

Traditional Healing Practices of the Apatanis in Arunachal Pradesh: Beyond Priests, Rituals and Rites

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ABSTRACT

The traditional healing system among Apatanis can be defined as a set of beliefs and practices used by the people through various rituals and rites for wellbeing of humanity and health. It also includes the taboos and use of herbs as medicine to compliment the rituals. In most of the cases of traditional healing system among Apatani, it is totally influenced by their religious belief where spirit and deities are considered responsible for all ailment but in this article, researcher will be discussing that traditional healing practices only which is practiced without rituals and rites.

Keywords: Traditional Healing System

Introduction

The main objective of this paper is to study the traditional healing practices without priest, rituals and rites among the Apatanis. This paper is based largely on the information gather through filed work. Wherever possible secondary sources have been also consulted. The Apatanis have traditionally settled themselves in the seven villages in Lower Subansiri District of Arunachal Pradesh.

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Among the Apatani healing system, certain rituals are practiced without the help of a priests' chant, animal sacrifices and using medicinal herbs. It is practiced in case of minor ailments like-headache, stomach ache, eye disease etc. The minor ailments that can be healed or treated without priest, ritual and rites are-

- 1) **Adhing achi (headache)** - in this case they used to take rice bear (*O'-Pokhe*) with chilli to get relief from the headache.
- 2) **Akhii achi (stomach ache)** – In this case one or two small hot coal is taken out from the hearth of fire and the patient is asked to take water inside the mouth and throw it over the coal on a particular coal by saying *Diipii Nyimung, Diiso miha hamang saniing hoka diipa giniing siikii*. This means they just ate leaves; they did not hurt anybody. Later on with that particular coal they marked encircle around the naval called *Khiinii-Pagey Nii* and after encircling throw it away outside the house.

Figure 1.Khiinii Pagey nii (encircling of naval)



Sources: Taken from field study

- 3) **Ami-achi (eye disease)** – In case of eye disease like irritation, itchy, gritty, yellowish or greenish discharge, redness and swelling of the eyelids, milk from mother's breast is applied onto the eyes. Sometimes dew drops from the grass are also put in the early

morning to get relief from pain and sensation burning in the eyes. Another way to heal eye disease is *Meliyang Riniing*. In this case two to four small clip called *Meliyang Eliyo* made of bamboo is prepared and with this clip wind is blown through the mouth onto the eyes and tied or put it on the hair, till eye ailment is recovered.

Figure 2 Applying mother's milk on

Baby's eyes to heal eye diseases



Figure Meliyang Eliyo

(artificial knife made of bamboo to wear during eye disease)



Sources: Taken from field study

- 4) ***Takey Byunii (sucking out of germs)***- This involves the sucking out the *Takey* (germs) in the form of blood from the body. In this process, the horn of buffalo and bamboo tube is used. Particularly in case of joint pain like the knee, elbow, back pain etc. The buffalo horn or bamboo tube is fixed into a position in pain area. It is kept at least for half an hour and slightly cut and blood is sucked out with mouth. In this type of healing, a particular person is there known *Takey Nyibu*. This process takes the whole day, sometimes even extended to next day if patient is not relieved. However it is done without any rituals and sacrificial. Basically this type healer is a female. This type of healing is done especially to old aged except in case of snake bite. It is believed that this kind of healing practices is there since the time of *Abotani*, mythical progenitor of Apatanis. Therefore sometime it is said that *Takey Nyibu* (priest) was the first priest.
- 5) ***Siiyi-Siibu (allergy)***- In case of sever itchy, irritation and look terrible on skin in any part of the body, a very small amount of rice is taken in the leaf of a maize, along with small piece of meat, rice beer is taken and wind is blown through mouth with these objects to the patients and throw it away outside the house. It is believed that throwing out this small amount of items is to convince or the unseen spirit not to trouble the patient anymore. A part from this *Pilla*, an alkaline liquid derived from water percolated through the ashes of specific dried herbs and plants is also used for allergy.

- 6) ***Byaku Panyi Panyii***- It is a kind of healing that practiced among the Apatanis without the help of *Nyibu* and without the sacrifice of any animals. It is practiced when a small child does not walk within the appropriate age. In such a case, the child's maternal or paternal uncle known as *Aku-Anii*, simply go to jungle and bring small stick known as *Byaku Panyi* for the child. With the help of this stick the parent try to make the child walk.

Conclusion

There is no written document regarding the traditional knowledge on the healing practices without priest, rituals and rites. These are passed through oral tradition from one generation to another generation. Today many people do not follow the old system and due partly due to the introduction of modern medicine and adoption of new religion. Nowadays people are more comfortable with modern way of curing ailments the rate of mortality is far than it was.

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