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## IDU MISHMIS OF ARUNACHAL PRADESH: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC PROFILE

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**Abstract:** Idu Mishmis are amongst the least studied tribes in India. This paper provides the ethnographic profile of the Idu Mishmis, a frontier tribe residing at the Dibang Valley district. A total of 8 households were selected for the study. The data was collected by using ethnographic methods (participant observation and in-depth interviews) with key informants (2019). All the data that was collected were used as individual case studies. This study attempts to provide an ethnographic profile of the Idu Mishmis as it existed years ago, as it's relatively the same as before. The objective is to provide a compilation of the various institutions, livelihoods and the cultural fabric of the Idu Mishmi tribe.

**Keywords:** Idu Mishmi; Dibang Valley; Ethnography; Arunachal Pradesh.

**1. Introduction:** One of the major residing tribes The Dibang Valley is the Mishmis. There are three main tribes of the Mishmis, Idu (known as Chulikota),<sup>1</sup> Digaru (known as Taraon) and Miju (known as Kaman) as explained earlier. The Idu Mishmis mainly live in the Dibang Valley District along with other minor tribes with a population of 8004 (Census of India, 2011). They have a distinct dialect, which falls under the Tibeto-Burman group of languages.

**2. Physical Characteristics:** The physical characteristics of the Idu Mishmi belong to the Mongoloid stock and they speak a distinct form of language, which belongs to the Tibeto-Burman family of languages (Burling & Post, 2017). There are two dialects, Midu and Mithu. Their difference lies in a few words and toning variations<sup>2</sup>. The Idu Mishmis tell the following story to explain their style of haircut: 'The Supreme God Inni, desired that there should be human beings on the earth, and created four men Mesa, Ami &, Mosa and Idu. When they arrived on the earth they felt hungry, and asked Inni what they should eat.' Inni replied, "Hunt whatever animal you get in the forest; and depend on its meat." Accordingly, they all went to the forest and finding a python, killed it, and with great rejoicing cooked it together. When it was ready, they sat in a row, and Mesa being the eldest, served them the cooked meat on their plates, giving to each as much as he could eat. But, as Idu sat at the end of the row, and was shy of his elders, he did not ask for sufficient amount and hence his portion was smaller than those of his brothers. When Mesa came to know of this, he felt sorry for Idu, and calling him, said, "you sat in the corner and ate your meat with your eyes lowered, and I could not recognize you. Henceforth you must put a mark on your head, so that I can recognize you even from a distance." After this the Idus began to cut the hair in their characteristic manner (Baruah, 1960).

**3. Mythical Origin of the Idu Mishmis:** "Two children were born to Idu Mishmi parents, one was a Human and the other one was a Tiger. One day they went to the forest to hunt and they killed an Animal. Post that, the human child cooked the meat and ate it and the tiger ate it raw. So, the human child in astonishment asked his brother, the Tiger, if you are hungry one day, will you eat me also? The Tiger replied, yes, I would eat you also. They go back to their parents, and the parents are in shock after learning about the Tiger's reply, they decided to have a competition amongst the kids (Tiger and Human), and decided whoever loses the competition will have to leave the village and go. So, it was decided that the tiger will cross the river and the human child will cross a bridge and whoever crosses it first would win. To aid the Human Child, the parents released Ants in the body of the Tiger, in that process, the Tiger got distracted and started scratching his body rigorously (that's how a Tiger has his stripes). After that, the Human Child easily crossed the bridge first and won the competition. That's how the Tiger had to leave the village and move to the Jungle for the rest of his life."<sup>3</sup>

'Once a terrible fire Inni-yala-Phri, which burnt all the living creatures in it, devastated the earth. The Supreme God Inni was sorry to see the earth empty and deserted. So he decided to repopulate it with living beings and entrusted Inni-Macelan and Ela Amide with the task. In course of time, Ela Amide gave birth to two children. The younger was a monkey. As time passed, the monkey grew very wicked, and whenever he got a chance, used to destroy the crops in the fields. Thus, Inni Macelan grew weary of the conduct of

<sup>1</sup> Idu Mishmis are called Chulikota Mishmis because of their distinctive hairstyle, with hair being cropped around the head. The people of the plains whom the Idu Mishmis had trade relations with perhaps gave this nomenclature.

<sup>2</sup> Toning variations is the ability to speak highly or softly on the basis of how one is feeling or what one is expressing. This is a common trick that used in speeches, poetry recitations, etc.

<sup>3</sup> As narrated by Lokha Elapra (Idu Mishmi) 35+ from Roing, Lower Dibang Valley.



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his younger child, and his love for him changed into hatred. He decided to get rid of him by a trick. He heated a stone, and made the monkey sit upon it. The monkey's backside got burnt and he ran away to the jungle. After that the monkey and his descendants started Living in the forest.'<sup>4</sup>

It is concluded from the above that Idu Mishmi folklore only talks about repopulation of the earth by their gods after the great fire and not about its existence before the great fire. These supernatural beings helped in the restoration of earth and is not a physical being like the sun, moon, etc. as portrayed today but metaphysical, eternal and spiritual in nature.

**4. Family life:** An Idu village is usually a collection of homesteads, each consisting of a single family of parents and children living together as one unit. The Idus practice polygamy wherein each wife has a separate space of her own (Apinku) within the same home. A domestic group / family may also include other persons related to the family, such as widows, orphans and infirm persons (Baruah, 1960). The grandfather is the one treated with utmost respect and the father is the Researcheritative head, wherein he has a say in all matters that concern the family. Amongst the Idu Mishmis, nuclear, joint and extended joint type families exist. The women of the household take care of the food (collection and preparation), collection of firewood, etc. The son is the heir of the property, and the daughters of the family get the mother's possessions. Male members, in case of a deceased father, maintain the headship of the family the oldest male offspring takes his place as the head.

**5. Kinship pattern:** Their kinship pattern is patrilineal, and their relationships are accounted through the male lineage. Their kinship pattern may be called classificatory, as they use certain lineal names for direct relatives and collinear terms for collateral relatives (Baruah, 1960). The Term Naba is used for one's father, and similarly Naba puiya is used to address one's uncle (fathers older brother) and Naba Iyiya are used to address the father's younger brother. The grandfather, father and Uncle's are treated with higher respect than any other relation. After this, the mother and the mother's brothers are in the line for respect. The relationship between siblings is a strict and a formal one. Young men usually call each other by their names, but if there is someone elder to you (male) then aapeiya is used, and in the case of females, apuiya is used. Married people address each other by the name of their eldest children, for example, if the eldest child is called Seme, then the mother will be called Seme Nani and similarly the father will be called Seme Naba.

**6. Formal and informal education:** For the Idu Mishmis, education is not the formal institutional process that an individual normal undergoes in their lifetime. Their main focus is to pass on their customs, norms, and traditional way of life, food, etc. to the younger generation. The penetration of education into the Mishmi hills is very recent, after 1947, with lots of formal and informal institutions sponsored by the Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram (VKA), Ramakrishna Mission (RKM), Kendriya Vidyalayas (KV), Vivekananda Kendriya Vidyalayas (VKV), etc. at the same time; there are Christian Missionaries who have their institutions in the area. Although the increased number of "Indianised" educational institutions coming to Dibang Valley is surprising in its own self. When the Researcher decided about this study and the probable language gap, but as soon as the fieldwork started, the ground reality was shocking. "Hindi" was the most spoken language of the state, and everyone spoke to the Researcher in Hindi. Many younger Idu Mishmis have migrated out of their villages and moved to urban areas for better opportunities. They don't depend on the forests for their livelihood and they have moved to various sorts of formal technical education available outside their lands and forest (doctors, lawyers, nurses, healthcare, engineers, etc.).

**7. Healthcare:** The Idu mishmis had their own traditional methods of curing diseases (mentioned in the later half of this chapter). In spite of having healthcare facilities, some of them still believe sicknesses are cause due to the evil spirits. As a result of which, they suffered critically. The ceremonies go on for days, and relief and the causation of the disease are achieved slower. But the younger generation is more familiarised with modern health care facilities and they prefer going to the Hospitals for faster relief. Even to know the causation of the disease (wherein also a traditional ritual is attached), the youth now days prefer to go ahead with scientific medical testes. This trend is changing amongst the elders also, as the kids are taking them to hospitals in the advent of sickness. However, they have not shunned their traditional methods of curing diseases completely, most of the Idu Mishmi families end up doing both, Traditional way; Bamuni (Igu) and modern Health care as well.

**8. Clothes and Jewellery:** Idu Mishmi women are excellent weavers and are blessed with great aesthetics. Traditional clothes and jewellery of the Idu Mishmis include a wide array of headgears, varieties of garments with different designs, colours and patterns woven in black, red, dark green and yellow for the upper and lower bodies and simply beaded neckpieces and metallic jewellery. Idu Mishmi women wear loose fitted bodice and a fitted, stripped (traditional design) cloth (popularly known as the Mekhela) around their waist. It is a wrap around skirt in mechanism, consists a variety of skirts such as Thuwe Juputu, Thnoye, Thuma, Thuwe Pupra and the bodice is

<sup>4</sup> As narrated by Lokha Elapra (Idu Mishmi) 35+ from Roing, Lower Dibang Valley.



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called Etopolo. Idu men wear a thick war coat called the Etondre usually made with stinging nettle or human hair and is interestingly woven by the menfolk. They consider this as one of their prized possessions. The colour pattern of this war coat is very simple, its black, red and white. The men also wear a loincloth called the Laoi-Hasi a rend the waist and a sleeveless woven shirt is worn on the upper body called Etomaju, Etombu, Etoko, Etopu, etc. these shirts are either made from cotton or wool. The jewellery includes, metallic lekapo and Arulo along with Andisu and Akhokhre (earrings). Apotolo, Apotolo-Juhe, Apotolo Ger-Andu, Apotolo Kulutu are the headgears of the menfolk made from cane and bamboo. Idu men are gifted bamboo and cane weavers, and it shows in the intricacy of their headgears. There is a bag made of bearskin called Anukochi, which is exclusively for the menfolk.

**9. Idu House:** The traditional Idu house is usually built strongly with leaves (roof) and Bamboo and Forest wood. The size and length of the house usually depends on the number of wives an Idu man possesses. Each wife has a separate room with a fireplace, sleeping and cooking arrangements (Apinku). The walls and the raised floor of the house are made with split bamboos supported with wooden vertical and horizontal posts and planks and the roof is thatched either with palm (Injuna; Calamus erectus) leaves or straw (Ako) (Baruah, 1960). The house is long and not very wide, “with a long passage have considerable amount of rooms all in one side, and an Idu House is like a train corridor” (Baruah, 1960). As one enters the house, the first room is the Alonga wherein one side of the room is considered to be sacred and a place only for men (where women are not allowed to even pass by the wall as they believe that the place is occupied by the spirit of house called Andro Zenu that may cause harm to them, so, they have to go from the other side around the room) and Amenido, where the skulls of the hunted (wild) and domesticated animals are kept. This is where men perform the hunting rituals. After this, comes the room designated to women. Each room has its arrangements to store supplies, racks and shelves called the Ato (where one stores smoked meat, fish), Andu and A-Poh (where one stores domestic articles used for daily activities) respectively. Phiri is the place where they store water and utensils; this place usually leads to the A-Soka (Backdoor) leading to the kitchen garden and the pigsty. Andaru is a raised verandah adjacent to the main house and parallel to the main platform of the house used for drying food, crops, etc. The pigsty is usually constructed underneath the Andaru. The granary (Ako) is constructed as a separate entity just next or in front of the house on bamboo stilts.

**10. Agriculture, Food habits and Beverages:** Agricultural pattern is mainly Jhum (shifting agriculture). However, now this pattern also is changing and the Idu Mishmis have resorted to a well-settled and flourished type of cultivation. The agricultural produce mainly includes a wide array of paddy, roots, potatoes, and a huge selection of green leaves. Millets are also locally grown, finger millet and foxtail millet. Mushrooms are also grown along with bamboo shoots. Idu Mishmis hunt wild animal meat, squirrels, birds, fish, etc. Pork meat (From Pigs) are also a popular protein consumed by the Idu Mshmi men, however, Idu women are traditionally forbidden to consume Pork meat so, they stick to poultry, birds and fish. The locally brewed rice beer Yu/Yuchi is the main beverage prepared from rice or rice mixed millets or maize. Yu/Yuchi is paramount to the culture of the Idu Mishmis, no social gathering or ritual is complete without serving this brew. The Idu Mishmi women prepare this brew. There are social taboos (discussed in the next segment of this chapter) that are to be followed while this beverage is brewed by the womenfolk, that includes women in their menstruation cycle are forbidden to make this preparation and restriction in entering the house where the rice beer is being prepared for the four to five days, depending on how much time the fermentation process takes.

**11. Ghenas:**<sup>5</sup> Ghenas are socially sanctioned beliefs and practices that play a very important role in shaping the life of an Idu Mishmi, be it male or female. There are ghenas related to all walks of life for an Idu mishmi, such as dietary restrictions, etc. before going for rituals, hunting and even for women in general. Women are not supposed to consume the meat of wild animals such as deer, boar, stag, etc. as well is pork meat (mentioned earlier in this Chapter). Male folk who hunt also have to follow taboos before they leave for hunting, they have restrictions in eating spices, onions, garlic, chili, mushroom, etc. and cannot touch domestic utensils, cannot mate with partner/wife, if any women in the household in under menstruation the male member has to stay away from her (cannot have physical contact of any form). Such taboos last from 1 to 5 days, and this variation is from village to village and even person-to-person. The hunter has to perform a ritual called Aphun Aangi at the hunted place in the forest; it's a symbolic payment (Aiyadurai, 2016) wherein a piece of the animal ear is cut with a machete (dao) followed by a prayer, and some piece of metal from the cartridge is offered by placing it on a tree or plant to the spirit of Golo/Golon.<sup>6</sup>

**12. Marriage:** The Idu Mishmi society is Patriarchal and Patrilineal. They practice polygamy, but incestuous marriage is strictly prohibited. An Idu Mishmi man cannot marry an Idu Mishmi woman from his own clan, that is, if his father and her far are descendants from a common ancestor (in the male lineage). An Idu Mishmi man cannot marry an Idu Mishmi woman, if she is within the 13th degree

<sup>5</sup> Social Taboos.

<sup>6</sup> The hunters fear and respect this spirit the most, it's the guardian spirit of all the wild animals, and Golo/Golon provided them with the animals to hunt, so when the hunting is successful, an offering is made.



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in descent from the maternal grandfather in the male line, that is they have to marry 13 generations apart (from the male lineage). Such matrimonies are considered adulterous, and also thought to bring ill fate to the clans of both parties involved. Additionally, parallel or cross cousin nuptials are also considered anomalous and impure (Baruah, 1960). The most preferred way of marriage is negotiation / arrangement by a mediator that is chosen tactically who is neutral to both the parties involved. The mediator then goes ahead with the marriage proposal from the boy's side to the girl's house. Once the marriage proposal is accepted, the bride's family in the presence of the mediator discusses the bride price called yaku-bri. Once the yaku-bri is paid, both the parties mutually decide the date of departure of the Bride from her maternal house to her Groom's House. But in recent years, there have been some settlements that have amounted to a lump sum of cash as well as Mithuns.

**13. Death Ceremony:** When an Idu dies, they wash their dead body first; clothe him/her with new clothes and laying the dead in north-west direction with some money in the palm of the dead. It is believed that the soul will need the money as it makes its journey to the final destination. The Idu's bury their dead with all their worldly belongings as they would require their material possessions along with them in their afterlife. There is a prayer that is chanted by the shaman (who is performing the death ceremony and will help the soul to move on to the afterlife), "You were 10 months in your mothers womb, now you have lived your life here. Now you must find your way to the land of the dead, you must ask others the way" (Blackburn, 2005). People come to attend the funeral and contribute in terms of cash, livestock, food, etc. There is an entire death ritual called the 'Ya' that is performed over 5 days by a Shaman/Igu in the house of the dead. There are smaller rituals as well but it's a process of the transition of the soul from this world to the world of spirits for which an Igu is confirmed. If the Igu agrees, he/she performs a protective ritual before coming to the house of the dead. Before entering the house, the Igu performs a ritual called Laroti wherein he asks for protection from all evils spirits for himself, the family of the dead as well as the funeral attendees. As soon as the Igu arrives, he is paid in advance and he chants the Akuti ritual, so that the dead don't come back to the world of the living and disturbs them even in their dreams (Emoti). The Larmaba ritual wherein the Shaman communicated with the soul upon calling, so that they can prepare for their journey towards Achindomu, the soul's final destination, follows this stage. The dead is buried on the second or third day, during the time of burial, Anja is performed while the Igu is at home performing the Laromaba ritual. Post the burial; the Igu goes to burial site to feed the dead. Food is hung on the Bro-API (a fence like structure made on the burial), in this part of the ritual, Igu directs the soul to eat the last meal and asks him not to come back to the world of living. An Amungo (a structure made of bamboo, from leaves called Evena from the Jungle) is erected on the wall inside the house. After the Igu comes back from the burial ground, he begins the ritual by throwing Aayi-Yo (broom made out of Evena leaves) on the Amungo. This is done to send off the soul to its final destined place.

**14. Underworld:** The Idus call the soul megra or arra, and have ideas about its function and location. The soul is a vital principle, which sustains the life of the body, and has its seat beneath the breastbone. The soul is invisible and can, therefore, never be perceived or felt. When the soul withdraws, the body falls dead. The ideas of the Idus of the underworld are very interesting. When the megra or soul leaves the body at death, it becomes incorporeal like the air. It wanders on the earth for a few days, and as soon the burial of the body is over, goes to live in the Underworld. They have their own theory of karma, wherein on the account of his/her past deeds, they are sent to different places in the underworld. The Idus speak of five different places to which the soul goes after its departure from the human body. The road to all these places start from the same point. It is called Adde, and is guarded by a spirit named Jahirru. Jahirru decides where one's soul goes on the account of their past deeds and even in some cases on the account of how an Idu mishmi died.

**Table 1: Underworld of the Idu Mishmis:**

| Eternal Place/Underworld | Categories of Idu Mishmis                    |
|--------------------------|--|
| megra-mra                | Good Idu Mishmis                             |
| aru-mra or makui-mra     | Souls of wicked Idu Mishmis                  |
| jahi-u                   | Idu Mishmis who die Drowning                 |
| ijjinga or etenta        | Idu Mishmis who die of an accident           |
| etadi-epappa             | Idu Mishmis that commit sinful acts / crimes |

The above table describes the underworld of the Idu Mishmis.

**15. Interpretations of Dreams:** The Idus believe that dreams are the means by which the spirits communicate with man. When a man is asleep his soul roams about, and whatever it sees or does appears to its owner in a dream. Like many other people, the Idu believe that dreams foretell the future. Many of the dreams are creative, and purposive; they encourage man to action. Nightmares are distinct from ordinary dreams. A dream may be ignored, but not a nightmare; for it is more distressing, and casts its shadow for a long period. A nightmare has a motif behind it; it is caused by the visit of an angry spirit. The majority of the night terrors of a child are ascribed to the visits of dead relations during sleep, which produce a sense of dread in his mind (Baruah, 1960).



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Table 2: Dreams and their local interpretation:

| Dream (Emo)                               | Idu/Local Interpretation    |
|---|-----------------------------|
| One's teeth falling out                   | Loosing of Maternal Uncle   |
| Pregnant woman dreams of carrying a stone | She bears a male child      |
| Crossing a river                          | All round success           |
| Flying                                    | Death of a household member |
| If an Igu dreams of killing a tiger       | Expects his own death soon  |
| House destroyed by fire                   | Dry weather                 |
| Bridging a river                          | Predicts his victory        |
| Killing a snake                           | Victory over one's enemies  |
| Felling a tree                            | Hunting success             |
| Catching the Sun or Moon                  | Shall receive some property |

The above table describes the dreams and the local interpretation amongst the Idu Mishmis.

**16. Hunting:** Hunting involves the obedience a lot of tabbos/ghenas in the life of an Idu Mishmi. It is also one of the most important aspects of the life of an Idu Mishmi. According to the Idu Mishmis, Tigers and Hoolock Gibbons (Monkeys) are considered to be sacred, and killing them is considered no less than homicide while hunting other animals like Takin (*Budorcas taxicolour*), musk deer (*Moschus chryogaster*), Asiatic Black bear (*Ursus thibetanus*), Wild Pig (*Sus Scofa*), Serow *Naemorhedus sumatrensis*, Malayan giant squirrel (*ratufa bicolour*), temminck's tragopan (*tragopan temminckii*), Khalij Pheasant (*Lophura Leucomelanos*) and Blyth's tragopan (*tragopan blythii*) are frequently hunted (Aiyadurai, 2016). These animals have a wide array of uses, especially for meat (food), skin is used for bags, mats, etc. and the animal skulls are clasped to the sacred wall of the Alonga (mentioned earlier). But the hunting ritual and the ghenas revolving around that still remain intact amongst the seasoned hunters. The newer generation hunters are very particular about the ghenas to be followed during "wild animal" hunting, but for to others they are very casual.

**17. Religious institutions:** The religious belief of the Idu Mishmis is attributed to different malevolent and benevolent spirits of the world, called Khinyus. The world of the Idus is full of very powerful spirits, Khinyus, whose relations with the Supreme God are not well defined, though they are regarded as, in a vague way, subordinate to him. These spirits are classed under two categories, namely those who are kindly disposed towards men, and those who are, in the main, evil, quick-tempered, and uncertain in mood. They are supposed to be behind every misfortune that befalls mankind and, unless properly propitiated, bring all kinds of ill luck to them. The Idus has, therefore, elaborated a system of rites, magical formulas, and prayers to keep them in check. Even spirits who have more positive powers of doing good, such as bestowing plentiful harvests, will not, it seems, do this unless they have their share of the sacrifices (Baruah, 1960). Like any other people who have remained simple in their beliefs, the Idus have an anthropomorphic view of nature and natural happenings. They explain every occurrence as caused by an agent, which, to the Idu mind, is a spirit, either benevolent or malicious. Nature is alive and activated by innumerable spirits who hold the powers of good and evil over human destiny. An Idu is, therefore, constantly under emotional pressure to please the spirits who are regarded as dispensers of worldly fortune and to appease those spirits who are essentially ill tempered and capable of bringing misfortune to mankind. It may appear that, by an extension of the same anthropomorphic world-view, the Idus have arrived ultimately at the conception of a Supreme God, infinitely more powerful, which they regard as the creator of both the spirit-world and lesser mortals. This is also, perhaps, the reason why this Supreme Being is considered as beyond human supplication. No special sacrifices or offerings are prescribed for him, but his name is invariably invoked on all sacrificial and ritualistic occasions. Idu religion prescribes various codes of ritual to govern the conduct of man with the spirits. It has devised a way of life that man should follow in order to fulfill his true nature, and carry out his moral and social responsibilities. Some actions are intrinsically evil or inexpedient, and religion condemns them (Baruah, 1960).



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Table 3: Idu Mishmi spirit names and their popular belief

| Sl. No. | Spirit Name | Popular Belief   |
|---------|-------------|--|
| 1.      | Abruli      | It's a female spirit that does no harm to Men.   |
| 2.      | Ali         | A spirit that guards the household and bestows wealth.   |
| 3.      | Andra       | Not a harmful spirit, but if is offended by someone can be a little dangerous  |
| 4.      | Arru-sudu   | Spirit of the wind; controller of the wind   |
| 5.      | Arruya      | An evil spirit, who breeds contentment amongst men and prompts them to fight   |
| 6.      | Aasha       | An evil spirit that lives under the earth, if offended, visits an Idu Mishmi in the form of dysentery, high fever and sickness.            |
| 7.      | Asila-amide | A good spirit, that gives people children.   |
| 8.      | Asu         | A good spirit that gives wealth to man   |
| 9.      | Athu        | A very evil spirit, that gives pain to women during childbirth. He also kills small children.  |
| 10.     | Golon       | A good spirit, Guardian Spirit of the Wild Animals.  |
| 11.     | Beika       | An evil spirit, A snake spirit who lives in water. When graced by an opportunity, it will take men and women away and drown them in water. |
| 12.     | Brerru      | An Idu name for thunder, hurls thunderbolts when angry   |
| 13.     | Errasur     | An evil spirit that lives in the sky. When angry, he sets fire to human dwellings.   |
| 14.     | Ithri       | An evil spirit, Causes tuberculosis, makes them vomit blood.   |
| 15.     | Malo        | Spirit of Agriculture.   |
| 16.     | Meesu       | Evil spirit that stays in personal belongings, if misuses, Meesu creates havoc.  |

The above table describes the Idu Mishmi spirit names and their popular belief.

**17. Shamanhood/Igu:** This form of Idu Mishmi priesthood is not hereditary, and a son of a priest cannot become a priest simply by the virtue of his birth. A man first gets his first inspiration to become a priest in his dreams. He then serves a period of apprenticeship under an experienced Igu. Every Igu has a tutelary spirit, called drawn, who guides him in the performance of rituals and in the diagnosis of diseases. During trance, the priest invokes his drawn that comes in response to his prayer, and guides him along the right course. There are also a few other indications for becoming a shaman, a man must be born with the umbilical chord around the neck, the mother dreams that her child will become a shaman, a pregnant woman that dreams of caressing a child lying in a basket that is hung in the Egamba or Iu-amba tree expects that her child will become a Shaman. Some women also dream of the bird Praerru making its nest on the roof of her house, her child will take up Shaman hood. Such children while approaching maturity, they experience a state of trance (it is said that his soul travels to the spirit world) (Baruah, 1960). The Igu are believed to possess supernatural power and they can communicate with the spirit world. The ritualistic chant by an Igu is of the first language, the language of Igu and they are the main source of oral histories amongst the Idu Mishmis. The costume of an Igu is called Amralapoh. The ritualistic chants are about the origin of man, animals, universe, festival, death, etc. Priests, of whom the Idus recognize as the Igu, conduct all sacrificial ritual and ceremonies. Only domesticated animals are used for sacrificial purposes. Thus, usually Mithuns, Buffaloes, Pigs and Fowls are sacrificed at the different ceremonies and festivals. The Igu hold very respectable position in the society. Apart from that they don't enjoy any special privileges in an Idu Mishmi Society. They don't charge money or ask for it, the Idu's give them according to the ceremony he is going to perform (out of goodwill). Depends from person to person, and on their wealth.

**17.1. Birth ceremony:** The Idus do not believe that sexual relations alone are the cause of pregnancy in woman, for without divine intervention, even the natural process remains barren. A woman married for years but without a child is very often treated with contemptuous disregard. A special ceremony called Abu-irru is performed by an Igu to lift the cause of barrenness from her. In cases where signs of conception suddenly disappear, it is believed that a priest has stolen the fetus by magic. A pregnant woman must be careful to observe at least-one taboo;

- She must on no account touch any of the antlers hanging on the wall of her house.
- Her husband has to refrain from eating venison.
- The husband should not be present when the labour pains start, the child is delivered by the other women of the family or female relatives. If delivery is delayed, a ceremony called eta-asi is performed and a fowl is sacrificed.

When an Idu Child is a day old, a ceremony called iu-a-rru is performed. The priest persuades, Asa and Asila-amide (who watch over little children) pleading them to look after the newborn Idu child from any danger or evil spirits. The Nuhi ceremony, which falls on the ninth day of childbirth, is a simple one. The priest invokes the household gods, Asu and Andra and prays to them to look after the child. The life of an Idu (male Child) is always surrounded with anxiety and fear. He is constantly on guard against a possible enemy,



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and is never without a dao (machete) or a gun. 'A man who walks about without a gun or a spear is less than a man,' they say. An adolescent girl's usual occupation is to help her mother in collecting firewood, fetching water and attending to the younger children of the family (Baruah, 1960).

**17.2. Other Igu ceremonies:** There are different ceremonies performed by an Igu for the achievement different things. The ceremonies are very purposive in nature as they cater to only one problem. Hence, there are different Igu ceremonies for each event in an Idu Mishmis life. For an example, Ai-i is a ceremony solely intended to ward off evil spirits causing sickness. There is a longer process called the Amrasa, this ceremony is only performed to cure anyone suffering from serious illness.

**17.2.1. Field ceremony (Kemeha):** A sacrifice is usually performed before the sowing of seeds, to ensure a good crop. A fowl is put on the stump of a tree, and as soon as the fowl is sacrificed, it is set free, so that the blood smears the field. This ceremony is performed to honour God Malo, who gives good crops.

**17.2.2. The Rreh ceremony:** The Rreh is the most important ceremony of the Idus. An individual may perform this ceremony at any time during his life, for the welfare of his family. The aim of the various rites, which run in a series, is to obtain riches and good crops, and to ward off the evil spirits. But above all, these are performed to seek sympathy and kindness from the greater and powerful spirits.

**18. Political Institutions:** The village political organisation amongst the Idu Mishmis is called Abbalah, viz. Abba meaning 'in between' and la/lah meaning 'to speak'. Abbacheya-Alombro or Abbaya-Alombro are the mediators of the Abbalah / Abela. This organisation is formed by a few elderly village dwellers, usually four to five members; those have a good reputation in terms of their wisdom and judgment. The members need to be good orators as well. They make arbitrations through negotiations and mediations, done by skilful people in settling disputes. Shamans play a very important role in these mediations, as they with their magico-ritual power carry out oaths (Ata, Assey, Ikuta, etc.) on the accused, or sometimes at both the parties involved to prove their innocence or guilt. Poh is what the punishment to the accused is called, and is usually compensated in the form of livestock, cash, etc. after the issue is resolved, the Abbaya (mediator) takes a portion of their compensation as a consultation fee from both parties called Apesu. After the dispute is settled, the parties have to give one egg to each mediator, as they believe that evil spirit may cause harm to the mediators thus, as a protective measure for their journey home. Disputes such as theft, murder, land disputes, fights, assaults, threatening, adultery, etc. are taken over by the Abbalah.

**19. Conclusion:** The crux of the Idu Mishmi society is a confluence between spirits, animals and humans with each one having its pivotal role in an Idu Mishmis life. This study looked into their social anthropological reality, wherein they have retained most of their traditions and cultural ethos until today, in spite of all odds, as an Idu Mishmi would proudly say, our ghenas, dream interpretations, spirits, animals, underworld, Igu and unique way of life is what makes an Idu Mishmi an Idu Mishmi!

## 20. Some key concerns of the Idu Mishmis

1. Rapid developmental activities taking place in Arunachal Pradesh (inter-state highway, trans-national highways, etc.) will have its implications on the Idu Mishmis. With accelerated hydropower development in the region (12<sup>th</sup> five-year plan) there will be major changes in the tribal and cultural fabric of the Idu Mishmis.
2. Igu as an institution, and the importance of Ghenas, interpretations of dreams, etc. are on a decline since the past few years.
3. In the recent past, Rreh festival amongst the Idu Mishmis has been regularized across both the districts of Dibang and lower Dibang Valley. It is celebrated from the 1<sup>st</sup> to the 3<sup>rd</sup> of February celebrated for the great mother "Nani Inyitaya." Additionally, there are many other heterogeneous factors responsible for bringing about changes in the spheres of religious faith and practices amongst the Idu Mishmis; Hinduised cults, temples, gods, and goddesses penetrated into the frontier since the achievement of statehood. RKM, Sharada Mission, Vivekananda Mission and perhaps the most powerful of the lot, VKV are prime forces that render services in both education (Hindi medium) and health schemes giving rise to new taxonomies, such as "Donyi-poloism"<sup>7</sup>, "Intayism" amongst the Idu Mishmis, "Rangfraism"<sup>8</sup> and so on (Chaudhuri, n.d.). This is seen in an earlier section of the Chapter, in relation to Bhimsmaknagar and Nani Intaya Goddess, how Hinduism has penetrated into the Tribal ethos of Idu Mishmis,

<sup>7</sup> Donyi-Polo (also known as Donyi-Poloism) is an indigenous religion of animistic and shamanic type. The name "Donyi-Polo" means the "Sun-Moon." Talom Rukbo is the father of Donyipoloism, and it's popular amongst the Apatani, Adi, Galo, Nyishi and Tagin Tribe of Arunachal Pradesh (Tani Group of Tribes; they believe that they are descendants of a legendary Human Father called Abotani, the first ever human being on this planet).

<sup>8</sup> "The double word Rang-fraa is believed to have embodies the twin concepts of power (rang) through miracles and healing as well as that of wisdom and knowledge (fraa) that Rangfraa embodied." It is the new institutionalized religion (with an undertone of Hinduism) of the Tsanga Community of Arunachal Pradesh.



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There is a small pocket of Idu Mishmis that have converted to Christianity as well.

4. Furthermore, the phenomenon of suicide amongst the Idu Mishmis is a serious psychosocial issue (Mene, 2014) that needs to be considered with its dwindling population. With such a low number, another hazard like suicide can be harmful to the existence of the Idu Mishmis eventually.

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