Since all these were impossible, his mother never came back from the land of the soul. Since then, the *Igus* (shaman) chant all the words which had been recited by Sineru to stop the dead from coming back.

Shamans and Funeral Rituals

The funeral ritual practices of Idu Mishmis are unique in nature and generally performed for three to five days depending on the nature of death. The Idu Mishmis believe in afterlife and that after death, life is transformed from the materialistic world to the divine world, i.e., the land of the soul which is referred to as *Asia~lo~ko*. *Igu*, the shaman, plays an important role in funeral rituals and performs a number of rituals, dance and music, and offerings in the house of the deceased continuously for days and nights together. Several customs, practices, taboos, beliefs, offerings, oral narratives, dance and music are associated with this funeral ritual.

Igus are of two kinds. The first is highly experienced and officiates in rituals like *Yah*, *Reh*, *Amra-sey* etc., in which they need to be in full sacred costumes. The junior *Igus* act as medicine men and perform rituals like *Ayi*, *Atare*, *Alluthru* etc. Sacred dress and ornaments are part of *Igu* and they use costumes like *Amrala*, *Re~pu*, *A~we~to*, etc., in various ceremonies. Without the costumes, the *Igus* are considered incomplete. The costumes are kept with great care by the *Igu* in their houses in *Apito*. Among them, the principles of leading a better life exist in the form of sacred chants and hymns, mythology, rituals, customs and practices, origin narratives etc. The hymns and chants are sacred, and a member of the community is expected to abide by it from birth to death. The chanting of the hymns vividly describes the great relationship of man with

nature. The survival of the tribe till today is due to their understanding and belief of spiritual connection with Mother Nature. These chants and rituals are performed by the *Igu* and he is considered master of all supernatural spirits. In Idu Mishmi community, both men and women can become *Igu* and they both play an important role in the society. Certain important rituals like *Amar-se* (which is performed to protect family members from the evils), *Bro»cha na* (graveyard dance), *Ya* (ritual to guide the soul to the super natural world) and *Bro»fri* rituals are performed by elderly *Igus*.

Whenever a death occurs in the village, the relatives of the deceased go to the *Igu*'s house and inform him about the death and request him to come and perform the rituals. As soon as the priest gets information, at night, he starts chanting from *andaku* (drawing room of house), in order to find out the cause of the death. He tries to find out which evil spirit had killed the man/woman, which evil spirit or ghost had crossed the boundary (*la»ro»*), and eaten up the person. After knowing the cause of the death, he sleeps at night in his house and the next morning he gets ready to go to the deceased's house to perform the rituals. The *Igu* wears his traditional sacred dress and ornaments and takes several sacred objects and musical instruments along with him when he goes to perform the funeral.



Figure 1: *Igu* in his sacred dress

Before leaving his house, the *Igu* performs a chant and invokes the chief of the evil spirits and invites the spirit to accompany him. It is believed that the other spirits may attack his house when he goes to perform the funeral rituals. Therefore, he chants, cuts a *tothro* plant (bamboo), blows the horn, and locks the house and leaves. After invoking the spirits, he should not go back to his house, and if this rule is violated, it is believed that the spirits will destroy his house. Normally, two persons assist *Igu* in rituals. Therefore, *Igu* chants for the assistants also in order to protect them from the evil spirits. On reaching the house (where the person had died), the assistants help the *Igu* in his rituals. They make sure that menstruating women do not touch the sacred items, nor prepare any food for the *Igu*.

Iguthro» refers to hosting the *Igu* in a special way. A few persons are deputed to look after the special needs of the *Igu* for the rituals. On hearing about death, close relatives bring mithun, pig, hen and local rice beer (*yu*). These relatives prepare food - young girls/women serve *yu* to the guests, while young men/women or elderly women/men serve food. Some guests may refuse to eat food in the house of the deceased, so one of the neighbours is requested to host it. For this purpose, a special structure known as *la»ro»* (made of bamboo) is prepared. This structure is semi-circular in shape and built away from the house. The food has to be served from the *la»ro»*, and the one serving should neither cross the *la»ro»* nor touch the guest. If by mistake, he/she touches the guest, he/she has to attend the full death ritual ceremony.

Funeral Practices

There are a number of rituals and practices connected to the funeral among the Idu Mishmis. These are discussed below.

Bro»to - Construction of Grave

Bro»to refers to the construction of a new grave for the deceased person. It is usually constructed by relatives and neighbors. Normally, the size of the grave is about 6 feet length and the depth is about 5 meters. After digging the grave, walls are made of bricks on the four sides and the flooring is done with cement. Once done, it looks like a well constructed furnished room with bed, wardrobe etc. Sometimes the interior is also decorated with wall papers.

As soon as a person dies, the corpse is washed and clothed with new traditional clothes. The body is in extended position with hands crossed over the chest and folded palms. Before the burial, the dead body is placed in *a»lon»ga* or *idriku* (refers to the place where skulls are displayed in the house). Here, the body is laid on a carpet, on which 2/3 large bed sheets, or a mattress is



Figure 2: Offering of things inside the grave

placed. The direction of placement is according to the direction of the house. Normally, the dead body is kept opposite to *idriku* where the heads of hunted animals are displayed.

Coins and paper currencies are placed in the palm of the deceased person. It is believed that the deceased person will buy water in *aÈ"loÈ"chiko*, the world of the dead. *AloÈ"anini*, the owner of *aÈ"loÈ"chiko*, will not give water unless he is paid money and therefore the relatives offer money to the deceased person.



Figure 3& 4: Offering of piglet and hen inside the grave



Figure 5 & 6: Relatives with offerings placed inside the grave

They also offer bamboo leaves to use in the world of the dead in order to chase away flies and insects. If he was a hunter or murderer or possessed a gun, one of his relatives will first fire the gun in the air through a window. This is known as *a»so»kata*. It is believed that the people and animals that were killed (by the dead man) would be waiting to take revenge on him. So the gut is shot to give warning to the vengeful souls.



Figure 7 & 8: The deceased placed in the grave, and the grave being closed

If the dead person is poor then an arrow is shot in the air, and then the gun is shot in the air outside the veranda before the body is carried to the graveyard. One shot is fired in the graveyard too.

If the death is normal, the *Igu* comes with *tothro* plant, chants and puts the plant in *andaku* (veranda of the house). Before entering the house, he goes to a specially made hut (*Atita Ako»pra*) to perform the rituals the whole night. The assistants accompany the *Igu* and perform on the *gerambu* (small drum) and blow the *ajiru* (buffalo hornpipe). The host gives some money to the *Igu* to perform the rituals. The *Igu* chants and performs the rituals for the whole



Figure 9: *Igu* performing funeral ritual

night without sleeping. During the rituals, he communicates with *mrega* (the soul) and the time of the communication depends on *Igu*. It may be early in the morning or mid night, before burying the corpse. This ritual is called *Abri»gi»*. Some *Igus* conduct this conversation with the soul after burial and before the performance of *Bro»ch na* (the graveyard dance).

Abri»gi» is performed before the burial. When *Igu* performs *Abri»gi»*, one of his assistants sits behind and plays the *ka»li»to* (flat gong). This gong should not be performed continuously, but at regular intervals. Everyone present there maintains silence when the *Igu* performs *Abri»gi»*. Otherwise, it is believed that because of the noise, the soul will not have a proper conversation with the priest. During *Abri»gi»*, aged men and women who know the language of *Igu* sit near him and listen to the communication carefully. Many people do not understand the priestly language; however, they sit and listen to the conversation.

Alimbro » is performing on the gong (*ka»li»to*) after the burial. Here too, as during the performance of *Abri»gi»*, everybody maintains silence.

Post-Burial Rituals

The time of burial depends upon the family members. If the relatives have to travel a long distance, then the burial time is based on their arrival. Before

taking the dead body to the grave, all the belongings of the deceased are taken to the graveyard and arranged in the newly constructed grave. Then the corpse is carried away along with a mattress to the graveyard. Those who carry the corpse make a peculiar sound like “*ho0000...*”, and hearing the sound, others make way for them. The relatives also give a certain amount of money to the persons who carry the corpse. The relatives follow the corpse to the graveyard and place the corpse inside the newly constructed grave. Generally, the corpse is kept in a lying position on the new bed in the east-west direction, and all the new items like crockery, wardrobe etc., are kept inside the grave. After this, they close the top of the grave with concrete or wooden platforms.

After the burial, they all come back to the house of the deceased and the *Igu* performs *Alluthru* (purification ritual). This ritual is primarily to purify the persons from the evil spirits. Whoever enters the dead person’s house cannot go back without doing *Alluthru*. Here, the *Igu* chants and touches the person’s body or head with bamboo leaves to drive away the malevolent spirits. Everyone has to stay in the house till the priest performs the final *Alluthru* in the house.



Figure 10: *Alluthru* being performed

After *Alluthru*, the *Igu* performs *Amra se* in order to protect family members from the evils. Generally it is performed throughout the night. In the ritual of *Ali brula* the *Igu* invokes the souls of all the family members and he checks

who is in danger from evil spirit, also checks what bad tidings would befall them. He asks the souls about their problems, and it is said that he comes to know who is going to die a natural or unnatural death in that family or in the village.

After *Ali brula*, *Igu* performs *Mraba khusu* in the house. In the ritual of *Mraba khusu* the *Igu* wears all the ornaments, and accompanied with musical instruments, he chants all the history of Idus and tells the story of Sineru, and invokes the supernatural spirits. After performing *Mraba khusu* the priest takes the *tothro* plant with him, chants for the protection of his assistants and musical performers who are going to perform *Bro»cha na* (the graveyard dance).



Figure 11: *Mraba khusu* being performed

Bro»cha na is performed by the *Igu* in the graveyard after the burial. During this ritual, the *Igu* gives food to *mrega*, the soul of the deceased, and tells that he is not alive anymore, and that is why he is giving food at the graveyard. The *Igu* tells the soul not to come back to the world of the living. Then he offers rice beer to the soul and says that he may come back to the human world when stone is rotten and when bamboo reaches the clouds. It implies that the soul should never return to the world of the living. The *Igu* also lays down the condition that the soul may return to this world only when the

color of the *evina* leaves disappears. The *ewuoo* bird cannot fly very high, and lives on the ground. *Igu* cuts off one claw of the bird, buries it in the ground, and tells the soul that it may return only when the bird is able to fly above the big trees in the forest. He warns the soul that if it tries to come back in the form of a rat, or *ejikru* (a small bird), it will be eaten up by the house ghosts *Aasu, Andro, Eru, Anda*. He further states that the soul may return only when the tiger stops roaring. This ritual of *Bro»cha na* generally lasts for more than three hours.

Ya ritual is performed in the deceased person's house by the priest. It is performed to guide the soul to the supernatural world. The primary difference between *ya* and *bro»cha na* is mainly the difference in the duration of chants. In *Ya* the chants continue for three nights and in the case of *Bro»cha*, it is only for two nights. It depends on the family member to do only *Bro»cha na* or to perform *Yah*. Here, the *Igu* feeds the soul and guides the journey of the soul from the entrance of the house through several mountains which is called *Mabra*. He describes a number of places on the journey of the soul and guides the soul properly to its place. During this journey, where ever hills are encountered, he provides a ladder to climb and where rivers occur, he provides bridges to cross the rivers. The *Igu* guides every step of the journey of the soul till the soul reaches its destination.



Figure 12: *Igu* performing *Ya* ritual

There are certain restrictions for *Igu* who perform *Ya* ritual. Restrictions for those days are that the *Igu* should not eat any kind of mushroom, onion, or garlic; he should not go near the weaving areas, nor wash clothes. He should not take food prepared by menstruating women, and he should stay away from sexual relationship. If *Igu* performs *Ya* for the first time in his priestly service, then he has to follow the restrictions for ten days in his house. If it is the second time, then he has to follow the restrictions for nine days. If it is the third time, then he has to follow the restrictions for eight days, and so forth.

In the ritual of *Ayukhishu* the *Igu* narrates many stories about different types of bamboos like, *aruto* (big size bamboo), *abrato* (small size bamboo), story of *ewena* leaf and story of *ayumbra*, *angro ashothrula* etc. After this, the priest performs *Mraba yo*, in which he narrates the history of Idu Mishmis and he guides the soul to the dead world crossing different types of *mabra* (mountain) and gives food to the soul whenever they reach different types of *mabra*.

In the ritual of *Nathru tamro Mrayawete* the *Igu* chants for the people who helped during the funeral ceremony in cooking, serving, digging the grave, who offered things to the deceased person etc., in order to protect them from the spirits. It is believed that sometimes the spirit will go along with these people and therefore this ritual is performed to protect them.

In *Lomi na*» the *Igu* chants in order to send away all the bacteria and bad diseases like cancer, and leprosy from the house by calling all the supernatural powers. This will protect the family members from all bad diseases.

In *Andomo ro*» to ritual, the soul is guided by the *Igu* beyond the *Andomo*, and on the way, a river has to be crossed with the help of a boat. As an enactment, the *Igu* bargains with a boatman in order to carry the soul across the river. After they cross the river, the *Igu* through his chants returns to the living world. After crossing the *Andomo*, the soul can rest at any place in the vast expanse of territory of the after world. In this ritual, the soul of the deceased is to be symbolically sent across the river, therefore one person acts as a boatman by wearing an Assamese towel on his forehead and another person tells the boatman, "one person is going with lots of luggage and animals". The person who tells the boatman should be very cautious while explaining and answering the boatman's queries because it refers to the dead person's soul. By mistake if he says, "many people are going", then it is believed that some more deaths will occur in reality. He should clearly state that one aged male is coming or aged female is coming or young boy or young girl, or baby girl or baby boy. One other person acts as if he is bargaining with the boatman about the charges for the boat and the boatman replies in Assamese.

It is important to note that the person who acts as bargainer should not act the same role in other death rituals for a year. If he violates this rule, it is believed that he will die.

In the ritual of *Ashotho*», the family members sit in a line and the *Igu* will suck each individual's forehead or stomach of family member with *kaÀliÀta* (herbal plant root) in his mouth; and the *Igu* also places a feather of a rooster on the hair of each family member. This is performed to purify the members of the deceased's family.

Asa ji» is performed at the end of the death ritual ceremony. Here the *Igu* carries *aweto* (the headgear) in his mouth, or sometimes a live rooster, and with a sword in his hand, drives away the evil spirits from that place. This ritual is performed in *alonga* or *edriku* of the house. After chasing away the spirits, the *Igu* goes outside the house and kills the rooster with his mouth, drinks the raw blood, and takes out the liver.

The next morning, he throws the *tothro* plant from where he had cut it. He throws the plant where no one can touch it, and leaves the house to depart for his own house. The family members of the deceased offer rice beer, *aku*, rooster and other meat to the *Igu*. Taking all these, the *Igu* leaves for his house and on the way, far from the house of the deceased, he makes *la»ro*» (boundary made of bamboo) and invokes all the powerful spirits, whom he invoked earlier. There he offers them food, rice beer, *etola*, and *aku* and requests the spirits not to follow him to his house and sends them to their own places.

Thereafter, after a gap of some months, *Bro»fri* is performed. This ritual has to be performed within one year of the funeral. In this, the family members perform the same rituals that they had performed earlier during the funeral. They make a similar kind of grave and bury beer, different types of seeds, rice seeds, clothes, vegetables, and bamboo baskets. The close relatives of the deceased and the members of the community take part in this ritual and the host holds a feast for all the people with food and drinks. This ritual concludes the funeral rites of the Idu Mishmis.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The above mentioned ritual practices are generally performed during normal/natural death. However there are some minor differences in rituals in certain kinds of death. When a baby dies in the mother's womb or within ten days of birth then the father or the mother places the infant in a small basket (*agra*) and hangs it from a tree which is situated a little away from the village. Generally, this is done secretly. During this kind of death, both the mother and the father maintain certain restrictions for five months. It is believed that

when a child dies, the soul lingers on the earth for a certain period, roaming aimlessly and feeding on the sap or little trees and bushes to satisfy its hunger and thirst. After some time, it dissolves into thin air. But if a baby dies in ten days time, then they perform the death rituals similar to that of adults. However, young girls/boys and unmarried men/women are not allowed to attend the funerals because it is believed that the same kind of death may befall them in future.

When a husband or wife dies, then the surviving spouse follows certain restrictions. They should not eat banana, sugarcane, squirrel, birds like *pidi* (peacock) and *peba*, fish, or any other big animals like tiger, bear, deer, and monkey. Even garlic, onion, and sweet potatoes are not allowed to be eaten. When a priest dies, first they close the eyes and mouth, and wash the dead body of the priest. They shake the priest's *amra»la*, blow the hornpipe, and play the musical instrument *re»pu*; one screams "hoooooooo..." aloud, while one plays the small drum. After this, they perform the rituals by calling other priests to the deceased's house.

In unnatural deaths, the *Igu* uses the *ashowuu* (small branch of tree) in every chant and in *Anja*. The *Igu* holds it in his hand or hangs the branch with a rope while performing the chant. Different types of unnatural death rituals are seen - suicide, murder, fire accident, death in water, etc. If the dead is female, then ritual performance is done for four days. *Alluthru* concludes the rituals. So, on the fourth night, everyone has to spend one night in the jungle. In the same way, on the death of a male, on the fifth night they have to stay in the forest. Boundary protection (*la»ro»*) is made by the priest with bamboo. For this, they make a structure out of *apito* bamboo which is found only in the hilly area or from *aruto* bamboo which is available near rivers or at the edge of the village. Here, they sacrifice raw eggs and place the broken shell over a bamboo sliver or throw a stone and cross the structure. But menstruating women cannot cross this structure; they have to go by its side after throwing the stone or bamboo sliver. In an unnatural death, *Alluthru* is not performed before the end of the funeral rituals, but in normal conditions *Alluthru* can be performed prior to it. In the case of a murder, before the washing of the body and closing of eyes and mouth, the hornpipe is played. One plays the *repu*, one other shouts "hoooooooo..." into the ears of the deceased, while some others play the small drum. On the dead body, they sacrifice a bear and then burn it. Even in the graveyard, they practice the same.

There are some restrictions in offering goods while burying in the grave. When a woman dies, a weaving loom is not allowed to be buried along with the corpse. It is believed that if one does so, then the deceased person will cut

the survivors. If a male person dies, then they do not bury the locally made rain coat (*elebe*), but they burn it. Before burying the hat (*apo»tolo*) of the deceased, they make a hole in it, and it is believed that in the death world there will be rain all the time where he or she goes. It will create a problem if the hat is put in the grave during cultivation as it will spoil all the grains in the death world. Again, when an *Igu* dies, the headgear (*a»we»to»*) is not buried if he did not have the power of *a»rosiyato* (i.e., to fly). If such an *Igu* is buried with the headgear, then he cannot walk and run away from the *alo»anini* (the owner of the underworld) who would imprison him and make him a slave. It becomes very easy to catch the priest when he is not able to fly.

The Idu Mishmis believe in a place of confession (*adege*), where the dead confess whatever they did during their lifetime and how they lived on earth. There are different *adege* for different persons. If the person has performed *Reh* in his life time, then the soul will go to *Remo Adeanuli Adege* for confession; if a person has committed murder then his/her soul will go towards *Athuro»echachi Metro»aya»mko Adege*; if a person was a hunter, then the soul will go to *Aru»go-Adepo»lo»*. After confession in *adage*, every soul goes towards the death world known as *Mudu-a»lo»ko»*. After this they go to the final death world which is known as *Asia»lo»ko»*. The poor or the rich have a similar fate; their souls go to the final death world. But the servant has a different death world which is called *Etadi-aichi Adepothu»*. Here, the servant's soul confesses everything what he/she did in his/her life. The soul of those who had sexual relationship with servants will also go to the servant's death world.

All the beliefs described above, ritual practices and narratives clearly reflect the traditional world view of death among the Idu Mishmis. These funeral rites and customs are concerned not only with the mourning, preparation and disposal of the body, but also with afterlife of the deceased person, the well-being of the survivors and with the persistence of the spirit or memory of the deceased. Idu Mishmis strongly believe that there is a life for human beings after death and therefore they bury the deceased person in a well constructed room and offer all the required things like bed, blankets, crockery, fan, TV, grains, piglets, hen, money, dress, umbrella, ornaments, etc. to the deceased person, believing that these things are required for the afterlife. The funeral practices of Idu Mishmis not only deal with burial and afterlife of the deceased person, but also with the well-being of the survivors. The main function of the *Igu* is to perform rituals in order to direct and drive the deceased soul to the underworld and make sure that the spirit will not come back to the living world. These rituals involve chanting, music, dance, offerings etc. The shaman also performs rituals like *Alluthru* to purify the survivors/people who took part in the funeral ceremony. It shows that the spirit of the deceased

person may affect the survivor and therefore they believe that they have to get purified through rituals. These belief systems, rituals and narratives are orally transmitted from generation to generation.

However, in the modern social-cultural context, these practices and belief systems are gradually losing their value due to several reasons. One of the major reasons is religious conversion. A considerable amount of religious conversion took place among the Idu Mishmis tribe particularly from indigenous faith to Christianity. Those who have converted do not follow the traditional practices associated with festivals, agriculture, or lifecycle ceremonies including funeral ceremony. In Christian funerals, the church priest plays an important role, and not the *Igu*. The priest prays and sprinkles holy water on everyone in the name of Jesus and prays for the soul to rest in peace and also for the well being of the survivors. Again, *Anja* is an integral part of funeral ceremony and it cannot be performed by everyone. Nowadays only a few elderly people know how to perform *Anja* in funerals. The present generation is not aware of *Anja* and its function. There is a change in the construction of the grave also. Earlier, they dug the grave and covered it with wood which can be used for agriculture after a certain period, but now they build the grave with cement and bricks which becomes a permanent structure. As a result, the agricultural land is also reduced.

In modern days there is a huge demand for *Igu* to perform the rituals, but there are few *Igus*. The younger generation is not interested in becoming an *Igu* because of the modern education and employment, and there is no formal institution to learn the knowledge of *Igu*. The death ratio of the existing *Igus* is also very high due to alcohol and health problems. As a result, the knowledge of performing rituals and their functions are slowly disappearing from the society. Traditionally, the family that hosted the rituals offered a rooster or some special portion of the sacrificed pigs or mithuns to the *Igu* as a remuneration for his service. Nowadays, they give cash payment to the priest, and the amount of money depends on the financial status of the person. At times they receive up to INR 20,000 or more. Therefore, the poor are unable to afford the expenses towards funeral rituals. It is believed by the Idu Mishmis that the changes occurring in traditional belief systems, rituals and practices harm the society and as a result several unnatural deaths are happening in Idu Mishmi society today.

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