THE COSMOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION OF NYISHI OF ARUNACHAL PRADESH

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Key Words:

Aabhu Thyani, Chan/Chenee, Jengbu aabhu, kuriumkulu, Pabhu Aabbu, Poyu Uyus Thyani.

Abstract

The origin of Nyishi still remains unexplored and enshrouded in legends, mythologies, custom and customary laws. The folk and legends are transmitted from generation to generations through oral literature. The Nyishi believe that Chan/Chenee (Creator/Superpower) created the universe including all living creatures. The time of creation is called kuriumkulu (the period unknown to past and future). When Chan/Chenee invoked the power of Chenee rolum dolah (spirit of water) appeared and Jengbu aabhu and Pabhu Aabbu (considered as super natural power) appeared including Thyani (legendry fore Fathers of Nyishi Tribe). There were many generations of Thyani. Thyani was omnipotent, omnipresent and had a cordial and healthy atmosphere with other creatures. Thyani share the universe as members of families. Aabhu Thyani could easily enter into a marriage tie with any object that he desired. Nyima Thyani married Chewa Chengdig ne and son Nyidig Thyani was born. Nyidig thayni married Chiwa Chieying and Nyiying Thyani was born. From Nyiying Thanyi two sons were born namely, Nyayu Thyani (origin of human generation) and Poyu Thyani (origin of Uyus). Nyayu Thyani married Chiwa Changitune and Nyder Thyani was born. Thyani also had matrimonial relations with other creatures. The Poyu Thyani (origin of uyus) become the trouble maker and conspires against the Thyani constantly and in the universe. The paper is an attempt to discuss the genesis and evolution of universe according to Nyishi of Arunachal Pradesh.
Introduction

The origin of Nyishi still remains unexplored and enshrouded in legends, myths, mythologies, custom and customary laws. But like any other society in the world, the Nyishi of Arunachal Pradesh also has their religious practices, social codes and legal institutions which are based on myths and legends. The myths and legends tell about religious observation, social practices, modes and methods of justice delivery which are contained in the oral literature of the Nyishi. These myths, customs, usages and customary laws are transmitted from generation to generations through oral literature generally like narration, folk tales, folklore, songs, *eidd bengnam* (song of legendary narration on the occasion of marriage), *bengjamnam* (song of legendary narration on certain occasions), *nemye kabnam* (narration by mock crying), *buva sonam* (song with dance of legendary narration), *gumbabanam* (merry making song specially on occasions like housewarming and celebration after last harvesting), *uyus barnam* (incantation for rituals), *peep cheepam* (boiled egg examination incantation), *ruksen kunam* (chicken liver examination incantation), *reeckesing kenam* (pig liver examination incantation), *yuma tungnam* (mock dream rituals), *tajor panam* (rituals for offering of tribute), *oram panam* (ritual for immediate heeling), *yullow barnam/yullow panam*, (highest form of rituals for protection, peace and prosperity), *netting tingnam* (citation of incident as an example), *nyugung pagu tonam* (narration of genealogy) \(^1\). There is a famous saying among the Nyishis that goes like “*Netting sangtungam tabin peema-Harming sangbeeham tapum peema*” (the past historic reference once cited will always remain and be remembered by the people. It cannot be destroyed by anything and it will remain generation after generation) \(^2\). On the basis of this famous saying, the origin of the customs, usages and laws of the Nyishi are found in myths and legends.

Origin of life

The Nyishi believe that *Chan/ Chenee* (Creator/Superpower) created the universe including all living creatures. The time of creation is called *kurunkulu* (the period unknown to past and future). When *Chan/ Chenee* invoked the power of *Chenee rolum dolah* (spirit of water) appeared and *Jengbu aabhu* and *Pabhu Aabbu* (onsidered as super natural power) appeared. During that time the universe was in a shapeless, jelly form with no surroundings, no boundaries,
and no life. It was followed by hogargarnam/ ballah barman (origin of object or substance) and followed by seaching (earth), nyodo (sky), takar (stars), auz/ dori (air), hai/issh (water), ujang/doni (sun) and pholu (moon), and separated. The process continued on the saching (earth), the langkhu (stone), and kamkhuk (soil), which is called langkhu-kamkhuk darnam/darlingnam. Subsequently nasing-namang, sangne-langne (grass, creepers, trees and plants), tapum- tarup (insects and flies), pathah- kabung (birds and mice’s), tab- tapik (snakes and lice) iki-purak (dogs and fowls) sabing-erick (goat and pig), seew- sabbe (cow and bos-frontalies) were created. After that nyikum nyi hogargarnam/garlingnam/ballah barman/barlingnam (human like creatures) were created. Now the universe is full of life and objects. This human like creature is called aabhu Thyani (legendry fore Fathers of human generation). There were many generations of Thyani. Thyani was omnipotent, omnipresent and had a cordial and healthy atmosphere with other creatures. Thyani share the universe as members of families. Aabhu Thyani could easily enter into a marriage tie with any object that he desired. Nyima Thyani married Chewa Chengdig ne and son Nyidig Thyani was born. Nyidig thayni married Chiwa Chieying and Nyiying Thyani was born. From Nyiying Thanyi two sons were born namely, Nyayu Thyani (origin of human generation) and Poyu Thyani (origin of Uyus). Nyayu Thyani married Chiwa Changitune and Nyder Thyani was born. Thyani also had matrimonial relations with other objects. Some of the prominent name of wives and children are as follows:

At last Thyani married Tewne Hawma an enormous frog. One day they had an argument and his wife set herself on fire and died. Thyani private organs were injured during his efforts to save his wife. He was busy on aeer donam (mooring) at a place called saa rilo geko. His silence was broken by a teying (fly) and he became restless and mischievous. In order to compensate for his loss he forced teying (fly) to become his wife. Teying (fly) was killed by porak (fowl) and the fowl became his wife. Porak was killed by ikki (beach) which became his wife. Ikki (beach) was killed by a goat which became his wife. The goat was killed by a pig which became his wife. The pig was killed by the sebbe (bos-frontalis) who became his wife. Sebbe was killed by a tree and the tree became his wife. On the way he noticed some beautiful girls busy husking paddy. They were Donyi Lundi, Donyi Lungryo, Donyi Yaye Chumji and Jangte Nee. They were the daughters of Anne Donyi. Aabhu Thyani liked the girls and played tricks asked if anyone could break his stick. Out of curiosity Donyi Yaye Chumji broke the stick, and in return Thyani demanded one of them as his partner. Aabhu Thyani married Donyi Yaye Chumji, a daughter of Anne Donyi (mother Sun). They had their baby after some years. Hence, the need for a nyabang (baby sitter) arose. Donyi Yaye Chumji asked her husband aabhu Thyani to go to her parents’ house and bring her sister to help them raise their baby. She also instructed him to follow the route called hath Sakho (safer and prosperous route). If he followed this route he would be safe and have fortune and prosperity. She forbade him from taking the Hech Sakho route (unsafe route laden with misfortune). This route was frequented by misfortune and poverty stricken.

However, aabhu Thyani did not heed his wives suggestion, so he followed the Hech Sakho route. On the way he met Yuma Tada, the epitome of poverty and misfortune. Aabhu Thyani was robbed and deprived of his good dresses. He was in fetters and very shabby. Aabhu Thyani was feeling ashamed of facing his wife and child. Therefore, he transformed himself into a dog and reached his home. There he could not reveal himself. But his wife sensed something wrong and felt that the dog was extraordinary. Hence she decided to test it to ascertain the reality.

Accordingly, Donyi Yaye Chumji spate on her palm and asked the dog to lick it up. Her presumption was that if dog was a real one, it would lick the spit on her palm. Otherwise it would not do so. In that case the dog must be her beloved husband Thyani. The dog did not lick the spit on Donyi Yaye Chumjis palm. She pleaded with aabhu Thanji to return to his normal human form again and to give up the dog form. There was no need for him to feel ashamed.
because of his encounter with Yuma Tada and the resultant state of shabbiness and poverty. He could still regain his earlier position. But aabhu Thanyi was unrelenting. Aabhu Thyani adamant stand infuriated Donyi Yaye Chumji and she left for her parents’ house with her child thus, deserting her husband aabhu Thanyi. There is a mythology on the origin of bungrang bungte (middle man) which reveals that, after encounter with Yuma Tada at Heach Sakho, aabhu Thyani became very poor and was in a retched condition and his wife and child also deserted him. These conditions made aabhu Thyani very depressed and frustrated. Out of depression and frustration he decided to destroy every thing in the universe including himself. This decision of aabhu Thyani shocked all the creatures of the universe and creates fear among them. All the creatures of the universe consulted among themselves and decided to intervene which was led prominently by sobu uyus (benevolent spirit), Doriang Chajing, HebJarjoo and Gyab Punyo to negotiate and dissuade Thanyi from undertaking the destruction of the universe and himself. Negotiating team Doriang Chajing, HebJarjoo and Gyab Punyo met aabhu Thanyi and persuaded him not to undertake destruction of the universe and himself. They also suggested aabhu Thyani to marriage with Jangtee nee, (the younger sister of Donyi Yaye Chumji). Aabhu Thanyi accepted their offers to marry Jangtee nee and agree not to destroy universe. Thus, the role of middle man is originated.

When the proposal of aabhu Thyani marriage to Jangtee nee broke out many dabu/dane uyus (malevolent spirit) did not like it. Many of them were also interested to marry Jangtee nee. Malevolent uyus decided to guard and keep vigil around Jangtee nee to prevent aabhu Thyani meeting with Jangtee nee. To overcome the obstacles and success ding in his mission, aabhu Thyani turned into a bird called Tacha Sala. When Jangteenee was busy with weaving in the porch of her house, Tacha Sala (small bird) flew over her and dropped the semen of aabhu Thyani on her forehead and semen of Aabhu Thyani entered the womb of Jangteenee and she became pregnant. This episode results the origin of enmity.

When the new reveals to others, in order to prevent aabhu Thyani, they also claimed that they are the father of the child. Thus, everyone was claiming to be a father of the child in the womb of JangteeNee. JangteeNee calls all the claimants of the child and told them if the child is born through head, it belongs to Cher merr, if born through shoulder, it belongs to Pemerlyir, if born
through stomach, it belongs to *KirLyirboo* and if the child is born normal like any other creatures, it belongs to *jinggang* (poor) *Thyani*.

The *JangteeNee* delivered a male child normally like other creatures. Accordingly *JangteAnne* declared that the child belongs to *jinggang* (poor) *Thyani*. She accepted *aabhu Thyani* as her husband and legal father of the child. This is the origin of natural justice in dispute settlement 49. But the malevolent *uyus* were not happy with *Jangtee Anne* decision. They still claim her child as theirs. *Jangtee Anne* again arranged *laming abka sunam/laiming abnam* (archery competition). It was agreed upon by the entire claimant that, whosoever win the archery competition, the child belongs to him. On the appointed day of the competition, the competitor brought the best of best bows and arrows in their possession and competition began. The arrows of *uyus* could not hit the target but it was *aabhu Thyani* alone could hit the target and as per condition agreed *Thyani* was declared winner as well as the father of the child. This is the origin of archery competition 6.

The *uyus* still did not agree to give up their claim on the *Jangte Anne* and child. Rather *uyus* were enraged more by defeat after defeat. They were determined to avenge *Thyani* and his family. Seeing the gravity of the situation, *Jangte Anne* again plans to save *Thyani* and his family. Accordingly to this a child was allow to recognize his father by claiming into the man laps. Accordingly on appointed day every claimant came well dressed. They seat in circle and the child was let loose with pig liver tied on the neck. Again child claim into the lap of *aabhu Thyani* thus, recognized him as his father. This event became the origin of *Nyelee* (dispute adjudication institution of Nyishi) 7.

However, the *uyus* were further enraged by this defeat and hatched another conspiracy to eliminate *Thyani* and his family. On the other hand *jangte Anne* was also determined to save *Thanyi* and family. Hence, *jangte Anne* send *Thyani* and his son on the earth as the safest place from reach of the *uyus*. She also gave *Thanyi* the *podung* (bamboo tube container). This *podung* contained seeds of different crops and souls of the different animals. *Jangte jnne* forbade *Thyani* not to open the *podung* till the reaching earth. However, out of curiosity *aabhu Thyani* opened the *podung* before reaching earth. Seeds of crops and souls of animals escaped the *podung*. They whispered which attract the attention of the *uyus*. Thus, *uyus* collected seeds of crops and the souls of animals and claimed the ownership of it. *Thyani* could claim very few left over.
Even after securing the seed of crops and soul of animals, the *uyus* were after life of *Thyani* and his son. *Jangte anne* again intervened in the matter to saved *thanyi* and family by offering the crops and the animals in lieu of *Thyani* and his son life. This is the origin of *peer nyoga tamnam* (offering of crops and animals in the rituals). This is done through a middle man called *nyub* (priest) ⁸.

Despite of constant quarrel, *uyus* and *aabhu Thyani* continued to live together. The result was constant conflict between *uyus* and *aabhu Thyani*. In all the conflict with *uyus*, *Thyani* alway had the upper hand. There is myth on conflict between *uyus* and *aabhu Thyani* which goes like this, the conflict between *uyus* and *aabhu Thanyi* became regular features and more serious on earth. But *aabhu Thyani* could easily escape from *uyus* only because of extra ordinary vision power called *Nyime Dungrang*. With this *Nyime Dungrang* *aabhu Thyani* could able to see the past and future of the world and living creatures as well as *uyus* intension. The *uyus* were envy of *Nyime Dungrang* possessed by *Thyani*. So *uyus* organized a game called *booboo bonam* (rope swing game). *Thanyi* was also invited on the sport event with hidden agenda to snatch *Nyime Dungrang*. When *Thanyi* was busy in rope swing *uyus* trapped thyni and never allow him to coming down to ground. In return *uyus* demand *Nyime Dungrang* or lives of *Thyani*.

But intelligent *Thyani* did not carry the *Nyime Dungrang* with him, he hide it some were away from the spot. Lastly he reveals the fact in order to save his life. The *uyus* started fight for the *Nyime Dungrang* among themselves and *Nyime Dungrang* was broken. In the mean time *Thyani* also managed to free himself from the trapped and joined the tussle. But he could able to touch only some remain from scattered leafs. The major portion of the *Nyeme dungrang* was misplaced or taken by the *uyus*. From this day *uyus* could able to see human, but human could not see *uyus*. This event is considered as the day of separation between the human and uyus.

When it happened, *aabhu Thyani* consulted *Jangte anne* to overcome crisis. *Jangte anne* gave animal liver with her spit to *aabhu Thanyi* and asked him to place it at *kebu lambeek/Humbak/Gehumb pykum* (junctions of all the paths of *uyus* and *Thanyi*). After some time *Thanyi* discovered that some footprints on the spit of *Jangte Anne*. This was reported back to *Jangte anne* and she told *aabhu Thanyi* that, the footprint were of *uyus*. She also told to *Thyani*, the means and methods of knowing the desire and activities of the *uyus* through an omen. In this process activities of *uyus* can be seen through livers of fowls, pig and egg. She also
promised to give this knowledge to some person in the form of *nyub* (priest) who shall works as meddle between the human world and the *uyus*. From this day the omen is said to be originated and institution of priesthood also came into being and Nyai Tallo became the first human priest. It is said that the priest can see *uyus* and souls human occasionally.

After long struggles between the *uyus* and the *Thyani*, the *uyus* were virtually marginalized. They agreed to divide the territory and resources where the *uyus* were given hilly terrain, differently able living creatures and animals which are not useful to human being. The *dapo* (wooden poll used as symbols/ demarcation) is used as the sign of agreement. This is said to be the origin of *dapo ponam*. With this agreement *aabhu Thyani* conquered the universe. But *abang Chenne* (proprietor of poison) was not yet satisfy with the outcome. So one day, *abang Chenne* flot an evil design to eliminate *Thyani* and his generation. He invited *Thyani* for fishing by *subu peenam/bukter ternam* (catching fish by diverting water). *Thyani* catches only eatable fish, but *abang Channe* catches poisonous fish also. They boiled the fish in the *udung* (bamboo tube). In the process *abang Channe* exchanged his poison fish container with that of *Thyani*. *Thyani* also knew the tricks played by *Chenee* and he also quickly exchanged the *udung* into original place. But without knowing, *Thyanis* tricks *Channe* eaten the poisonous fish and died. His dead body was carried away beyond human habitant placed called *Dedalara* (*Snow Mountain*) and *Thyani* again saved the human. This is said to be the origin of ritual called *dapa beenam/dapa chhenam*). *Aabhu Thyani* was free from any sickness but his two daughters namely *Yariyo* and *Nyriyo* had fallen love with *Nyai Takwang* and *Nyai Talwng* the two sons of *doly* (epidemic) *uyus*. *Thyani* was reluctant to that relation because this two brother Takwang and Talwang were in semi-human form and very teen and short. But two brothers also challenge that they are as strong as *Thyani* and other creatures. But *Thyani* did not accept it and to prove their strength, *Thyani* challenged them to hit at his thumb from *Haa Ryingko* (*South Pole*). For this *Thanyi* stand at *Haasang Ryingdum* (*North Pole*) with his raised thumb. If would be sons in law arrow could hit the thumb of *Thyani*, he would allow her daughters to marry them. Arrow of Nyai Takwang and Nyai Talwng could able to hit the thumb of *Thanyi* which injured *aabhu Thyani* badly. This is said to be the origin of *Doly* (*Viral disease*) and for this *Nyishi nyub* performed ritual called *libiq bigbekpaqnam* by recalling these happening and the name of persons involved. This way Nyishi customs and laws were originated and the people are practicing the same till today which is now part of customary law of the Nyishis⁹.
Conclusion

The Nyishi understanding and interpretation regarding universe and life is unique. They follow oral but, fair knowledge transmission and memory help them maintain the knowledge intact. But the time is very tough due to modernity and interaction with various. The timely recording and documentation will help the scholars and policy maker in shaping direction.

Notes and reference:

2. Ibid
3. Ibid