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## **Mvgu/Fire Accident and Changing Local Taboo in Galo Society: A Case Study of Tadin Village of West Siang District, Arunachal Pradesh**

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#### **Abstract**

*Arunachal Pradesh a land of rising sun composes of 26 major tribes and more than 100 sub tribes. Among them Doba, Gallong Abor, Gallong Adi, Galo who traced their lineage from Abo Tani (fore father) settled in confluence of yomgoo river in west siang district and subansiri river in lower subansiri district are unique in their identity, ethnicity and culture. Before 2011 Galo were sub tribe of Adi tribe and listed as a scheduled tribe under the name Gallong since 1950 in writing, which changed the term Gallong to Galo by parliament Bill on 19 Dec, 2011 to reflecting the actual Galo pronunciation of this name and become separate tribe in Arunachal Pradesh. Since immemorial galos had its etymological culture of mvgu/fire accident and have unique and complex rituals and ceremonies. Our societies visualize some continuity and change in ritual ceremony after mvgu. This paper attempts to study the etymology of mvgu and its effect on socio-economic life of galos. It also attempts to outline the changing society of Galo for mvgu by bridge better relationship between victim and society.*

**Keywords:** *mvgu, kojum-lento, nyirsi/xwrsi-marsi, aarw-rwnam, vrap-gvpak, Buhu-Loma, Komro-Komte/komtv.*

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**Introduction:** Human civilization gradually changed due to discovery of fire which is also associated with mythological belief of Galo tribes. The happy life changed with mvgu which was cursed of the sun and start changed the life of Galo society due to its unique and complex ritual. But this ritual practice becomes a hurdle for victims then and now. Where the system of mutilation and isolation took place but this aged old practise is ritually accepted by society in lieu to continue its tradition and culture. The changing society with rational, new theological and modern ideology gave some relaxation in practising ritual ceremony after mvgu. Among the 26 major tribes of Arunachal Pradesh, Galo is one of the tribe who still practising many ritual ceremony of fire accident. So the proposed paper and researcher should study the case of consecutive fire accident within two year which gutted down 51 houses, 25 rice mill, 5 granaries, 1 church and 1 Dere/community house in Tadin

village and should study the causes and effect of mvgu and the condition of victims in society.

**Objective of study:** The prevalent of local taboo after mvgu/fire accident need special exploration of its etymology, causes and effect on Galo society. The reference of few journals, books, dairies and government document do not reach the ambit of this system prevalent and practically by Galo then and now. Therefore, with this background, present research work on 4 may 2015 and 1 august 2017 fire accident at Tadin village shall analysis the ethnological and changing Galo society with following **objective:** To study the etymology of mvgu/fire accident, to study the causes and effect of mvgu on Tadin village, To study the continuity and change in local taboo of mvgu in galo society.

**Review of literatures:** In this book entitled the gallong (2010), L. R. N Srivastava has discussed about existence of chute/chutv-Gamte/gamtv, iite/eetv-bote/botv (benevolent spirit of house) without them house cannot prosper. And stated the special ritual performance in constructing house in auspicious area. He brief about the role of fire which was control by benevolent sprite which keeps family happy and prosper. And he will appease by giving oblation when angry, otherwise it led to fire accident.

In this book entitled Glimpses of early history of Arunachal (1989) L.N Chakravarty has discuss about socio cultural life of Galo tribes of siang and role of kebang in settling any village and inter-village dispute.

In this book entitled Tribal Village council of Arunachal Pradesh (1999), Dr. B. B Panday, Dr. D. K Duarah, N. Shankar has chaptered on institution of keba/kebang a village council who solved any cases as per socio- political sphere.

Varrier Elwin's another work, myths of the North East Frontier of India, (1958), He discuss about the origin and ethnology of Galo.Heexplains the present of keba/kebang, buliang system and present of customary law by all community of Arunachal.

Bogum-Boka (Galo customary law, west siang district, Aalo) 2017ed, liya ete and medam ete has stated the fine of one mithun and all expenses of ritual done in village by person whose negligence the fire accident. Also if somebody died then accused should give two mithuns and two cows to deceased family

In this book entitled Adi tribes of Arunachal Pradesh (2006), S. H. M Rizvi and shibani Roy try to sum all statement given by scholar and writers regarding the origin of Adi a synonymous of Galo title and has discuss about socio- cultural life of Galo with their physical decoration.

Alexander Mackenzie's the north east frontier of India (1989), explain the term Abor and Gallong or Doba Adis as sub group and their different cultural identity.

In his book entitled leadership pattern in tribal society (1991), B. B Pandey has explain socio- political view to have better inter tribe and inter regional relation institution of

marriage system. He also explains enduring of new social and cultural ideas for each of sides.

In this book entitled slavery in Arunachal Pradesh, A. Kr. Thakur (2003), has discuss about the slave become asset for their master by indulge in marriage system. These slaves were capture from inter-tribal raid, accused of fire accident, and long debt of family.

**Research Methodology:** The important reason for taking up the present research topic is to study Age old ritual practice and gradual changes after fire accident in Galo society. Field survey was the main mode of research where both the primary and secondary source is consulted. For convenience of educated and uneducated villager, Research was done with schedule interview and questionnaire. Many Govt. published books, document, survey reports, books, journals and magazine were consulted.

**Statement of the problem:** The socio-culture and economic life of Galo society is complex of unique ritual performance like mvgu/fire accident which has its etymological origin since immemorial time. Galo society continued to follow aged old ritual practise but with civilization they start to glorify the rituals making relaxing ritual practise. Though this paper researcher would seek to know about etymology of mvgu and its causes, effect and change in the society. We have a good deal of literature on history and culture of Arunachal Pradesh and the Galo, yet we do not get a clear picture of its etymology and ritual practice and its changing trends in Galo society on fire accident. So, study on mvgu/fire accident and changing society needs better understanding and research.

**Discussion:** Etymologically During the creation of universe and earth there were two sun so, which result in sleepless habits, exhausted life, drying up of environment due to overheat and darkness was aloof. so a meeting was conveyed and decided to shot down one of the two and the responsibility was assigned to Komte Lakda (malevolent sprit),who had taken his komro komte(weapon of bow and arrow) from Buhu-Loma(iron smite).He shot down one of the two so, another sun as a protest refuse to emit his light again. Now the darkness prevails and life become worsens for survival. So a meeting was again held and Pwrwk (grey jungle fowl/*Gallus sonneratis*), Pvga (oriental pied hornbill/), Pako-Tanw (rat) and Ui Kobu (*cryptomys hottentotus*) were sent as a messenger of peace to request the sun to re-emit her light again for welfare for all. At last she agreed but he warns of accomplished her with many unnatural calamity and hazard. She also asked to give son of komte lakda as yidum (oblation) for her. But Tapen (bat) as mediator lie to council that sun asked Niri (the son of abo tani/our fore father) for oblation so for welfare of all abotani agreed and sent his son as oblation for sacrifice. But later sun found that she had taken innocent life of niri and cursed the bat to be categorizes nor as animal nor as to be bird. The sun feel guilty and asked the abo tani not to comes out when she re-emit her light again for few hours in order to avoid accomplished unnatural hazard and calamities, but abo tani want to see the new light and comes out. since then abo tani is also cursed with unnatural hazard like mvgu/fire accident, unnatural death, bite of snakes, fighting among ones, draught, famine etc.now the fire again become uncontrolled devastate and all start

running away from kojum lento (fire) or yachu/unnatural calamity which is now regarded as aarw-rwnam (keeping seclusion oneself from bad omen). Now they start searching for agent which could be used to extinguish the fire so, it was decided to use water as extinguisher but the present of nyirsi-marsi (water) were undeciphered. Now they start searching nyirsi -mars (water) to extinguish fire and meeting was conducted where all agreed for roksin / reksin kika nam (hepatoscopy) to find out nyirsi-marsi (water). Fortunately a rat with water droplet in his moustache attends the meeting and all start questioning of water. Rat tells the present of pond filled with water underground so all decided to trace out the way and to dig out the water. All request abo tani to show a way for underground water but only small hole was made from his shot so, the task was again entrusted to nyite/xwtv-pote/potv (spirit) to dig out the water from underground. He went to buhu-loma and took axe, sword and dug out water. Since then water is used as agent to extinguish fire. Now the fights between fire and water start which result with flee of fire and hide under the rock. So rock become so hot that the strike of two pieces can ignite spark which was later supported by compiling kopu-hamik (spongy material of *Caryota maxima*) to start fire.

Fire accident is followed by many ritual ceremonies in village and with victim. Where victims are allowed to remain seclusion for two days or 1 month away from village and allow retaining hut in periphery of village. It is only to keep village away from transmitting bad omen of fire accident. The first two days were regarded as obligation days for sun and water gods. The villagers meet in a fix day and Merap/mvrap-Gepak/gvpak or Medum/mvdum-Gepak/gvpak (ritual ceremony to override bad omen of fire accident) where effigy of fire and almighty god is made with flora like taboo (one species of bamboo with herby and small in height), Richi (entada purseatha), Tare (cane leaves), tale (*Wallichia densiflora*), pibum-pija (*Saccharum spontaneum*), Tabuk-bukli, belak, kora, Tagi, hiuk-hiak. Some times hepatoscopy was done to find out the causes and based on result of hepatoscopy number of yidum (oblation) are fixed for sacrifice. Even mithun, rectum (male pig), goat were used for yedum/oblation. Yidum should be managed by that family from whose house fire first started. During ritual ceremony one member of accused house from where mvgu started was to carry male pig for oblation and another are assigned to carry eegin (basket to carry woods) where half burned wood of gutted house and one such half burnt wood throw down by every house of village to be carried in his/her basket. Villager also pour/sprinkle water on them too during visit in every house a small piece of dumde-dakyo/kolu (*Musasapientum*) are thrown to every house roof till last rite area by nyibu/priest. This is done in fear not to transmit the yachu/bad omen of that house by villager. nyibu (priest) who is go between human being and spiritual world (gite) was blessed by tabo goar (spirit) and assigned to conduct this kind of ritual along with boo/assistant priest. For final rite an eerap/seepe is constructed where animal and fowl blood is smeared on the prepared effigy and was allowed to flow away with ship in water. If there were no river near the village then a spot far away from village where no one easily trace pass were chosen for such ritual ceremony. The villager who took part in those rituals took bath and then only enter their house and start ignite fire. For ritual ceremony the priest were gifted with Aadam/aame (Himalayan

plate), Tekom (Tibetan bell) etc. some time if they don't have that then some cultivable land was given as debt. Of ritual performance. But mostly they have the material because they hide out their valuable metal underground in some decipher area in fear of such accident.

If somebody died during fire accident then hepatoscopy was conducted and trace out the main causes of fire accident in particular house and to whole village. Then the result of hepatoscopy is associated with giving separate yudum (oblation) in his/her name to please the bad omen not to repeat again. But sometime this cannot be held due to unavailable of actual owner of house like keba dere (community hall), government quarter etc. for that simple ritual was held with recitation of charms & spells by sprinkle of water on spot to over ridden the bad omen. The area where fire guttered the house cannot be reuse in fear of evils still remain there. The victim can enter the house or village of other only after Gapu Ripak/Medum Gepak but they have to perform a month long ritual obligation of performed ceremony.

Galo people follow many rules and regulation regarding such type of accident and always follow the mythological obligation for mitigation of fire accident. they tied up skin of hochik (pangolin), tails of ngobi (eel fish) in entry door of house, keeping skin of elephant and python, also if bad dream is able to divination then the causes is investigate through hepatoscopy and it might be mitigate the fire accident by giving oblation.

The great devastated fire accident engulfs more than 51 houses in Tadin village within a short span of two years. On march 4, 2015 as 14 houses, Two granaries, One church and Six rice mills were gutted down and in-charge deputy commissioner Tamik Talom provide Rs. 4000, 12 bags of Rice and 1 bag of salt to each as immediate relief and on 1 August 2017, around 2:30 am the fire engulf 37 houses, One community house (dere), 3 granaries and 19 rice mill into its hazard orbit without any death casualty. The incident spread as synonymous to wild fire with getting super and sub sonic responses from different corner of state. For fast relief deputy commissioner of West Siang with district disaster management officer rush into spot and gave Rs. 1,40600 as immediate relief and handed 1 lakh as donation from hotel Todo, Itanagar. many temporary tent and ration and medicine flow in the spot from 1 Bihar Regiment under 5-Infantry Brigade Of Indian Army, Itbp and district hospital Aalo. Cries and worry of fire victim engulf more than 149 governmental and non-governmental organisation supports like Aalo veteran football club, Galo welfare society, North East Frontier Technical University; Aalo Baptise church etc provided its best possible support. The local MLA Jarkar Gamlin handed Rs. 50 lakh as contribution from Pema Kandu (chief minister of Arunachal Pradesh), kiran Rijju (MoS for Home Affairs of India) and himself as relief fund to fire victim of Tadin.

The mvgu/fire accident of Tadin Village had categorized many causes. Theologically the long debt. Of bad omen in family might caused this incident in particular and incomplete and wrongful ritual ceremony by village might led the incident. Some time if chute-gamte, lite-bote (benevolent sprite of house) is not pleased then such accident occurs. It is also belief that if victim and villager don't observe strictly the norms prescribe in ritual

ceremony then it might transmit for another accident. As the cases of MAY 4,2015 accident ,where the accused were forced to perform ritual ceremony of Gapu-Ripak/Merap-Gepak(ritual ceremony to overridden bad omen of fire accident) but they were Christian so, they and other villager might not observe Aarw-Rwnam(keeping seclusion oneself from bad omen from transmit)strictly which might led to another fire accident. To mitigate the accident hepatoscopy is done by priest to find out the causes. As per the result of hepatoscopy oblation is given to mitigate the accident. The accident of 1 August 2017 was due to irresponsible of not switch off the gas stove. It is informed that On 31<sup>st</sup>July the accused house had late night merrymaking party after reaping paddy of jhum field. By end of the party they fried Tipak (galo cuisine) in gas stove which was stationed in corner of the house. It is reported that the fire start from the site where gas stove were kept and concluded that accident was due to un attend of turning off gas and not from hearth which is in the centre of the house. Generally our irresponsibility and ignorance led to occurs fire accident in Galo house made of wooden, bamboo and Taek/toko patta (livistonajenkinsiana) some causes like:

1. The carelessness burning of fire woods in hearth during night.
2. Practising of not putting off the fire before sleep or unguarded fire and not paying attention of fire wood size beyond the fire place/hearth.
3. Throw away of ashes without completely extinguish led to fire accident in wooden made house.
4. The roast of Ampu (rice husk), Tami (millet/eleusinecora canagaertn) which is use for preparation of Opo/Apong (rice beer) might be over heated or disperse by cat, dog and fowls result in mvgu.
5. Earlier days burned fire wood was used as a light during night visit may cause fire accident.
6. Dried/smoked of pig and other fatty meat at first chamber of tray over hearth led to melt down of fats which ignite greater fire and led to accident.
7. Throwing of cigarettes and matches in wooden made house without fully extinguished its butts.
8. Sometimes high wind blowing should be kept in mind and not to burn in open area or leaving the fire without putting off properly.
9. The incident may be caused due to burning of naked lamps led to fire accident.

As per the accident that occurs in Tadin village on May 2015 and August 2017, the condition of fire victims and villager were changed little. So, the socio-economic and religious condition of victims and villagers of Tadin fire accident were categorized into section based on field survey and schedule interview on their economic condition, cases of ritual/isolation which led to religion mobility, their physical and mental status, judiciary aspect, politicize and future planning.

The economic condition of victims were worsen due to burned down of their savings and valuable property and some public account of self help group and corpus fund along with individuals check book and account pass book. They had some relieved by getting support

from many government and non-government organisation. But the health and Economic status became worsen due to which they were unable to re established their house and economy asset which make their family suffer in field of education, livelihood, settlement etc. They urge government and other non-government organisation to support in enhancing their economic status.

The accident shows the condition of society in terms of continuity and change in ritual practise. As old ritual stated to be isolating the victims in order not to transmit the bad omen from them to other house or villager. But the case of such tendency was not seen in Tadin village as all treat equally and extends fast and essential support to victims through constructing temporary house, providing rations, allow to staying with them and emotion support. As due to very busy schedule after accident some might feel the atmosphere of isolating them from other village. But due to presence of rationalist person and some theologian who extend moral and physical support never led them to feel isolating from others. The rituals of isolating victims led to some religion conversion but in case of Tadin such cases was not found, except one family convert to Christianity after fire accident not due to isolation but the choice of family to enhance their economy, health and theological belief as stated by family.

To support and to regulate the condition of victim the villager constituted a committee. As per the committee more than 149 government and non-government organisation extend support and minimize the pain of victims through providing financial, house hold material and medical. Local MLA Jarkar Gamlin extend his ex-gratia with sanctioning of levelling the location of incident for better settlement without politicizing the issue.

The Galo were attached with many judiciary/keba/village council in all aspect but in regard with Tadin accident no such cases were informed but after may 2015 accident the three accused children who ignite the fire were unanimously fined a sum of Rs.5000 as to be compensate to villager for making dread as reported by local ASM-1 of Tadin Village. Many by laws and document related to judiciary were also gutted down which were kept in community house/dere for reference. After the accident keba was conveyed and decided to buy GI sheet by all victims for their newly construct house and the construction should be planned by keba with modern settlement pattern. The Gaon Bura and village Secretary were entrusted to look over any kind of dispute if arise and to solve amicably without any physical and mental torture.

**Concluding observation:** Galo who settle in confluence of yomgoo and Subansiri River still continue aged old culture and tradition which is identity of their existence. But many ritual and ceremony are very hard and objectionable to follow which result in many socio-economic and political changed in terms of religion mobility, economic depression in family, secluded life style due to some local taboo, sometimes delinquent in judiciary proceeding due to affix rigid local taboos. But with renaissance in ideology, thinking and rationalist the aged old local taboos and many ritual ceremonies come into decline. The time of isolation, domination, delinquent justice, strict life style now changed with better

humanity and adaptation. As this research topic stated the norms and ritual practise which was very rigid to stick with custom and tradition, but changed in time the life style of victims and society of Tadin village was better stratified on socio-economic and political without any rigid norms to follow. And researcher brief the etymology of fire accident, causes and effect of Tadin fire accident and summarize some basic cause of fire accident in Galo house and is to be mitigating the fire accident.

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