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Concepts of Death and Journey of the Soul after Death among the Adi Tribe of Arunachal Pradesh: A Study based on *Pénge*[1]

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Abstract

Drawing from the oral text *pénge* (funeral song) and chants in use among the Adi tribe of Arunachal Pradesh, this paper primarily aims at examining the concepts of death and soul's journey beyond the physical existence. The funeral song is a lengthy one performed beside a dead body by the *pénge miri* (*Pénge* singer, hereafter PM) throughout the whole night. The PM describes the Adi philosophy of death, one's achievements in life, and the steps to be taken to appease and guide the departed soul in its final journey to the netherworld. The explanation of human death and the soul's journey to another world is primarily centered around the spiritual life as believed and constructed among the pre-literate Adi society. This study may throw some light on the essence of the Adi belief in the continuity of this life and the afterlife as depicted in the *pénge*. The study is mainly empirical, whereby the funeral song was recorded during the real-time performance. Interviews were conducted with professional experts to get a simplified explanation of its content.

***Keywords*:** Death, Ritual, *Pénge*, *Miri*, Soul, Soul-journey and Transmigration.

Introduction

Every society in its preliterate form has been found to be in possession of its own subjective worldview of nature and natural phenomena which forms an essential component of its oral tradition. Based on their sacred beliefs and faith in supernaturalism, the Adi[2] tribe has developed an elaborate ritual system. Like the *samskaras* of the Vedic

belief system, they have a series of rites and rituals to be followed in one's life time, from cradle to grave. Hence, death is also associated with elaborate funeral rituals. A prominent ritual practice associated with the Adi funeral is the traditional song called *pénge*, which is the main source of the present study. It is performed beside a dead body by the *pénge miri*[3] (Pénge singer, in short PM) before the final cremation is done. It has a wide content, something like a biographical account of the deceased person, containing prescriptions to be followed to appease and guide the departed soul in its final journey. Above all, the main idea behind the elaborate performance centers around the concepts of human death and the soul's journey after death. Clearly, the *pénge* has multiple meanings and is central to the understanding of beliefs and practices of the community.

Traditionally, the Adi tribe had been practicing animism as it is usually understood. With the advent of Christian missionaries during the British rule, conversion started and gathered some momentum. As a counter-reaction to it, in 1968, some Adi first-generation learners and intellectuals led by Talom Rukbo restructured and reoriented the Adi belief system into the Donyi Polo religion, named after their principal Sun-Moon Gods. (Chaudhuri: 2013). Presently, Donyi-Polo performs funeral prayer songs that are composed in recent times. These songs are sung when the *pénge* is not performed. Despite of such changes, the practice of *pénge* remains as customary although it is not mandatory to all.

Approaches to Studying the Ritual of the Dead

In all religions, death is the gateway to the netherworld in more than its literal sense. The events following it are significantly bound and interwoven into a web of social relationships and cultural pattern specific to a society. According to Allen Kelleher, in the case of human beings, emotion sometimes gets the better of reason where it has a better chance to manifest; consequently, the event of death is not just limited to its biological implication, instead it is submerged into existential reflections and social norms (Kellehear: 2007).

The Egyptian Book of the Dead is regarded by many as the earliest literature dealing with the dying and the afterlife. The translated book 'The Book of Coming forth by Day' contains around 200 spells that are meant to help and guide the soul to overcome the dangers and obstacles while journeying to the netherworld (Delley: 2023). In Hindu Dharma there are sixteen Samskaaras, the last one called 'Anthyeshti Samskara' deals with the funeral rites. It covers descriptions of the netherworlds—*Yama-Loka* and various kinds of *Naraka Lokas* (Hell). The experiences of the soul as it leaves the body and the

cycle of countless births the soul undergoes are simultaneously explained (Basham: 1954).

The theories propounded by Robert Hertz, Emile Durkheim, and A. Van Gennep are basic to studying the dimensions of death ritual, including funeral song. Robert Hertz holds the view that the final funerary service releases the soul from the grip of death and provides it peace. It ensures its entrance into its new home with other ancestral souls. In the final ceremony of death, separation of body and soul is completed, which also ensures the soul's entry into the community of the sacred ancestors. He further opines that the conflict between the mortality of the human body and the immortality of the soul is resolved by a belief in 'afterlife' and confirmed by the ritual performance all across the world (Hertz: 1960). A. Van Gennep views funeral ceremonies as the final aggregation of the ghost of the deceased into the community of the dead (Gennep: 1909). After studying shamanism, Eliade Mircea comes to the conclusion that after death the soul departs and enters a place that is believed to be the dwelling place of the ancestor souls (Mircea: 2004). Most of the scholars extensively use this theory while studying the funerary rituals. Keeping all these into account, the paper proceeds to understand the Adi concept of death and the social process associated with the soul's journey after death to the netherworld as described in the funeral song.

Review of Literature

Eliade Mircea studied the funeral rituals of several tribes across the world. He found that 'journeying in spirit' form was a common phenomenon among them. A soul has its own path of journey as per the beliefs held by a particular society. For example, according to the belief of an Indonesian tribe the soul after death sails back in the 'Boat of the Death' to the original homeland of the ancestors. The Lolo tribe believed that after death the soul should go to its rightful place in the heaven following a funerary ceremony called 'Zhi-ma', literally meaning the 'Road to Desire' (Mircea: 2004).

Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf draws our attention to the importance the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh attach to the specific journey of the soul to the 'Land of the Dead' as per their belief. The journey to that land has been described by him as tough and often tortuous. This picture is provided by the shamans who visit the World of the Dead either in their dreams or while in a state of trance brought about for the specific purpose of releasing the shaman's personality from all bodily ties (Haimendorf 1953: 42).

Stuart Blackburn found that although the journey of the soul of the dead and, more commonly, ritually authenticated journeys have been reported from many cultural regions (native North America, Polynesia, and island Southeast Asia), such practices

appear to be most prominent in Central and North Asia and in the Tibeto-Burman-speaking cultures stretching along the Himalayas, from Nepal to southwest China (Blackburn: 2005). He also studied the ritual signifying soul's onward journey as practiced by the Apatani and Mishmi tribes of Arunachal Pradesh through their oral texts. In the context of the Adi tribe, Sarah Hilaly made an attempt to describe the death ritual and journey of the soul. However, her study lacks information provided by the actual oral text, and many key aspects have been missing.

Objectives

The above-mentioned literature indicates the presence of somewhat similar beliefs among different cultural groups of the world, which are also reflected in the funeral practices of the Adi. Keeping this in mind, the paper attempts to document the *pénge* and examine all its broader aspects. The meaning of the *pénge,* the concept of death, existence of a soul and transmigration of a soul, existence of the land of the dead, and journey of the soul after death as contained in the basic theme of the *pénge* have come within the scope of the present study.

Methodology

The present paper is the outcome of an empirical study based on the funeral song of the 'Padam' group of the Adi tribe, predominately inhabited in the Siang valley. There are a number of villages included in the study such as Damro, Padu, Sili, Bodak, Ayeng, Mebo, Motum. The Damro is the parental village of the Padam Adi. This group has been practicing the funeral song till the present day, which was one reason why the area was selected for the study. In order to theme out the paper, data collection was carried out by recording the *pénge.* In the study area, only four people were found who could sing it, and they got themselves prepared to sing whenever a grieving family called them. Of them, three were from Ayeng, and one from Ngopok. The researcher had recorded the real-time performances of the two Damin Lego in 2015 and Abet Tayeng in 2018. A personal interview with the latter was taken in 2020 to understand the archaic words used in the song. Thereafter, to get equal representation of the respondent, four persons, each from Mariyang and Mebo sub-divisions of the Upper Siang and East Siang Districts, were interviewed. The numbers of respondents were few because the study was primarily on PM's content, although the procedure followed may not fall in the category of content analysis. It was more an attempt to get into the meaning of funeral song sung in archaic tribal language and find some explanation of ritual behaviors as well as the associated practices. Some knowledgeable persons of the society were interviewed in 2020-21 to get the layman's point of view. Due to the descriptive nature of the research, data were documented in a descriptive manner, followed by a critical analysis of the same.

An Overview of the *Penge*

In a natural death, the dead body is undressed and properly bathed and cleaned. Thereafter, the body is dressed up with new clothes in the same way when a baby is newly born, which signifies the cycle of life. Then, the dead body is kept at one side of the *puyu* (sides of the hearth where people usually sleep) till the preparation for the journey to the netherworld is underway and mortal remain is taken to be buried. If a person dies during the day, burial will be deferred till the morning, which is considered to be an ideal time for burial. Hence, from night to dawn, the *pénge* may be performed if the bereaved family so desires. In cases of unnatural death, such activities as bathing, wearing of new cloths, and performance of the funeral song adding dignity to the dead are not done. Even weeping besides the dead is strictly prohibited (Interview, Pertin: 2020).

Meaning of the Pénge

Some scholars have attempted to define the *pénge* according to their own observations and perceptions derived from their practical lives. J. Herbert Lorraine writes that the song is performed ' to recount to the dead before burial their life's history and also instructions as to their future life' (Lorraine: 1905). Another local writer, Bani Danggen, describes 'dirge as a solitary song to guide the soul of a dead man to its destination' (Danggen: 2007). According to Tamo Mibang, '*pénge* is a classical song sung by the old people at the time of death of their near and dear relatives' (Mibang: 2000). The definition given by Mibang has missed a point regarding the PM. While agreeing with him, it is also to be pointed out that the near and dear ones of the dead can only sing some lines to express the sorrow and grief caused by the death. As an expression of mourning, this may also be called *pénge*. But it gives a narrow meaning. In a broader sense, it is a funeral solo song sung by the shaman or an expert among the laymen to narrate the life and afterlife journey of the deceased person (Interview, Pertin: 2020). For a better understanding, let us take Milton Cohen's description. He writes,

The final service ends the travail of the soul, releases it from the grip of death, gives it peace, and ensures its entrance into its new home with other ancestral souls. Priests and priestesses arrange this spiritual transport (Milton 1998:5).

The above statement seems to be applicable to some knowledgeable Adis. The only difference with Milton Cohen's statement is that the songs recorded in this paper are not sung by the shaman but by the common men having knowledge about them.

Authority of the Pénge Performance

There is a pertinent question to be answered: who is authorized to perform *pénge*? The shaman is the real authority because of his power to communicate with the unseen forces. Sometimes he performs in a trance while escorting the soul. But though shamanism was originally related to it, it is a rare practice these days. As a matter of fact, it is not that easy to come across shamans among the Adi. In the changing situation, nowadays a well-versed, resourceful person sings the song after attaining the professional skill in the absence of the shaman. A PM of this type is heavily dependent on memory and prior learning by mentally identifying with the shaman. Unlike shamans, they do not have divine power but have the professional expertise to perform (Interview, Pertin: 2020).

The performance of the song requires a person to have knowledge about the steps to be taken in singing without music and with no followers as we come across in other songs of the Adi. The PM sings *pénge* by sitting beside the dead body. While singing, the PM mandatorily holds a flat stick.[4] The palm of the other hand is placed at the jaw, and the elbow of the hand is placed over the knee to support the head. It is sung in a rhythmic melancholic tune, 'aya..., *ulo…alo lolo…* and *ada… ada tai mamo é…*' (the Adi way of expressing pain and grief) to express the distress and pain for the deceased person on behalf of the family. These words are prefixed repetitively in every stanza or after a few lines all through *pénge* which makes it different from other songs (Pénge, Lego: 2015).

In order to perform a *pénge,* PM is to be hired by the bereaved family. The overhead charge of hiring them is expensive since traditional endowment is usually in precious *tadok* (porcelain beads).[5] Now-a-days cash is also accepted. It is treated as the price of his nightlong toil. The singing of it entails a threat to PM since it deals with the dead person. The evil spirits may harm him on the way (Interview, Pertin: 2020). As engaging a PM has become a costly affair, not every family is in a position to meet the expenses (Interview, Perme: 2020).

Nature and Functions of the Pénge

The purpose of the *pénge* is wide as could be revealed from this specific study. The following description will show its nature and functions. It is sung only to commemorate natural death. It can be sung irrespective of gender and age. However, the song is considered more appropriate for the elderly person. It is because singing of it entails the deeds and achievements of a deceased person and there is little scope to do it in the case of a young one (Interview, Pertin: 2020). Life finds meaning when it is lived fully.

The death of a family member is the most tragic event in one's life. At this juncture, the *pénge* plays a significant role in consoling the bereaved family by telling the universal truth of life - that the human being is mortal but the soul is immortal. Basically, it is a performance meant for the peaceful journey of the soul. Once PM starts singing, the family and relatives gradually stop weeping in order to listen carefully to its content and not to disturb the PM's performance. The PM's performance serves double purpose. On the one hand it helps in family members regaining their composure, and on the other it keeps them awake and deeply engrossed as they listen to the song (Interview, Pertin: 2021).

It is believed that there is life after death. Hence, the objects belonging to the deceased or used by the person during lifetime are offered at the funeral. Offering also consists of food grains, other edibles, ornaments, daily useful utensils, and animal sacrifice.[6] The *pénge* is a medium to convey the sacrifice and offering made by the family and relatives. While narrating, the PM strives to appease the soul to accept the offering and sacrifice made for him and leave the worldly life gracefully without looking back (Interview, Tayeng: 2020). The sacrifice of fowl (female one that have not lay egg yet) by the relatives is described in the following lines:

No konno ké ai, yekli-yekpan a pannam takam é ai.
(Yesteryears, during life time, you were given a piglet.)

Rokli é rokpan pannam takam é.
(Now giving a chicken to you to be tamed.)

Nom géddang é ai, tabí é géddang ém géman é bidokupé,
(Again, today relatives are giving you in bulk.)

Yekjong é joman ém bidak ku ai,
(Giving you a pig to be tamed.)

Ga:te ké rokrék é sibé si ai,
(Giving you fowl to be tamed.)

Tabi é géddang é nom ai géman bidokupé,
(A full load of fowls for you to carry ahead.*)* (Pénge, Lego: 2015).

By sensing the existence of the ancestral land, the PM guides the soul on its journey to the land through the *pénge.* As the journey begins, he prays and wishes the soul to successfully reach its destiny. The *Maksong Sumpa* has the power to guide the soul and the PM to find the right path to the other world.

Ya. Bomi é Rapul[7] *é ai, niné nom esi pé kabié ríyek é daksim.*
(Oh my Bomi Rapul brother! I am lamenting your death.)

Marmapé kaban é pepe é daksim ai.
(I am lamenting your departure.)

Sina Pédong é nané ke Pédong é níkong sim ai kedang,
(See, I am holding Pedong nane's woven stick.)

Arum bíngu kedang lagag a bomdakla ai.
(I am carrying it with me to guide you.)

Esi ké béne biting takam é, marma ké égo é berbéng takam ém,
(I am carrying it, so that there would be no trouble for you to proceed further.) (Pénge, Lego: 2015).

The *pénge* is something like a manual giving guidance to the departed soul in course of its journey to the other world. The PM on his part convinces and urges the soul to pay attention to his words and follow him in whatever form he or she exists after death. The PM pursues the soul to discard worldly possessions and accept whatever the family and relatives offer. It is believed that if the departed soul hankers after the worldly possession, it might harm the domestic animals and agricultural possession of the concerned family (Interview, Tayeng: 2020).

Phases of the Pénge Performance

In order to have a proper understanding of the *pénge,* it has been categorized into different stages based on the basic subject matter of the narration. The sequence may vary from one singer to another, but the basic content is the same. At the very beginning, the PM introduces himself to the listeners and to the deceased person's soul, makes a declaration about his attendance in mourning and presence of relatives and friends of the deceased. Then, he apprises listeners and the soul that he has been hired by the family to guide the soul in its onward journey (Pénge, Lego: 2015).

The first stage of the *pénge* is focused on how Doni[8] was born and brought up in the world. It also narrates how Doni defeated the forces of other competitors, his survival was proof enough that he was the fittest by virtue of his shrewdness, and could become the master of the world (Pénge, Lego: 2015). The reason for tracing such a background is that all human beings pass through the same stages of growing and facing struggles as Doni did.

The PM addresses the background where the deceased person's birth took place as an introduction. It is necessary to do so, so that the descent (both patrilineal and

matrilineal linage) of the person could be known by the listeners. During the study, it was found that women used to stay in their parents' home for a couple of years more despite being married and given birth to children before shifting to their in-laws' house. So, the maternal uncle's home is no less important than that of the father in a child's upbringing. As such, the *pénge* gives special attention to the maternal home where the deceased person spent his or her childhood days. Thereafter, the narration shifts to the paternal home (Interview, Pertin: 2022).

The next part deal with the deceased person's paternal home. It involves the *Gumin soyin* (the benevolent deity of home, also applies to custodian spirits), considered one of the responsible deities to deal with the death of a family member. His agreement with the *Nyité poro* (the spirit of the world of the dead) culminates in the death of a human being (Pénge, Lego: 2015).

After the introduction of house and family, *pénge* then proceeds to describe the various stages of life in general. While singing, PM highlights and illustrates the life of the deceased person from cradle to grave. It primarily focuses on the deeds and achievements, if any, of the person in the public sphere. Thus, by listening to it, one can get a short biographical sketch of the concerned person (Interview, Pertin: 2020). The biographical account is again categorized into the following sequences:

The following phase is depicted in the story of upbringing of the person during childhood, which is called *sisang-gí:sang*. The PM narrates under what condition the person had been brought up by the parents. Here, we come to know about childhood as the period of 'learning by doing' in association with peer groups and the process of developing skills. Here the physical and mental developments are elaborately dealt with. The relevant excerpt from the *pénge* runs as follows:

Ada a…No kongki é boté é buluké é ai.
(You are the son of *Kongki boté.)*

Noké ko:mang é nané buluke é.
(And being the son of *Komang nané.)*

Nom pajal é, aji pajal jalman é ku.
(You have been pampered like anything.)

Aya a…Ané aji nom pajal é jalman é daglang.
(Here mother had pampered you.)

Aya.Ané aji nom mébi é béli é dagla a.
(Here mother had nurtured you tenderly.)

Abo olo nom pajal é jallén ko é.
(Here, the father began expressing his love for you through a lullaby)

Aya… Konno ké ngilum é…Aji nom ngilum é lumman lénkua lalo (Pénge, Lego: 2015).
(Oh, you the child of man! This is the very place where your birth ritual was solemnly performed.)

Thereafter, it proceeds to the family and social life of the deceased person. This is basically the phase of attaining strength and courage, having achievements, and social recognition that one aspires for in life. This phase is termed *gíngkí-singkí.* For an agrarian Adi, achievements are counted in terms of agricultural production, possession of the domestication of animals, owning of costly elements of material culture, number of hunted animals, size of the immovable property, quality of siblings and one's offspring. The achievements would be duly recorded in the funeral song. For example, if a person was a good hunter, the *pénge* would without fail mention about it (Interview, Pertin: 2020).

The next phase is the retirement stage of a person. It is an agonizing part of one's life when the person feels rather neglected and excluded from most of the activities of the social life. Nevertheless, such a person stands for a different kind of value – one of fulfillment and completion of the cycle of life with the approaching death. Thereafter, the *pénge* tries to explain the philosophy of life and death shaping their worldviews (Interview, Tayeng: 2020).

The last phase, called *bédang énnam*, describes the route of the final journey of the soul to the other world. The PM sets the final journey along with the soul of the deceased person by following a particular route to reach its destination, which is called *pénge ayit bédang*. According to Sarah Hilaly 'the funerary songs both linguistically and mnemonically connected distant site into the cultural and mental landscape' (Hilaly: 2017). This route coincides with their original migration route, and the study area comes under it.

Since a dead man is buried, his/her mortal body becomes a part of the soil. Hence, it is metaphorically said that the deceased makes friend with *Tabín Dorín* (termite) and *Dongal* (earthworm) and starts its journey from thereon by rising from the burial pit (Interview, Tayeng: 2020).

Aya. No kilung dorín é tabín dorín bulumté,
(You shall be the friend of a termite.)

No dorin rumné mé rumkai.
(You made one of them your friend.)

No dorín ginying é aying kai.
(You are now a friend of them in every respect.)

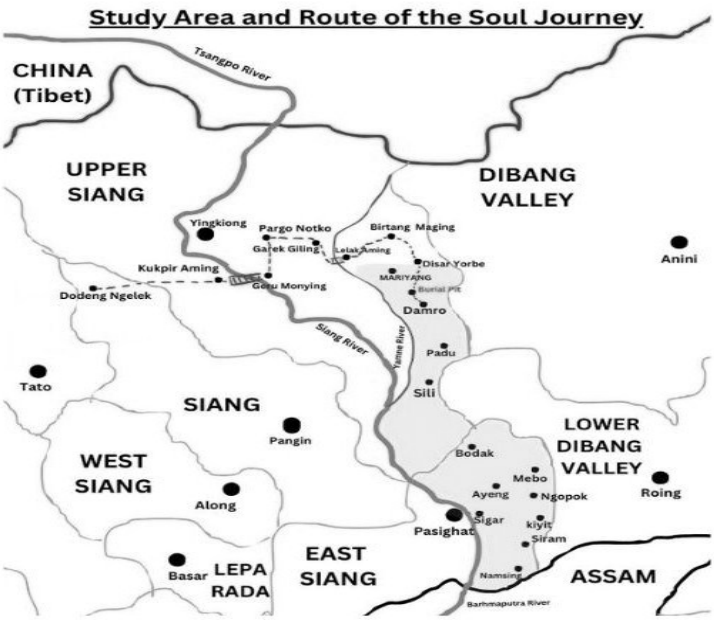
No kirti pé dibum é batlu kanadé,
(You could mold yourself as a mole.)

Nokké godum romrum logé, no kirti pé dibum é batlu langala,
(And you shall rise from the grave as a mole.)

Ngitépé dégu é yirang pé énlenye,
(You shall then proceed towards the land of the dead.) (Interview, Tayeng: 2020).

The following are the names of selected important places along the route soul takes, starting from Damro village up to Dodéng Ngélék (abode of the soul):

Damro ⟶ Burial pit⟶ Dísar yorbé⟶ Bírtang Megíng ⟶ Lélak Amíng (crosses the river Yamné) ⟶ Garék Gílíng⟶ Pargo Notko⟶ Géru Monying⟶ Kukpír Amíng (crosses the river Siang), and finally to Dodéng Ngélék (the abode of soul in Riga area) (Interview, Tayeng: 2020). The following map shows the study area and the route taken by the soul during its journey from Damro to Dodéng Ngelék.



The soul in its spirit form starts its final journey from its own house, and the *PM* takes the soul underground since the mortal remains are to be buried. Then, it rises from the Disar Yorbé, proceeds towards the Birtang Megíng, and crosses the river Yamné. Thereafter, it ascends to the mountain range through Garék Gílíng, where the soul is received by the people of *Ngitéporo* (people of the dead world) at Pargo Notko. The dead or the soul of it is removed of his old cloth by the *Ngitéporo* people and a new *singkuk galuk* (barked cloth) is given. Hence, we can say that this place is the gateway to the soul's journey. It is believed that the trunks and branches of the trees and ground of this place are glossy due to the frequent use of them by the soul for keeping clothes that have been brought from this world (Interview, Pertin: 2022).

Thereafter, the route of the journey descends to Pobé Bemi and to Geru Monying. Then, it crosses the river Siang through Kukpír Aming (a place where a hanging bridge is located). Finally, the journey, after travelling along the above-mentioned path and after reaching *Dodéng Ngélék*, comes to an end. While bidding adieu to the soul, the PM points towards its final destination and asks the soul to live there forever in a new abode. The excerpt from the *penge* may be quoted.

Déna nyité bori dolung.
(That is the dead men's village.)

Sina poro bokong dolung é.
(Here's the dead people's village.)

Déna mitík do:lé rekap dagné.
(Those are their houses lined in a row.)

Sina kamme do:lé rékap dagné.
(Here houses are arranged in a distinctive pattern.)

No ngité ruutum ém tumlangka.
(You establish your own house there.)

No poro ruutum ém tumlangka.
(You build your own house with the demised mate.)

Ngité díang é yirang élo.
(This is the land of the dead people.) (Interview, Tayeng: 2020).

After escorting the soul successfully and having shown the dead land, the PM leaves the soul and returns to his home by using *pémí* (eagle) as a vehicle following a different route in the return journey (Interview, Tayeng: 2020). It is important to note that

wherever the person dies, the route of the journey starts from their village, and it mandatorily passes through Damro.

All souls of natural death have to travel through the same route to the netherworld, irrespective of whether the *pénge* is performed or not. It also implies that the nature of death decides where the soul is destined to go.

Concept of Death and Existence of Soul as Revealed through the Pénge

Human beings are mortal and death is a natural process, so is the mourning of the bereaved family. This brings us to the elaborate rituals associated with death. Every community has its own religious and philosophical ideas and beliefs about death. Among the Adis, the notion of death is lucidly explained in the *pénge* which has been discussed under the following sub-headings.

1. *Predetermined by Kongki-Komang.*

Kangki Boté and *Komang Nané* (Fertility God and Goddess) are the designated deities of *Sedí Melo* (Creator of all) responsible for the procreation of human beings. These life-giver deities predetermined the life span of the human beings when to take birth. In a similar way, a human being also dies at the stipulated destined time. The following stanza is an excerpt, which substantiates the above:

Ya.. Kongki yokmo é ríyék é mambí ríyek é.
(The Fertility God has created you.)

Komang é ríyek é, yeksak liktung.
(The Fertility Goddess decides you to die one day.)

Komang é ríyék é yektum a liktung naike.
([So]God/Goddess has fixed your day to die.)

Komang é ríyék é yektum a liktung naike.
(So, fertility God has fixed your day to die.)

Kongki ané melo ké riyék é kyakek a génam é ai,
(As, fertility Goddess has fixed your day of birth.) (Penge, Tayeng: 2020).

It is believed that the death of 'Doni' alias 'Tani' (the first man on earth) is inevitable; even the *Misum-miang* (the Goddess of beads) has not survived forever. She was killed by *Sili sidong* (the spirit of flood and water) while in pursuit of the beads from her. Her death is a lesson that every living being is bound to die in this world one day or

the other, naturally or unnaturally. It seems that this version is meant to console the bereaved families that no one is immortal, whether he/she is rich or poor, God or Goddess. No body, even God or Goddess, is above death. Following are the lines that have rationalized death of a human being by comparing it with the Goddess *Misum's* death.

Misum mami é meté, meté takír é dígirang génam,
(It was mother *Misum,* who had accepted the inevitability of death.)

Doni téng, doni tagír é dirang mingédak.
(Man follows her footsteps.)

Noté misum tagír é dírang mín gédak.
(So, you are also following her as you die like her.) (Interview, Tayeng: 2020).

2. *Agreement between the Gumínsoyin and Ngitéporo*

They also believe that the death of a human being is caused by an agreement between the *Gumínsoyin* and *Ngitéporo* (the Spirits of the world of dead). *Ngitéporo* comes to *Gumínsoyin* with a proposal to take the lives of family members. If *Gumínsoyin* accepts the gift and other eatable offerings brought by *Ngitéporo* during the meeting, it is certain that one member will be facing death. Hence, acceptance of *Ngitéporo*'s proposal by *Gumínsoyin* is one of the reasons for human death. This action of *Gumínsoyin* is like somebody selling his or her prized possession of domestic animals for some monetary need, which amounts to succumbing to the inevitable. Moreover, *Gumínsoyin* also knows the fact that humans are mortal and death is unavoidable (Interview, Tayeng: 2020). So is his agreement which is a natural process. Following are the relevant lines excerpted from the *pénge;*

Nokké Rapul ané gumin é moko, koré ém kosutuné,
(Your Rapul benevolent deity of the home sold you).

Nokké soyin ané moko, soyin koré kosutuné,
(Your benevolent deity of home sold you.)

Nokké rapul ané gumín si,
(It is your household deity that sold you.)

Ngite binpu ém dorík sutula.
(By accepting the packed food offered by the dead people,)

Poro popu ém no tírik sula.
(By accepting the drinks prepared by the dead people,)

Ngité kerang ém pékpak subito (Interview, Tayeng: 2020).
(He discarded you to be among the dead.)

3. *Significance of the Donyi-Polo (*sun and moon*)*

In the legends of the Adis, there were two suns during the early stage of the evolution of the universe. With no presence of night, it heated the earth continuously and hindered the growth of plants and animals. So, *ettung tíklung* (frog that dwells inside the bamboo with a hole) killed one of them as decided by the council of the living world. Killing here probably signifies absorption of the heat generated by the sun because the killed one later became the moon endowed with less heat and brightness. In retaliation, the sun stopped rising, which caused absolute darkness on the earth. So, the selected elderly persons of the world decided to engage *Resi tabé* (the first known shaman-crow) in a mission to convince the sun to rise again.[9] The sun accepted the proposal of the *Resi tabé* on a condition. He said, "When I rise again, some *Doni aji* (human beings) will certainly die, and it will continue till the rising and setting process of the sun is completed." The crow accepted the terms with the expectation that a human being would definitely offer *pimbet* (packaged food) to a dead person, which would then be eaten by him. The belief that crows make noises in the vicinity of human settlement areas before a person dies by sensing the offering to a dead person ahead may be correlated with it. It is believed that the first human death occurred in the world when the sun rose and set again (Interview, Tayeng: 2020). From that point of view, the phenomena of the sun and moon rising and setting, and that of birth and death of human beings could be visualized as natural. However, some *mirí*(s) believe that a cock was engaged to invite the sun. That could be the reason why the cock crows before the 'sunrise' by sensing in advance the movement of the sun (Pertin: 1980). The following excerpt tries to find a link between death and rise/setting of sun and moon.

Boki moné, moné lobong é tétong saye kuém,
(When the sun rises and glows,)

Kasi ké dikong pongo mipí ém,
(Whenever he rises daily,)

Ngo doni miyum ém, milo lingoé saye ém,
(He will take human life numbering five hundred males.)

Bo moné, bo kirum é jumang dagém.
(Whenever the moon sets and dies,)

Nyamné língo ém, nyamé désap ém sangap bomye.
(She will take the lives of women to be buried.) (Interview, Tayeng: 2020).

The killing of one of the powerful celestial suns in the legendary tale also reflects the inevitability of death. While singing the *pénge*, PM persuades the soul and other members present at the funeral to accept the universal truth that human death is a natural phenomenon. It is bound to happen just as the sun rises and sets in. It can be further deduced that it is the sun that controls death. The excerpt stanza may be revealing enough.

Nom giné moné maya, siroké roé pongo délo, Bo moné, Bo lobong é títong dakém,
(Today's morning sun destined you to die.).

Nom Boo moné, Bo désap ém sangap to,
(Yes the rising sun makes you die).

No kongku tagír é girang gédak.
(It makes you to end your life).

Méyum ké yumé délo, Boki moné, Boki kirum ém. jumang génamé,
(Last night moon caused your death.)

Nom Boki kirum ém jumang bomnam é.
(You die as the moon sets in.)

No kongku béndéng ém bénang dak.
(You are bound to die.)

Boki moné maya, nom boki kirum ém jumang bomkané.
(Yes, it is moon which takes your life.)

Bo moné maya nom bo desap ém sangap bomtoné
(And the rising sun causes your burial.) (Penge, Tayeng: 2020).

The notion of *Nané-babu among* (the ancestral land, equivalent to heavenly abode) is a philosophical time-honoured theme in the Adi society. They believe that the souls of ancestors and grandparents live there, and the last desire of every individual is to reach that place (Danggen: 2007). This is a customarily projected preconceived notion of every individual. It is considered that those who reach the place attain eternal peace and reunion with their ancestors. The direction the soul takes to reach its abode almost coincides with the route taken by Adis during their migration.

Classifying the dead according to the nature of death has been prevalent since early times. It is believed that the departed souls live according to the nature and the cause of death. Those dying unnaturally are the victims of two evil spirits[10] (Borang: 2013). The souls of such people are believed to be hovering around living human beings

without having a proper land for them.[11] One is assigned two different types of abode according to the nature of his or her death (Interview, Pertin: 2020). The following table shows the classification of death types and its causes.

Table 1: Types of death and funerary tradition

Cause of death	Types of death	Types of Burial	The principal aspect of funerary tradition
Normal (old age)	*Sinu/Uyu*	With proper *Ago*[12]	Performs *pénge*, sacrifice and offering
Any accident and suicide	*Sirol/Taléng*	Without *Ago*	Offers live pig into the jungle. Dead body is not brought back to home.
Stillborn	*Orí*	Puts the body into a gourd pot and hung on the tree	No funerary service except maintaining taboo for three to five days.
Death during delivery	*Ngipong Urom*	Without *Ago*	*Li:nam* separated by thorn and spike (*Ta:nyum).*
Child death within few days of delivery	*Uyu*	Covers with split bamboos giving a cone shape	No elaborate funeral ritual; observes taboo for three to five days.
Death caused by the ghost or unusual behavior	*Ngipong Urom* (Shinigami)	Without *Ago*	*Li:nam* separated by putting thorn and spike (*Ta:nyum*) on the body and buried.
Death due to bleeding suffered by woman before death (women's disease)	*Ngipong Urom*	Without *Ago*	*Li:nam* separated by putting thorn and spike (*Ta:nyum)* on the body and buried.

Sources: Field Study

The above table is an attempt to differentiate death on the basis of its causes. The normal death is the most dignified one and is associated with funeral songs and other elaborate rituals. Other types of death are unnatural and caused by evil spirits. The souls

caused by such deaths excepting stillbirth are believed to hover around the living. There is no definite abode for them. Even funerary practices associated with such deaths are anything but solace-giving exercises. Instead, there is an implied hostility toward victims of unnatural death. Incidentally, Radcliffe Brown and Sigmund Freud have tried to hypothesize presence of hostility between the world of the living and the world of the dead (Goody: 1962). This could be one such manifestation. However, with people becoming knowledgeable through modern education, the harmful effects of ill-disposed corpses have been realized and the earlier treatment has gradually made its way out. Still, it has not gotten the same treatment as the normal death receives.

Notion of Existence of the Soul

The Adis call the soul *ayit* or *yalo.* According to their belief and imagination, *ayit* is the essence of life, and with its exit from the physical body, the living man becomes lifeless or inactive. In the absence of *ayit,* no physical life is possible (Ering: 1975). Clearly, they impose their own perspective on the notion of a soul's existence. It is believed that after death, the soul gets separated from the mortal body and enters another world. Death is pronounced as *batyuk*, a change of skin like a snake does (Ering: 1975). But in common language it is called *sinam* (dead). It has been found that the *batyuk* refers to not only molting but also the process of transformation from the host body into another invisible animate form. The *pénge* narrates this transformation of the soul in another form during the soul's journey. These forms cited in metaphorical terms are *Dibum batlu* (molting of Cicada), *Go:pung goyeng* (sound of Cicada), *Taying* (flies), *Kírtí* (mole), etc.

From the consideration of transmigration, the deceased is addressed as *taying* (a fly), which may be an example of natural – symbolical association. Similarly, the word *désing* (covered with soil, since the body is buried) is sometimes used to its natural association. Both are equivalent to the English word 'late'. It may be mentioned here that while addressing the deceased male, '*désing* or *taying boté* is used; for the female, it is '*taying* or *désing meté*. In both the cases, the names of the deceased person come after the terms of address.

The Concept of Transmigration of Soul

They believe that the soul of a human being transmigrates to other living beings in the form of animals and insects after death for a few moments, especially during the 'transition period' of the soul's journey to another world after death. If family members see any unusual behavior or appearance of a bird, animal, snake during the period after death, they believe that it may be the dead person appearing in a living form to announce

his/her departure to the netherworld. So, the transmigration takes place only during the period of sojourn, it is not permanent. They often believe that the dead person appears in the form of a snake (especially shaman), *bungka* (rat), *kirti* (mole), *pédi goyéng* (cicada), and *tamit* (housefly) only at the time of his or her final journey. The general belief is it happens because the soul does not find any other alternative medium to show itself again to humans (Interview, Pertin: 2020).

In cases of unnatural death, the soul is believed to be living in *do:rung-líasm* (corresponding to the word 'hell'). It is said that such a soul appears in unusual physical forms like birds and animals before human beings. The unusual sudden appearance of an owl, bat, frog, snake (red), insect, etc. in the house is believed to be that a ghost. However, in normal death (*uyu*) also there may be some unusual appearances. One may appear as a rat, which makes different kinds of sounds when the soul starts the final journey, and on some occasions, one may appear as a snake. So, the PM asks the soul to revisit the village or native land (if it died outside) by making the *tuttut* (rat created sound) to make them aware of the soul's visit. The following are the excerpted lines:

Aya.. No taying é luyil é dugyil é daglangka,
(You keep in touch with us when you come across them in the form of flies.)

No tuttut é.., Kébung é tuttut é, Uyu é tuttut é mankan é sulangka,
(You sing *tuttut*, the unusual sound of a rat to make us aware.)

Aya…., nom dédu é géyu yépé é moko. (Pénge, Lego: 2015).
(If you sing it, we will know that you are on your way to the next world.)

Findings and Analysis

E.B. Tylor's theory of body-soul dichotomy as a universal feature of human society (Tylor: 1920) is found somewhat relevant in this funeral song. As soon as a person dies, the society's dual functions relating to a corpse and escorting its soul in its final journey receive utmost reverence. Such an approach to society represents the merging of certain psychological and sociological functions for handling institutionalised treatment of death. Escorting the soul primarily rests on one man, the funeral song singer. Singing in this case has a profound purpose and it plays a significant role in maintaining an institutionalized social order. The psychological function implicit in the funeral rites performed by the grieving family is reflected in the dignified way of bidding farewell to the departed soul.

The belief in death caused by the sun 'rise and set' is a social construct. Just as the phenomena cannot be altered, the death is also inevitable; the analytical meaning of death

lies here. Though they do not know about the DNA, cell, tissue, etc., they could think of life as being programmed when male and female gametes unite. It is the *Kongki-komang* (the deity of fertility) who bestows fusion of the gametes to biget offspring and determine individual's life span. The death of *Misum-Miang* demonstrates that the gods or super-persons are also bound to die and cannot escape death. Such examples only show the inevitability of death and at the same time give stress on the need to console the bereaved family and relatives.

The soul's journey has a spatial orientation of space, position, and direction as prescribed by the PM which is similar to David Parkin's observations (Parkin: 1992). The landscape, names of places, rivers, and mountain ranges mentioned in the *pénge* during the soul's journey exist in real life. And the final destination is also located on this earth in the western direction. It may be related to the Sun and Moon setting in the same direction. If someone sees the setting 'Sun and Moon' in dream, it is interpreted as the symbol of soul of a dying person. The route followed in the final journey is the same for the entire group of Padam Adi members, which may be indicative of the close group character and the unifying force operating behind.

It is interesting to know that the final place is located north of Riga in the Siang District of the State, where PM finally drops the soul permanently. But nobody is sure about the exact reason behind the soul's connection with this place. Respondents even said that a soul could sail beyond the earth, whereas the place was located on this earth. It shows the dualistic nature of the 'Land of the Dead' - one on the earth, and the other far beyond its earthly abode taking the form of a utopian construct. Robert Hertz's contention that dualism is the essence of primitive thoughts seems to be appropriate in this regard (Hertz: 1960). On the other hand, in unnatural death the soul is believed to hover around without having a fixed land of its own. For them, it is known as *do:rung lísam*. The soul of such a death mostly appears in the form of a ghost. Tylor's theory of metamorphosis of soul to ghost or spirit form seems to be applicable in the case of Adi unnatural death. What is proper is what follows the natural course.

There is no doubt that the existence of 'heaven' and 'hell' is a utopian social construct. The Adis have consciously constructed a realm of the netherworld where the soul is believed to be in reunion with their ancestors, subsequently attaining eternal peace. This ideal realm called the 'ancestors' land' is believed to be a place with abundance of all necessities of life to sustain the afterlife. And it comes very close to the English word 'heaven' as could be understood from the replies of the respondents. It is a recreated image in the minds working behind social existence. On the other hand, the soul

of the unnatural death leads a degraded life without having direct access to the basic necessities in the afterlife.

Transmigration is believed to have taken place during the 'transition period' of the soul's journey to the netherworld. This is the period following a person's death up to the third or fourth day after the burial of the dead body. If the family members see any unusual behavior/event and appearance of a bird, animal, snake, etc., during this period, they believe that these may be indicative of the appearance of the dead person in a living form again to announce his or her departure to the netherworld. Jack Goody has also spoken of such a transition period as an intermediary stage between this world and the next which the soul occupies temporarily (Goody: 1962). He thinks that at this stage the soul stays in the vicinity of its former habitat.

There is no doubt the *pénge* is the principal funerary ritual having socio-psychological functions. But there can't be anything concrete about it since the ritual knowledge is made up of overlapping of partial 'truths' and partial 'falsehoods' (David Parkin 1992). Since the route of the soul's journey is an imaginary one taking the form of a social construct, the abstract ideas that go with the creation of the land of the dead can provide a type of spiritual solace in the face of material loss. Moreover, equating the route of soul's journey with the route of community's early migration may not simply be coincidental; probably there is a deep-seated meaning underlying it – original land and continuity of stay beyond physical existence of all limits.

Conclusion

From the foregoing discussion**,** the *pénge* is found to have a multitude of values in the socio-religious life of the Adi society. It is a verbal art, one of the most important oral sources for academic research in a nonliterate society. The funeral song is a significant medium to learn about the Adi worldview of the life and death of a human being, and the afterlife that follows it. It is also an extensive mirror of people's lived religiosity and cultural memory, the relevance of which may still be found, but the performance is diminishing gradually due to the paucity of experts and shamans. Agreeably, modernization and other related factors are behind the changing attitudes and orientations of life. But, those who are still continuing with this practice hold the notion that the *pénge* performance bestows dignity on the bereaved family and provides spiritual solace to both the family and the departed soul. Apart from its traditional significance, the relevance of its performance currently lies in safeguarding the oral literature that provides information on the history and culture of the people. However, this may not be a permanent feature. Nobody knows when the practice will make its way out due to exogenous cultural

influences and lack of an appropriate safeguard measure. Or will it take a new political meaning? Lastly, it is suggested to carry out further in-depth research on this oral text from linguistic and literary points of view to make it more meaningful.

Endnotes

[1] The samples of the *Pénge* are taken from the Damro village, the parent village of the Padam group of the Adi sung by Shri Abet Tayeng and Shri Damin Lego of the Ayeng village under Mebo circle, East Siang District, Arunachal Pradesh and personal Interview with the former. For proper phonetic sound of the Adi É, Í and : are used in the article as per the Roman Modified Adi Script prevalent in the study area. Phonetically É sound is not found in English but a similar distant sound is found in the word 'total'. In the same way, Í sound is found in the distant sound of the word 'thrill' and for long vowel triangle colon : is used.

[2] The Adi are one of the prominent tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. They have different subgroups with slight variation in the language parlance.

[3] The *Mirí* is a complex word with variant meanings. It commonly refers to the shaman (priest), song and the singer. In this article it refers to the *pénge* singer.

[4] This special is *Maksong sumpa* (a flat stick used to weave the weft of a cloth loom). It is a kind of amulet to protect the PM during his journey with the soul.

[5] The endowment is known as *dumlíng*. It contains beads of two to five pieces of good quality that are prepared with the sacred thread *rídín*.

[6] The sacrifice of animals like *Mithun* and pig is called *dotgang* and that of fowl is separately termed as *tamit ga:ték*.

[7] The 'Pertin' clan is called 'Rapul', among whom the PM performs *pénge*. This line is sung when a member of the Pertin clan dies.

[8] The primeval man is called 'Doni' by the PM, but for a common man it is 'Tani' (human).

[9] He was the first priest of human beings. Some people address it as *agnung* (Crow).

[10] The *Bangi-banmang* (the spirit who guides man to commit murder and causes stillbirth), and drowning is caused by *silisidong* (the spirit who causes drowning).

[11] The *Urom Among* or *Do:rung Lísam* (the hell) refers to the abode of unnatural death.

[12] *Ago* is a burial structure made of bamboo and local roofing of banana leaves/thatch.

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