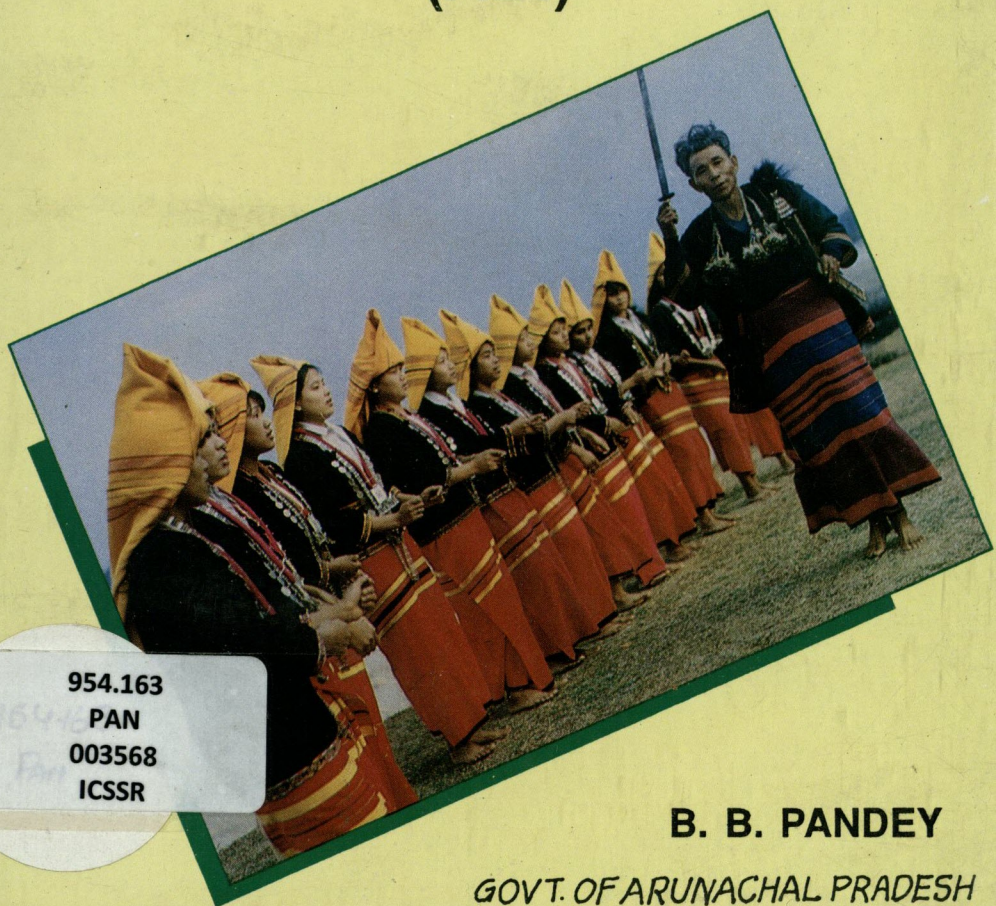


ORAL LITERATURE

FOLK SONGS OF ARUNACHAL PRADESH (ADI)



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B. B. PANDEY

GOVT. OF ARUNACHAL PRADESH

About the Book

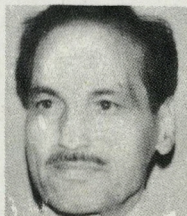
Most of the folk songs dealt in this book come out with neat attestation to the facts furnished above in a way providing a pointer to the possible way of emergence of a song singing habit as like as the tale telling habit in the group life.

The other fact that may here also be made clear is that the society and the man in their intricate inter-dependent explanation defying ways are responsible for this origin of the folk-life interaction.

A point that would grow clear during the course of treatment of the folk songs collected from various native Arunachal tribes and compiled at various suitable places in this book is that under occasions demand group life entertainment or group life sharing of shocks and sorrows becomes necessary and emotions pour out in uncontrollable folds giving rise to folk songs.

The author has tried to collect and explain the folk songs with brief meaning in the series of the documentation of the rich treasure of oral literature which is the most essential need of the day for the identity of the people. *Loss of culture is the loss of identity.*

About the Author



Dr. B.B. Pandey has obtained his Ph.D degree from Patna University and is one of the pioneer workers on tribal affairs. He has been engaged in

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ORAL LITERATURE

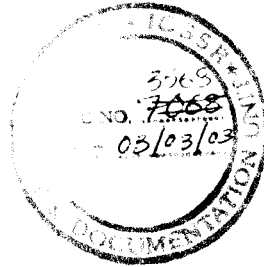
FOLK SONGS
OF
ARUNACHAL PRADESH
(ADI)

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Govt. of Arunachal Pradesh

DIRECTORATE OF RESEARCH
GOVERNMENT OF ARUNACHAL PRADESH
ITANAGAR
1996

FOLK SONGS OF ARUNACHAL PRADESH (ADI): written by Dr. B.B. PANDEY, Deputy Director of Research (Culture) and published by the Director of Research on behalf of the Government of Arunachal Pradesh with financial assistance from the North Eastern Council. Ministry of Home Affairs, Govt. of India, Shillong - 793001.

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First Published : 1996

Price : Rs. 80/- (Rupees Eighty) only



003568

ISBN-81-7516-095-0

Cover Design and Photographs by the author

Composed by : Micro Tech Printage, New Delhi-110002

Printed by : Himalyan Publishers, Itanagar, Arunachal Pradesh and printed at Shalimar Offset Press, New Delhi-110002

CONTENTS

PREFACE & ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	PAGE
1. INTRODUCTION	1-9
2. JIMIR LAYAP	10-12
3. LOBO LAYAP	13-20
4. DUNE LAYAP	21-23
5. TOGU LOBO GARNAM	24-34
6. DONYI-EM-HADOBE BONAM	34-43
7. MOPIN PRAYER	44-51
8. DELO NITOM MEMENE	52-53
9. NAJIN-NE-JA	54-61
10. ANI JUKSE	62-63
11. TAKAR BONE	66-65
12. OYO-NITOM (MEMEN)	66-66
13. TOPO GONE	67-72
14. ANNE YO ANNA	73-74
15. NYIJIR-MENSA	74-76
16. KABEN	77-78
17. KOLE ABULE	79-84
18. EVOLUTION OF MITHUN	84-87
19. EVOLUTION OF COCK	87-89
20. ATE AI MAMANG	90-101
21. SOLUNG, ABANG	102-126
22. SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY	127-131

INTRODUCTION

The Adis are spread over a more or less contiguous section in the centre of the wide cis-Himalayan belt of hills descending from the great Himalayas down the middle and outrange to the northern border of the Brahmaputra basin. The Adis habitat includes almost the whole of the three districts of East, West Upper Siang and spread across into Mori Circle of the Subansiri District on the West and the South Western half of the Roing in the Dibang Valley district to the East. The total area is about 21,229 sq.km excluding the areas in Dibang Valley and Subansiri.

The two clearly defined branches of Adis may be named Padam i.e. - Minyong group and Galoic group. Each branch has a number of sub-groups.

If one ignores the details of genealogy, he comes to one common feature that all the Adi communities believe in the same ancestor the mythical Abo Tani. This means that they have a feeling of homogeneity. But if legends are considered in contradiction to mythical beliefs, each community traces its origin from an ancient hero or leader who founded its first village. One need not go into those details as it is beyond the scope of this study.

The Adis are the most gay of the Arunachal tribes. They make merriments at various important periods of cultivation, harvest and other religious festivals. During those days they use a number of musical instruments and express their gay moods.

They go with their own distinct songs and dances, for common entertainment as well as other more important socio-religious purposes. Ponu or Ponung, a kind of group dance is common to both the groups and is the most popular entertainment. These dances and songs are performed during all festive occasions including welcome functions for honoured guests. For the rituals and important socio-religious performanc-

es such as for marriage, death, sowing, harvesting, jungle clearing, community hunt, rites to end excessive rain or enduring drought, to cure diseases, and to fight epidemics the Adis take recourse to songs and dances. The most familiar of such dances are those connected with Mopin and Solung celebrations and Nyida (nuptials).

Sacred narratives, usually long, are chanted on religious occasions for nights together by the priest (Nyjik or nyibo, Miri or Bari) accompanied by assistants (Bo) who repeat lines or refrains. Each text, even if it be in prose, is read with a special rhythm and tune. These texts tell the stories of creation and ancient sages and heroes, such as Abo Tani, the great ancestor of the Adis.

The Adis are numerically largest group of people inhabiting the East, West and Upper Siang districts of the State. It has number of sub-group viz. Gallong, Padam, Minyong, Bori, Bokar, Pasi, Pagi, Rame, Paillibo, Aashing, Tangam, Shimong, Karko etc, each having some salient feature in respect of cultural and language of their own.

The Adi villages are situated on the hill spurs and houses are generally of pile dwelling with variation in size and layout for each group. The chief house building materials are wood, bamboo etc. which are readily available around their habitation. The houses are constructed with self help basis among the co-villagers.

The family comprises of parents and their unmarried children. The society is patriarchal, patrilineal and patrilocal. The eldest male member of the house exert his command over all other members of the household. Among each of the sub-group there are number of exogamous clans. In marriage, clan exogamy and tribe endogamy is strictly adhere to. In some of the sub-tribe there are preferential type of cross-cousin marriage. Monogamy is the usual role but polygamy is permitted and practiced. The payment of bride price is prevalent.

The Adis have traced their origin from the mythical ancestor Abotani'. A number of myths and tales existed in their society regarding their origin and migration. The women are expert weavers and the men are expert in production of handicraft

items.

The Adis are primarily agriculturists. They practice Jhum cultivation in hill slopes and now a days T.R.C. and W.R.C. are also practiced.

The traditional political institution of the Adis is very strong. The village council called "Kebang" is responsible for maintenance of law and order in the village. It is a well organised institution. The inter village disputes are resolved by inter village council called Bango Kebang and the highest council is known as Bugong Bokang. All the disputes are settled as per their unwritten traditional customary laws.

The Adis believe in existence of innumerable malevolent and benevolent deities and spirits. A number of rites and ceremonies are performed by sacrificing animals and birds with the help of local priest called Nyibu. The Mopin, Solung are some of the important annual festival celebrated with traditional pomp and gaiety. Folk dances viz. Ponnung is performed on all festival days. Men and women, young and old can participate in this folk dance. The Adis religious thought and beliefs centre round the Donyi-Polo and accordingly they have developed a religion called as Donyi-poloism.

In the life of the Adis, the role of dormitory organisation is significant. The bachelors' dormitory for boys called Dere (Adi Miniyoun), Mosup (Adi Padam) for the girls. Rasheng (Adi Padam-Miniyong) is the centre for learning the traditional customs and practices.

Folk songs in most cases are sung to the accompaniment of musical instruments to heighten the rhythmic effects and also the moods of celebration, More often than not songs sung in chorus or in alternate group from question answer sessions between the partaking choral singing folks comprising of members of both the sexes.

Dance also is found to be predominantly accompanying the songs to provide better attractive colours to the occasion of the celebrations.

In absence of amass literacy and also mostly in absence

of a script to symbolize the sounds of a language, perhaps the societies in the old days had but been forced to express themselves through such songs sung in folks. Later on with the dawning of consciousness learning of the skills of writing out things and preserving them these songs collected from the singing folk's mouth were presented to the successive generations. Now in an age of advanced studies people sometimes find kindling emotions to be coming out of those folk songs and people dear to literature like to preserve the rich heritage of the past for reference and use both in their own times and in future.

Technically folk songs have never gone above the level of charity. The texts are always long requiring hours of recitation. So beyond outside festive occasions they were of little use. Musical compositions are not unknown, but they were mostly confined to the secret romantic moments of love. And of course they were hummed without any instruments. The Penge were also lyrical, but elegia and sad in tune.

The vacuum left by indigenous music was naturally quickly invaded and filled by the musical songs broadcast from radio and popularised through the cinema. School and College children are the main composis of songs and also the original singers. They set the songs to the popular tunes from Assamese and Hindi. The latter is getting more popular everyday. For special occasions especially in cultural gatherings of modern type patriotic songs are composed and sung. These are not completed and live for some time in the mouth of the young.

To become expert in singing of folk songs, secret competition among the youths irrespective by boys and girls was in practice. They danced and song in play grounds in the late afternoon till late evening. Girls dragged out boys to sing song in the centre, pull and push each other to sing was very common.

Young boys assembled at night in the community hall to perform competitions on same occasion expert elders led the youngsters. Open ground of the Village and community hall was the training centres of learning of folk song and dance. The oral literatures, were expressed and identified through song and dance by them.

But at present among the educated youths it is unfortunate that now folk songs and dances are not popular among them. They can't pronounce the songs in proper tune with rhythm.

The country of the Adis is noted for the beautiful scenery where...

The fabled river skirts the verdant bank incites youth to engage in vibration and dance. And the people for their charming disposition, colourful costume and enchanting music and dance. The last, rooted in their religious and magical beliefs as they are, have blossomed also into an art of recreation and entertainment. And many a festive night follows wearisome laborious days in which youthful feet thread the lawn in rhythmic glee to chase, around the melodious Miri (NYIBO) gaunt hardships and lank privations ever haunting the hillmen's life.

Occasions for such dances and songs are many and varied. They have all their characteristic traditional songs.

Ponungs are distinguished by a restraint imposed by art on the gay abandonment formerly souls and it has the symmetry, balance, melody and rhythm which one expects in songs however primitive they may be. These songs are sung by the Miri, (NYIBO) and girls repeat the first line in chorus before every new line and dance to the rhythm.

In Adi dances, there are usually two parties one consist of a single individual, the Miri. The Miri (NYIBO) originally the medicinaman, is the repository of all tribal myths; through oral transmission he learns by heart traditional ballads, which are usually very long relating the stories of creation of the origin of the people and the animals, of the discovery of poison for their arrows, legendary histories and geneologies of the tribes, and so forth. He is the authorised musician in these dances. Girls who are to dance deck him in his official attire: a red gale over his usual dress, two kirings hung from his neck, so that one dangles on either side of his chest. He holds a sword upright in the right hand. Thus attired he takes his stand in the centre of a circle formed by the dancers who are generally thirty to forty in number. He chants his songs and jerks his sword jingling the metal discs loosely attached to the hit keeping time with the music. No musical instruments are used. The

girls catch the refrain and sing it in chorus and dance to the rhythm. The office of th Miri is normally a male prerogative into the lower region. But women officiating as Miri are quite common in the north among Galo. The steps in the dances are almost the same all over the Adi country and are not very difficult.

The dance proper is performed by the other party which consists of a band of girls. The participant stand in a circle, shoulder to shoulder facing the Miri at the centre. If the number of participants is large enough, the circle is completed if not, the girls from an are or a semi-circle is facing the Miri.

The indigenous songs survive in the Villages, but the experts as a class are gradually disappearing.

CLASSIFICATION

The folk songs have been classified as follows:-

UROM PAKNAM

Though the Adi had no script of their own yet they created a voluminous oral literature. Like all preliterate literatures, theirs is also in verse and rhythmic prose specially suited for recitation and meant to be heard and memorized. As it has never been recorded in writing, it is fluid in character, varying in form and length, from region to region. Till now it has been properly surveyed and so it is not possible to form an exact idea of its extent. From what is known at present it can be said that it is in the main what we should call religious in character, while characterising it thus, it has to be borne in mind that in the early formative period of the society when this literature took shape there was hardly any distinction between what was religious and what was secular. Every aspect of life was permeated and influenced by a belief in th super-natural and spirits were associated with the minutest details of life. Still the purely priestly literature comprising such texts as are used only by the priests in their secerdotal functions are now also known to others. Other texts which are generally known also to the lay man and some of which are recited on festive occasions outside the strictly ritual context may be termed as secular literature for our present purpose.

Nyibo Agom

The first, i.e. the priestly literature is known in the Adi language as Nyibu Agom (among the Gallongs). Nyibu Agom is the creation of the priests in their professional capacities and for their professional purposes and they are their sole custodians. Their narratives-verse or prose tell of a world which preceded the present order. Being typical myths, they tell of sacred beings and semi-divine heresy and the origins of all things. They are connected with religious practices and beliefs. The body of narratives concern themselves with the relation of man with the unseen world and the explanation of such important events and happenings in his life such as birth, death, disease, marriage, sewing and harvesting, thus making them comprehensible to ordinary person. The myths have nourished value-impregnated beliefs and rites which the community holds dear and which are a factor in the maintenance of social stability. They may look irrational and even fanciful, but some of them have considerable philosophical; and literary beauty as, for instance, the tale of the coming of death into the world. It is from such folk compositions that more sophisticated literature had its beginning. With the conditions coming in and cracking the old structure of society, these myths are likely to either get modified or lose their validity and vitality but they are not likely to lose their value as a means of getting an insight into the Adi-mind and as material for sociological and literary study. The texts that so far have come to our knowledge are :-

- (i) Uram Pak-nam
- (ii) Be-nam
- (iii) De-nam
- (iv) Roksin kognam
- (v) Gunam
- (vi) Mopin
- (vii) Hurin
- (viii) Je-de
- (ix) Mode/ Mod
- (x) Am-pir
- (xi) Yu-ku

- (xii) Pe-ka/ Peka
 - (a) Ni-peka
 - (b) Homen peka
 - (c) Kale Peka
 - (d) Ali Peka
- (xiii) Togu

These may be classified under two heads according to the approach. In the first five the approach is mainly appeasement. The person falls in and suffers some hardship or mishap. It is assumed that some spirits got some-how displeased with the person and the way to save him is back their favour. In the rest the attitude is one of propitiation. The subject is to pay homage to the spirits for their good-will and favour. The hop and prayer is to bring fortune and material well-being.

This demarcation is, however, not very rigid. The texts of the second category are also recited and the rites for them performed though on a smaller scale to avert misfortune when the first category fails. The texts have been arranged in order of the potency. To-gu being the most potent text of all. Do : nyi Bo-nam has got a special application in that it is recited in order to stop continuous and excessive rain.

Obviously list is not exhaustive. For instance, there is another set of texts, quite a large number of them which are used in what we would call Magic. These are not looked with favour though there are priests who specialise in it and have their clanship. Such priests are known a Nyikok-Nyigre. Perhaps, they are better termed shamans as they are believed to have a direct contact with spirits.

The secular literature is more amorphous than the priestly, for the obvious reason that such compositions are free from the rigidity usually imposed on the religious ones where the forms of expression have not usually special significance. The reciters here enjoy the liberty not only to adopt old compositions to give them a new form and appeal but also they compose new ones to suit new occasions. Many of such ex-tempore compositions might die and therefore, be lost but still some of them may have a special and so lighter in the memory

of the successive generations as popular songs of the compositions have been able to get information of the following :

- i) Yane
- ii) Kaben
- iii) Mengo
- iv) Mem-Men
- v) Anne Yo Anna
- vi) Nyir Men (Banggi)
special festival for girl.

These are usually associated with festivities and merry making.

Kaben : is usually associated with marriage and is rectified song by women.

Mengo : is for certain socio-political occasions, such as settlement of marriage and settlement of disputes and instructions to the younger generation. One well versed in this enjoys high respect and is known as Mengkok.

Mem Men : Comprises narrative songs based on mythology. Anne Yo Anna : is another type of folk-song in which romance between boys and girls occupies an important position. Such songs are composed during courtship and such other romantic settings.

This brief survey covers inadequately the rich field of Adi (Galo) oral literature. That this is to keep alive this unwritten literature vast as it is, the recitation or chanting. This an acepint of its simple but catching cadence grips the mind sticks in memory. The recitation is a technical art and requires aptitude, training and practice. Only those who all these qualities can hope to possess the literature.

1. Tumpak Ete : Nybu Agom, Vol I. (Shillong 1972-73)
2. Roy, Sachin Aspects of Padam Minyong culture. (Shillong, 1966) pp 180