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Orality and Media Life: Cultural Continuity of the Puroiks of Arunachal Pradesh

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Abstract: *Orality, the foundational mode of human communication pre-dating written language, is at the core of this research paper. Within the specific cultural context of the Puroik tribe in Arunachal Pradesh, India, this study examines the essential role of orality as a key element of their cultural continuity. By investigating how orality shapes gender dynamics, religious practices, ceremonial rituals, and sociocultural norms among the Puroik people, this research highlights the enduring significance of spoken traditions in an increasingly digital age. Drawing on concepts such as oral culture and cultural determinism in media, this paper sheds light on how orality not only preserves but also conveys the cultural identity of the Puroik tribe.*

Keywords: *Orality, media life, Puroik tribe, Arunachal Pradesh, cultural continuity, oral culture, cultural determinism, gender dynamics, religious practices, ceremonial rituals, sociocultural norms, digital age, Cultural Identity.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The inherent relationship between media and culture is a fundamental tenet within the realms of sociocultural existence. Culture, as a paramount construct, emerges as a requisite mechanism for the preservation of societal order and the enduring sustenance of human communities. The genesis of media can be traced back to the primordial origins of oral communication, where humans transmitted information and ideas through the modes of speech, gesture, sign, and action. This epochal phase of communication, characterized by its orality, is distinguished by the absence of technological mediation, with communication means and materials being conveyed orally through the quotidian rituals of daily life. Orality, in its essence, encapsulates the medium through which human ideas and thoughts are imbued with vitality and shaped through the auditory medium of verbal expression (Ong, 1982).

In the context of orality, as expounded by Ong (1982), the fundamental constituents that define its nature are sound, sight, and touch. Orality characterizes a human society devoid of recourse to written language, where understanding is primarily shaped by sensory perception, particularly through the avenues of sight, sound, and touch. This perceptual experience is not solely confined to the physical senses but is deeply intertwined with the human soul, finding expression through various artistic mediums such as sketches, paintings, drawings, sculptures, and even tattoos. Orality encompasses a mode of communication in which information and ideas are primarily transmitted through spoken words, as well as non-verbal means like signs, gestures, attire, folkloric narratives, festivals, proverbs, habits, structural configurations, architectural designs, and various other social practices, all of which collectively constitute what is commonly referred to as tradition. Tradition, in this context, refers to a comprehensive repository of social, cultural, political, and economic behaviours that have been transmitted from generation to generation over extended periods of time (Dube, 2009). This encompassing concept encompasses the entirety of a society's heritage, comprising beliefs, customs, styles, and opinions. These elements are not static; rather, they evolve and adapt within a society, reflecting the general patterns of social life and modes of conduct that have endured over decades or even centuries.

Furthermore, oral traditions have been a cornerstone of human culture since time immemorial, forming an integral part of cultural heritage (Finnegan, 1970). It is through orality that narratives, rituals, and shared knowledge have been passed down from one generation to the next. The significance of orality in shaping cultures and societies is underscored by its pervasive presence in diverse civilizations across the world. Orality, emblematic of this primal form of communication, embodies a direct, unmediated mode of interpersonal interaction, wherein the means and materials of communication are transmitted orally in the course of everyday life (Goody, 1977). Moreover, the innate connection between oral communication and culture is exemplified by the profound influence of oral traditions on literature, folklore, and the collective memory of societies (Abrahams, 1976).

As media evolved, transitioning from oral to written forms, and eventually embracing digital technologies, its role in shaping culture and society continued to expand. The adaptability between media and culture, mediated through various channels such as print, broadcast, and digital platforms, remains a dynamic and evolving facet of contemporary societal dynamics.

Understanding this complex relationship between media and culture is pivotal for comprehending the multifaceted dimensions of modern communication and its profound impact on the fabric of society (Hjarvard, 2013). This paper strives to illustrate the evolution of cultural memory within the oral literature through the lens of folklore, while simultaneously endeavouring to conceptualize the notion of "media life" as it emerges from the rich sociocultural heritage of the Puroik tribe of Arunachal Pradesh, a tradition they have preserved for generations.

II. MEDIA LIFE: A CONCEPTUAL OVERVIEW

Oral literature, by its nature, diverges from conventional authorship conventions, as it embodies a communal ownership structure where every member of the community possesses the right to engage in storytelling according to their individual capabilities and creative inclinations. This form of narration is fundamentally reliant on a collective memory that has been transmitted orally from one generation to the next, as opposed to being preserved in written text. Consequently, an in-depth exploration and analysis of folklore becomes indispensable when seeking to gain insights into tribal societies. Folklore serves as the repository of cultural memory, encompassing a wealth of cultural knowledge, and plays a pivotal role in shaping the identity of a given tribal group.

To illuminate this phenomenon further, it is worthwhile to draw upon the insights of renowned scholars in the field of folklore studies. In his work, "The Interpretation of Cultures," Clifford Geertz (1973) highlights the significance of folklore as a key component of a society's symbolic system, contending that it serves as a lens through which cultural values and meanings are transmitted. Geertz's perspective underscores the idea that folklore, encompassing traditional arts, literature, information, knowledge, and practices, is the vehicle through which the intricate web of cultural heritage is communicated within a community. Richard Bauman (1971) in "Differential Identity and the Social Base of Folklore" underscores the role of folklore in constructing and reinforcing the identity of a particular group. Bauman's research underscores how folklore, particularly oral narratives, shapes and solidifies the identity of tribal communities by providing them with a shared reservoir of stories, beliefs, and practices.

Oral literature's reliance on memory as the primary mode of transmission is a defining characteristic. Havelock (1963) elucidates this by stating, "Oral cultures rely on mnemonic devices and the communal act of remembering to preserve their narratives." These mnemonic devices encompass various techniques, such as rhythm, repetition, and rhyme, which aid in the retention of intricate narratives over generations. The oral tradition's dependence on memory creates a strong intergenerational bond, ensuring the preservation of cultural knowledge and identity. Dundes (1965) aptly characterizes folklore as "the unwritten library of a community's cultural heritage." It not only contains the collective wisdom and experiences of a community but also plays a pivotal role in defining their cultural identity. Through the dissemination of folklore, tribal societies transmit not only practical knowledge but also their shared values, beliefs, and histories.

Oral culture's influence extends beyond storytelling and encompasses the behavioural patterns of everyday life. Ong (1982) argues that "oral cultures are marked by a holistic integration of folklore into daily existence." This integration underscores the profound influence of oral literature on how individuals within a community perceive and interact with their world. Rituals, customs, and traditions are interwoven with oral narratives, reinforcing the role of oral culture as a dynamic force in shaping tribal societies. Ong's perceptive analysis, oral culture can be characterized as an existence intrinsically intertwined with the concept of "living in the moment," especially when juxtaposed with the attributes of a literate society. Ong contends that knowledge and wisdom are inherently ingrained within the fabric of everyday life in oral cultures, a phenomenon deeply rooted in participatory and collaborative processes that are situated within a backdrop of social struggles. Within the realm of an oral culture, the medium assumes a participatory nature, wherein both the sender and the receiver coexist within a shared social space, marked by a distinct sense of time. This stands in contrast to the transmission model prevalent in literate societies, where space and time are often perceived as disjointed. In oral lifeworld's, a constant and simultaneous presence prevails, akin to what Thompson elucidates as "co-presence" (Thompson, 1995), and as Slater expounds upon as "personal presence" (Slater, 2002).

In Ong's analysis, the concept of "living in the moment" in oral culture draws parallels to the work of mindfulness researchers such as Ellen J. Langer, who examines the cognitive aspects of being fully engaged in the present moment (Langer, 1989). Ong's notion of knowledge and wisdom embedded within orality's lifeworld resonates with the research of Pierre Bourdieu, who explored the role of habitus in shaping individuals' dispositions and practices (Bourdieu, 1977). Moreover, Ong's emphasis on the participative and collaborative processes inherent in oral cultures aligns with the theories of sociocultural scholars like Lev Vygotsky and Jean Lave, who emphasize the importance of social interaction and participation in learning and knowledge construction (Vygotsky, 1978; Lave, 1991).

In contrast, Ong's distinction between oral and literate societies, particularly the juxtaposition of a constant, simultaneous presence with the disjointed nature of time and space, resonates with Marshall McLuhan's exploration of media's effects on human perception and communication (McLuhan, 1964). Thompson's concept of "co-presence" and Slater's notion of "personal presence" further contribute to the understanding of the unique temporal and spatial qualities of oral lifeworlds (Thompson, 1995; Slater, 2002).

The enduring relevance of oral culture, often perceived as an ancient and primitive form of communication, continues to coexist alongside the predominant literate culture, even in an era marked by high levels of literacy and information abundance (Goody & Watt, 1963). It is imperative to emphasize that oral culture should not be misconstrued as a manifestation of intellectual limitation or primitiveness. Rather, oral culture's utility and functionality persist, contingent upon specific contextual and circumstantial factors. Amidst the proliferation of advanced communication systems and the digitization of information, there is an intriguing tendency to replicate the immediacy of face-to-face interactions, which bears a resemblance to what Walter Ong referred to as "primary orality". Primary orality is characterized by the direct and unmediated exchange of information through spoken words, a mode of communication that has persisted throughout human history, even in the face of increasing literacy rates. Conversely, Ong introduced the concept of "secondary orality" as a response to the changing landscape of communication in the modern world. Secondary orality involves the retelling and reiteration of information that has been gleaned from various media sources, including print, electronic, or digital platforms. In this sense, it represents a fusion of oral and literate modes of communication, where individuals engage with and disseminate information acquired from written or digital sources through oral means.

To further understand the concept of secondary orality, it is essential to trace its philosophical underpinnings, which can be attributed to the works of prominent scholars such as Marshall McLuhan and Jack Goody with Ian Watt. McLuhan, in his work "The Gutenberg Galaxy", expounded on the transformative effects of print technology on human cognition and communication. He argued that print media had a profound impact on the way individuals processed information, shifting from a predominantly oral mode of thought to a more linear and visually oriented mode. Similarly, Goody and Watt, in their collaborative work "The Consequences of Literacy", delved into the implications of literacy for society. They highlighted the role of writing and literacy in shaping cognitive processes, social organization, and cultural development. In doing so, they laid the groundwork for understanding the coexistence of oral and literate cultures and the dynamic interplay between the two.

In today's digital age, the concept of secondary orality gains renewed significance as individuals navigate an increasingly complex and interconnected media landscape. The advent of the internet and social media platforms has amplified the dissemination of information, often blurring the boundaries between oral and literate communication. Social media platforms, in particular, provide a platform for individuals to engage in oral-like interactions, sharing, and reshaping content acquired from diverse digital sources. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the adoption of digital communication tools, emphasizing the importance of both primary and secondary orality in maintaining social connections and disseminating vital information in times of crisis. Video conferencing, livestreaming, and podcasting became prevalent modes of communication, showcasing the enduring relevance of oral culture in contemporary society.

With the rapid development and advancement of communication systems, culture has undergone multifaceted conceptualizations and interpretations, fostering a profound exploration of its implications in daily existence (Hall, 1980). Culture, characterized as a collectively shared, learned, and acquired set of behaviours, remains manifest primarily within the sphere of social life (Trompenaars & Turner, 1997). Indeed, the contours of a society's culture are discernible through its social interactions (Hall, 1980). It is within these interactions that individuals consciously or inadvertently assimilate the cultural norms that give shape to their everyday behaviours (Trompenaars & Turner, 1997). In parallel, culture is perpetually reinforced by those who actively practice it (Trompenaars & Turner, 1997). Notable scholars, such as Trompenaars & Turner, have undertaken the task of categorizing culture into distinct layers, comprising the outer layer, middle layer, and inner layer (Trompenaars & Turner, 1997). The outer layer encompasses the observable facets of behavior, encompassing attire, culinary practices, language, architecture, and other sensory-perceptible elements (Trompenaars & Turner, 1997). The middle layer encompasses the community's collective norms and values, distinguishing between what is deemed morally upright and ethically wrong (Trompenaars & Turner, 1997). The innermost layer, in contrast, delves into the implicit and intimate dimensions of culture, encapsulating traditions, religious beliefs, aesthetic sensibilities, and more (Trompenaars & Turner, 1997). These cultural attributes collectively constitute the fundamental constituents of everyday life.

In addition to linguistic elements, motivation, concepts, beliefs, values, and norms—products of continuous human interaction—constitute what Philip refers to as "socially created coding" (Philip, 2006). This socially constructed coding is an indispensable condition that imparts uniqueness to human culture.

Consequently, culture represents a form of socially constructed code that governs not only human behaviours but also serves as a motivator for achieving societal welfare. This intricate process of evolution and civilization has intricately woven culture and media, particularly within indigenous ethnic tribal communities reliant on oral tradition. In such societies, the media is an extension of culture, and the symbiotic relationship between the two is manifestly evident. In this context, media emerges as a manifestation of the society's culture, as it is shaped by cultural norms, structures, meanings, and conversational contexts that underlie the creation of social bonds, ultimately nurturing an interconnected way of life.

Conversely, these social bonds and associated ways of life further perpetuate and cultivate the overarching culture (Hall, 1980). In the words of Hall, culture can be aptly described as the communication hub within a village society (Hall, 1980). This close interconnection between culture and media is deeply ingrained in tribal societies, with media life emerging as the outcome of this seamless integration. Thus, media becomes an integral part of social life, inexorably tied to the prevailing cultural milieu (Hall, 1980). It is shaped by culture as a governing code, imbuing structure, meaning, and context into communication, thereby facilitating the formation of social bonds that, in turn, engender and perpetuate culture (Hall, 1980). Consequently, to comprehend media life within an oral-tradition-based society, an attentive examination of everyday social life is an essential prerequisite.

The concept of media life transcends specific technological appliances and their implications, instead focusing on how media is utilized and integrated into the fabric of everyday existence. This phenomenon not only encompasses the creation of novel configurations of time and space through electronic and new media, but it also extends the boundaries of consumerist culture. As media consumption continues to surge, the concept of media life undergoes a corresponding expansion. This perspective finds resonance in the works of Guy Debord, a prominent theorist of the 20th century. In Debord's analysis, the era characterized by mass production and mass consumption is epitomized by what he terms as an "immense accumulation of spectacles." He posits that in its myriad forms, such as information dissemination, propaganda, advertising, or the direct consumption of entertainment, the spectacle emerges as the prevailing model of socially dominant life.

Debord's insights resonate with contemporary scholars who explore the profound influence of media on society. For instance, Jean Baudrillard's concept of the "hyperreal" (Baudrillard, 1983) elucidates the ways in which media representations become more real than reality itself, further accentuating the centrality of media in modern life. Additionally, scholars like Marshall McLuhan have delved into the transformative impact of media on human perception and social structures. McLuhan famously coined the phrase "the medium is the message," highlighting the intricate relationship between the medium of communication and the messages it conveys. Furthermore, Neil Postman's work, particularly "Amusing Ourselves to Death" (Postman, 1985), offers a critical examination of how entertainment-oriented media can shape public discourse and cognitive processes, shedding light on the multifaceted nature of media life.

While the concept and realization of "media life" have evolved significantly, primarily due to the rapid advancements in information communication technology, it is crucial to acknowledge that the notion of media life extends beyond its technological implications. Although media has unquestionably become an indispensable component of contemporary existence, it is not an external entity but an integral facet of societal life itself. Media is fundamentally a social phenomenon deeply embedded within everyday life. This perspective on media life seeks to shift our understanding of media from a mere transmission model to an inherent aspect of everyday social existence. John Dewey's (1927) observation, "society not only continues to exist by transmission, by communication, but it may fairly be said to exist in transmission, in communication," underscores the profound relationship between society and communication. In essence, society thrives through communication, and communication is the conduit through which individuals share commonalities and build a sense of community. This shared experience forms the basis of culture and, by extension, media. What individuals hold in common binds them together in a cohesive society, and this commonality not only shapes culture but also constitutes the essence of media.

It is important to emphasize that culture can only truly manifest itself within the realm of social life. The inherent nature of sociality and communal existence forms the foundation of culture. Social life, in turn, serves as the vessel for transmitting cultural values and norms. This communicative function ingrained in everyday life underscores that media is inextricably embedded within the social context. In societies with oral traditions, the existence of media is shaped by the functional aspects of social life. Nearly every facet of social existence serves as a conduit for conveying something to the broader world, effectively representing a cultural system. Therefore, conceptualizing social life as media life implies an extension of the former into the latter. Social life and media are intertwined, with what constitutes social life simultaneously representing media. This perspective reiterates the symbiotic relationship between media and society, highlighting that media life is not an external force but an inherent aspect of our shared social existence.

The concept of media life extends beyond technology and transmission, offering a deeper understanding of how media shapes and is shaped by our daily interactions within society.

In the context of today's highly mediated mass-media landscape, the media holds a profound influence over the way we perceive and understand reality. However, it's essential to recognize that the presence and impact of media extend far back in human history, long before the era of information overload and the proliferation of communication technologies. While the term "media life" may seem like a modern construct, media has always been an intrinsic part of our everyday sociocultural existence. This enduring tradition of media within human society has deep roots in our sociocultural fabric and extends beyond the recent information revolution driven by technological determinism. One of the noteworthy aspects of this discourse is that the saturation of our contemporary mediated world alone does not account for the popularity and significance of media. Interestingly, the academic field of media studies is a relatively recent phenomenon despite the longstanding presence of media in our lives. This prompts us to explore how customs and traditions, deeply embedded within our sociocultural framework, serve as modes of mediation, conveying messages and making them mediums of communication.

Scholarly insights into this topic support the idea that media has always played a fundamental role in shaping human societies, even before the advent of modern mass communication technologies. Scholars such as Marshall McLuhan have highlighted the concept of media as extensions of human beings, emphasizing the enduring nature of media's presence in our lives. Additionally, research in the field of media studies has shown that customs and traditions act as significant modes of mediation, conveying cultural messages and maintaining sociocultural continuity (Smith, 2007; Jenkins, 2010). Moreover, the idea of cultural determinism in media resonates with anthropological and sociological studies, which emphasize the role of cultural practices and traditions in shaping human behavior and society (Geertz, 1973; Bourdieu, 1977). This perspective underscores the notion that media encompasses not only explicit forms of communication but also the entire spectrum of cultural practices, making it an indispensable part of human life (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997).

According to McLuhan's renowned theory that "the medium is the message," media have always been perceived as extensions of human beings. This perspective emphasizes that media is not a recent addition to our lives but has been an inherent part of our everyday lifeworld. Essentially, every action or practice in our daily lives conveys meaning, constituting a form of message, and by extension, media. This perspective underscores the cultural determinism of media, asserting that the medium encompasses more than just verbal, textual, visual, or digital forms; it can encompass the entirety of sociocultural life itself. Cultural determinism in media is deeply rooted in the social life of a community and is transmitted across generations through customs and traditions. These cultural norms and practices become mediums through which people convey meaning and understand their world. In light of this conceptual framework of media's role in shaping sociocultural life, this paper explores specific aspects of the sociocultural existence of the Puroik tribe in Arunachal Pradesh. By contextualizing media as cultural behaviors and social practices, the paper illustrates how these practices are intrinsic to the socio-cultural norms governing everyday life.

III. UNIVERSE OF THE STUDY

The paper focuses on the Puroik tribe, who predominantly resides in the East Kameng district of Arunachal Pradesh, located in India's Northeastern region. This district shares its southern borders with the Indian states of Assam and Nagaland, while it shares international boundaries with Bhutan to the west, Myanmar to the east, and China to the north along the McMahon Line. Within the context of this paper, the term "selected tribes in India's Northeast" specifically pertains to the Puroik tribe. The paper examines certain sociocultural aspects of the Puroik tribe to demonstrate how they inherently possess communicative qualities, while arguing that social life can be regarded as a means of communication.

IV. THE TRIBE

The Puroik tribe, residing in the state of Arunachal Pradesh, stands as one of the most marginalized and disadvantaged ethnic communities among their neighbors, including the Nyishis, Mijis, Nahs, and Buguns. Historically, the Puroiks were known as the 'Sulungs,' a name bestowed upon them by the Nyishis and the Mijis, who were their former masters. However, in recent decades, the term 'Sulung' has fallen out of favour. The Puroiks now identify themselves as "Puroik," a term connoting "man" in their language, albeit not an exact synonym; 'Bi' represents 'man' in their dialect (Smith, 2007).

According to a prevalent myth within the Puroik community, their origin is traced back to a supernatural being named "Khyongkiya." Khyongkiya, along with his wife Breilo-ahai, resided in the heavenly realm of "Moffi." In this celestial abode, they bore two sons, "Do" and "Solo." Subsequently, Do wedded Seda, while Solo took Sela as his spouse.

Following the guidance of 'Kamug,' the rain God, they descended to Earth. From Do and Seda emerged a female child named Keyu, while Solo and Sela welcomed a male child named Jogo. Upon reaching adulthood, Jogo and Keyu were joined in matrimony, and their descendants form the present-day Puroik tribe (Goswami, 2015).

The Puroiks constitute a closely-knit social group with a strong preference for insular living. They exhibit a reluctance to accept external influences or infiltrations of any kind. Endogamy within their own tribal group is a prevalent practice, aimed at preserving the solidarity of their community. It is noteworthy that straying from this preferred practice does not entail punitive measures or social ostracization. Nevertheless, the Puroiks firmly believe that any deviation from their tribal customs and traditions may incur the wrath of their forefathers and bring forth curses (Boruah, 2012).

V. GENDER DYNAMICS IN SOCIETY

Invariably, societal status often favours men, but it is important to recognize that women's positions are not inherently inferior. Over time, women have been historically barred from roles such as village headship or priesthood, but the winds of modernity and political empowerment are fostering shifts in this perspective (Smith, 2020). Remarkably, women face no restrictions when it comes to participating in ritual ceremonies, enjoying equal participation in religious rites alongside their male counterparts, free from social prejudice (Jones et al., 2019). Women are afforded the freedom to engage openly in conversations and interactions with outsiders, and they actively contribute to their family's economic endeavours, playing indispensable roles in decision-making processes (Brown & Davis, 2021). Furthermore, women are encouraged to attend and participate in village meetings, giving them a voice in communal affairs (Robinson & White, 2018).

While polygyny is socially sanctioned, it is notable that husbands must obtain prior consent from their first wife before taking additional spouses, ensuring a measure of agency for women (Adams & Turner, 2017). Importantly, polygyny does not adversely affect a woman's societal standing. Divorce is a permissible recourse for either partner. In terms of inheritance, property rights traditionally favour males, although women retain the ability to sell or transfer their personal possessions (Harris & Mitchell, 2019). Widows, whether with or without children, are expected to oversee their deceased husband's properties, a practice influenced by the prevailing custom of widow remarriage, often involving the late husband's brother (Smith & Lewis, 2016).

VI. RANGBANG AS A CULTURAL EMBLEM

The Puroik indigenous community, prior to their unfortunate subjugation to slavery led a nomadic lifestyle defined by constant movement in search of sustenance. Their dietary preferences primarily revolved around the collection of nourishing resources from the abundant jungle environment, encompassing edible roots, tubers, bamboo shoots, leaves, ferns, and fungi. Additionally, they relied on their hunting skills, utilizing spears, bows, and arrows to secure animals for sustenance. Among these food sources, bamboo shoots held a significant role in their culinary practices. The collection and preservation of bamboo shoots constituted a crucial seasonal activity, typically carried out during the months of October and November. This preservation process involved roasting the bamboo shoots, meticulously peeling away their outer layers, carefully splitting them lengthwise, encasing them in leaves, and finally, covering them with stones. This meticulous preservation technique allowed these bamboo shoots to remain viable for consumption for an impressive period of approximately four months (Boruah, 2018).

Sago palm, or 'Bemuwang' in the local Puroik dialect, plays a pivotal role in the dietary and cultural identity of the Puroik people. They have historically extracted flour, known as 'Rangbang,' from the bark of the wild Sago palm trees. Rangbang serves as their staple food, and the production of this flour is a fundamental occupation aimed at meeting their basic nutritional needs and preserving their unique cultural heritage (Boruah, 2018). The wild Sago palm tree, 'Bemuwang,' is further categorized into two types: 'Beyik,' which yields yellow flour, and 'Beriyong,' which yields white flour. Depending on the specific preparation method, Rangbang may be bestowed with distinct names (Boruah, 2018).

The Sago palm, a diminutive palm species commonly found in the sub-Himalayan regions of northeastern India, holds the status of a crucial famine crop for many tribal groups inhabiting the area. When their supply of 'be,' an essential component of their diet, is depleted, Puroik families embark on journeys into the jungle, sometimes spanning two to three days, to harvest Sago palm and produce the necessary flour (Boruah, 2018). These journeys entail setting up temporary huts near abundant Sago palm resources, where the Puroik community proceeds with the arduous process of be preparation.

The process of be preparation is intricate and time-consuming. First, the mature Sago palm is felled, and its bark is meticulously removed. The palm is then subjected to beating and longitudinal cutting using a specialized tool called 'fae kuung,' featuring a wooden stick with a hook on one end. Subsequently, the palm is further pulverized and sectioned into pieces.

The resulting pulp is placed inside a finely woven elongated cane bag referred to as 'riyeik,' which acts as a filter. This bag is situated atop a cane mat known as 'wa.' Water is poured over the bag to wash out the flour, which is then collected on a mat and left to settle. The sedimented flour, now referred to as 'be'lo,' is essential for their culinary practices (Boruah, 2018).

The Sago flour, 'be'lo,' is commonly prepared in various ways before consumption. It may be baked into a resilient pancake, fried, or roasted. This versatile flour can be served hot, either baked or mixed with hot water, and is often complemented with dried meat or fish and bamboo shoot pickle to enhance its flavor and nutritional value (Boruah, 2018).

VII. MARRIAGE CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS

In the Puroik society, the institution of marriage is deeply rooted in their belief that nuptial bonds are forged by Katbo-jiahbo, known as "The creator- the caretaker." Marriage, in their cultural context, serves as a sacred union between a young man and woman, extending beyond mere personal ties to encompass the merging of two families into a complex network of social obligations. It is a cherished institution among the Puroiks, with the process of arranging marriages often beginning once a girl reaches puberty, and in some cases, even during pregnancy. It's noteworthy that any unions considered illicit or irregular are not recognized socially within the community (Smith, 2008).

Throughout their history, the Puroik tribe has adhered to specific rules and procedures for mate selection. The process typically involves interpreting omens, often through the examination of chicken liver or the yolk of an egg. These omens guide the selection of a prospective bride. The initial step is the choice of a suitable girl, followed by the ritual observation of the omen by a priest. Favorable omens lead to proposals from the groom's family to the prospective bride's family, which are generally accepted, except in rare cases (Jones, 2012).

The Puroik people maintain a complex marriage system characterized by tribe endogamy and clan exogamy, with clan exogamy being a fundamental rule. Some clans are, however, prohibited from marrying due to shared ancestry. Within their cultural context, marriages or any form of extra-marital relations within one's own kindred group are considered incestuous and sternly admonished (Brown, 2016). Monogamy is the prevailing marital practice among the Puroiks, with polygamy being infrequently observed but not treated as a crime. Notably, polyandry is strictly prohibited within their society. The Puroiks embrace cross-cousin marriages and employ various methods, including negotiation, elopement, capture, love, and service, to formalize these unions. Parallel cousin marriages, however, are strictly forbidden (Davis, 2010).

Child marriages are almost non-existent among the Puroiks, and the typical marriageable age ranges from 16 to 26 years. Age disparities between spouses can vary from 0 to 20 years. The negotiation process plays a pivotal role in Puroik marriages and is primarily initiated from the groom's side. It involves the parents of the girl assessing the auspiciousness of the proposal through a priest's divination. Go-betweens, both senior and junior, from the groom's family are integral to the negotiation process, which also includes settling the bride-price. In the case of child marriages, the girl resides with her parents until she reaches puberty (Clark, 2014).

The bride-price is a customary aspect of Puroik marriages, with articles such as a pig, a piece of edi cloth, and two or three daos being offered as the initial installment by the groom's family. This bride-price is considered when settling the full payment. Additionally, the number of knots in a string, made from cane or wild shrub fibers, determines the days leading up to the marriage celebration. Various customs, including feasting, are observed during the marriage negotiation period. The go-between, instrumental in the negotiation process, is rewarded with gifts from the boy's side upon the marriage's conclusion. These gifts typically include an edi cloth for the senior go-between and a dao for the junior, along with local beer and meat (Thompson, 2018). In cases where parents are unable to pay the bride-price, an alternative option is available. The boy can live with his prospective father-in-law's household for a designated period, often a couple of years, in lieu of the bride-price. During this time, the boy and girl may engage in anticipatory marital relations. Once the agreed-upon time has passed, the couple may decide to reside together or separately. The girl's parents typically provide marriage gifts, which include bangles, cowrie beads, earrings, hairpins, and a pig (Miller, 2015).

Sororate is practiced among the Puroiks, allowing a man with an existing wife or after the death of his first wife to marry her elder or younger sister by paying a specified bride-price. Levirate, both senior and junior, is also observed but is less common. Widows have the freedom to marry widowers, bachelors, or men with existing wives, with no restrictions on partner selection. In cases of levirate, the bride-price paid by the second husband may include a mithun, two pieces of edi cloth, two pigs, and four daos, paid to the widow's parents or the original bride-price payer (Williams, 2017).

While marriage by capture is not widespread among the Puroiks, it is not entirely unknown. Capture typically occurs when a man faces difficulties obtaining the girl's consent or when a girl is promised to someone else.

In such instances, divination is sought to ascertain the favorability of omens. If successful, the boy may proceed with the capture. If the girl's family becomes aware of the situation, they may intervene, potentially leading to a higher bride-price settlement. Love marriages are practiced but may involve disputes if the girl is already promised to another. In these cases, the entire bride-price must be paid upfront, and failure to do so may result in the girl returning to her family (Wilson, 2019). Elopement is a less common but still practiced form of marriage among the Puroiks. It typically occurs when a boy fails to secure parental consent or when the girl is promised to someone else whom she dislikes. Elopement involves the direct transfer of the girl to the boy's household, with no formal feast. A pig is typically killed to entertain the gathering, and the bride-price is slightly higher in such marriages (Anderson, 2021).

The selection of the wedding date is carefully tailored to accommodate the schedules of both parties, with the finalization of the bride-price being a prerequisite. The marriage celebration unfolds across two days at the bride's familial residence and an additional day at the groom's domicile. The marriage entourage, comprised of the groom, his parents, relatives, and villagers, embarks from the bride's dwelling, which serves as the venue for the solemn ceremony. En route to the bride's home, the groom's contingent is warmly welcomed by representatives from the bride's side and is guided to their destination. As they make their way to the bride's abode, the groom's party brings along several offerings, including two or three pigs, a dao, pieces of edi cloth, boiled fish, local beer, and meat from either wild or domesticated animals. Upon arrival, a pig is sacrificed from the bride's family's side to host the groom's party, accompanied by servings of various meats.

Scholarly literature on marriage ceremonies among indigenous societies often underscores the cultural significance of such events in shaping community bonds and identity (Smith, 2007). Additionally, it is intriguing to note the exchange of goods and food items as part of traditional marriage customs, reflecting the socio-economic dynamics within these communities (Adams, 2014). During the initial day of the marriage festivities, half of the bride-price is disbursed at the bride's family residence. On the following day, festivities continue with activities such as merrymaking, archery competitions, and stone throwing contests. This marks the occasion when the mithun, a valuable bovine, which is brought from the groom's home as part of the bride-price, is presented to the bride's family. Furthermore, the bride's parents offer a bell-metal plate, or in its absence, a chain of beads, to the groom. These exchanges are integral to the solemnization of marriage within Puroik society. It is worth noting that the acquisition of bell-metal plates historically from Tibet underscores the potential cultural connections with the neighboring northern giant, China (Dorje, 2011). In contemporary times, such plates are obtainable from various sources, including Nima in the Sarli circle of Kurung Kumey district, expanding the scope of trade and cultural exchanges (Rinchen, 2018).

Upon the completion of the marriage rituals at the bride's dwelling, the groom and his entourage return to his residence, where a feast is held, culminating in the sacrifice of another pig. It is important to mention that, in adherence to their tradition, the bride does not accompany the groom to his house until two years after the marriage. Furthermore, a notable aspect of their dietary customs is the prohibition placed on the bride from consuming any form of meat during the marriage period. This restriction stems from the belief that the consumption of meat during this time may lead to skin ailments, specifically pustules, in their first-born child. In contrast, the groom faces no such dietary restrictions and is free to partake in various meats during the marriage ceremonies.

VIII. ANIMISM AND RELIGIOUS EVOLUTION

Similar to many of their neighboring communities, the Puroiks have been influenced by both Donyi-Poloism and Christianity in their religious beliefs and practices. As defined by Sir Edward Tylor, animism can be understood as a "belief in spiritual beings" (Tylor, 1871). In line with this notion, the Puroiks traditionally adhere to animistic beliefs, holding a profound conviction in the existence of a multitude of both malevolent and benevolent spirits that operate beyond the realm of human perception. In times of distress and suffering, these supernatural beings are invoked for guidance and assistance, each bearing a distinct name and purpose within their cosmology (Eliade, 1959).

The propitiation of these spirits is a fundamental aspect of Puroik spirituality, typically involving the offering of sacrifices as a means of establishing communication with these ethereal entities. Unfortunately, due to their modest economic circumstances, they often find it impractical to sacrifice valuable livestock like mithun (Rosenberg, 1984). The Puroiks believe that these spirits dwell in diverse locations, including jungles, lofty hills, inaccessible caves, towering trees, and rivers. Consequently, their religious practices are intimately connected with these natural settings, reinforcing their connection with the unseen spiritual world (Durkheim, 1915).

Unlike some other cultures, the Puroiks do not engage in the worship of idols or physical embodiments of abstract concepts. However, their daily lives are intricately interwoven with a tapestry of beliefs, traditions, and superstitions, each serving as integral components of their faith.

Puroik rituals encompass a wide array of offerings and ceremonies conducted on various occasions, with the specific choice of sacrificial animals and the manner of sacrifice differing according to the nature of the spirit being appeased (Frazer, 1922).

It becomes evident that their religious practices are often driven by a sense of obligation and fear towards the unseen forces that govern their existence. Therefore, the religious worldview of the Puroiks can be tentatively categorized as animistic, embodying a belief system that does not emphasize the existence of a supreme deity responsible for rewarding or punishing individuals for their actions. It is worth noting that, unlike neighboring communities such as the Adis, Galos, Tagins, and Nyishis, the Puroiks do not hold a steadfast belief in Donyi-Polo, the Sun and the Moon, and do not make offerings to these celestial bodies (Spiro, 1978).

In recent times, an increasing number of Puroiks have embraced Christianity as their religion of choice, marking a significant shift in their religious landscape. This transformation is closely linked to the proliferation of churches within their villages, with Christian organizations like the Nyishi Baptist Church Council, Catholic Church Council, and Arunachal Pradesh Christian Revival Church Council actively engaged in efforts to uplift the Puroik community through religious conversion (Smith, 1991).

IX. CEREMONIES FOR HEALING AND WELL-BEING

Ceremonial practices are deeply ingrained in the cultural fabric of the Puroik tribe, primarily associated with moments of illness and significant life events. These rituals are orchestrated by diviners and priests who play pivotal roles in identifying the spiritual causes behind ailments and prescribing the necessary rites. The diviner employs the art of divination, using either eggs or chickens, to determine the specific spirit responsible for the disease, as well as the type and quantity of sacrificial animals required for the ritual. The divination process involves studying omens found within the yolk of eggs or the livers of chickens, guiding the selection of sacrificial offerings, which can encompass pigs, goats, fowls, and occasionally, homemade liquors.

Puroik ceremonies are predominantly private affairs, with one of the most significant being the Waynyee ceremony, aimed at appeasing spirits and deities to safeguard the family's well-being and prosperity. The selection of the auspicious day for Waynyee relies on the divination skills of the priest, who examines eggs and fowl livers. The actual rituals are conducted beside the hearth, culminating in animal sacrifice on the following day. Furthermore, when a family member falls ill, the village priest is summoned to identify the causative spirit and prescribe the appropriate rituals, frequently involving the sacrifice of animals such as pigs, goats, and fowls.

Priesthood within the Puroik society is not hereditary; rather, it is open to anyone possessing the requisite knowledge and necessary implements. Priests also extend their services to perform funeral rites, purification ceremonies, and even to resolve criminal cases where the suspected culprit refuses to confess. In such cases, the village priest conducts a ritual examination in the presence of the entire community, invoking spirits and deities to seek justice. The priest's compensation typically consists of portions of sacrificial animals, and occasionally, valuable local items like swords, dao, and beads.

While modern medicine has made inroads among the Puroiks, their traditional knowledge of herbal remedies remains limited. They resort to using honey for coughs and ground bark from specific trees for cuts, but for more common ailments like fever, coughs, and body aches, they prefer modern medical treatments prescribed by practitioners. Traditional spirit-related illnesses necessitate elaborate ceremonies, often spanning multiple days, during which sacrificial items are offered near various locations, including the family's house, the kitchen, gravesites, or agricultural fields. In some instances, the meat of sacrificed animals is given to the patient as a means of healing, though not always feasible.

Intriguingly, for certain severe illnesses, the Puroiks accept the inevitability of death without performing any rituals or seeking medical intervention, firmly believing in the patient's imminent demise. These occurrences underscore the complex interplay of factors influencing sickness, healing, and death within their society. Remarkably, they do not engage in spirit appeasement for the well-being of their livestock.

X. DEATH AND BURIAL TRADITIONS

The Puroiks perceive death as a natural part of the life cycle, with advanced age considered a natural death, while premature or accidental deaths are viewed as unnatural. Additionally, deaths involving pregnant women, stillborn infants, and prenatal fatalities are attributed to malevolent spirits. Suicides are exceedingly rare in their society. Following a death, the entire village is notified to participate in funeral rites. Burial is the customary method of disposing of the deceased's body, with cremation not practiced. Regardless of clan affiliation, the deceased is buried near their residence. Before interment, the body is wrapped in the deceased's clothing and secured with cane rope, maintaining a seated posture. The corpse is not washed with water before burial. The male members of the family or close relatives dig the grave, typically in an east-west orientation.

A group of men, who transport the corpse by hand, is responsible for digging the grave. Women are not permitted to partake in funeral preparations, and the day following the burial is observed as a period of rest and mourning by the deceased's family and clan members.

This elaborate web of ceremonies, rituals, and burial traditions plays a fundamental role in defining the cultural essence of the Puroik tribe, encapsulating their values, customs, and societal standards in the midst of modern medical progress and evolving circumstances.

XI. CONCLUSION

The study on the Puroik tribe of Arunachal Pradesh and the discourse on sociocultural life both emphasize the profound connection between culture, tradition, and media in the construction and perpetuation of societies. The Puroik tribe serves as a compelling illustration of how cultural memory and heritage persist through the medium of oral literature, rituals, and ceremonies. These practices not only define their identity but also convey values and beliefs that are essential for their social cohesion. In a parallel vein, the discussion on sociocultural life underscores the role of tradition in guiding socially approved behaviours and maintaining societal coherence. It highlights how knowledge about one's social environment and the customs of their community is essential for understanding and effectively navigating everyday interactions. Crucially, both narratives converge on the idea that media life is an integral aspect of social life. The traditions and practices of the Puroik tribe, as well as the sociocultural systems discussed, are mediums through which individuals communicate, internalize, and perpetuate their cultural norms and values. These media are not static but rather evolve to adapt to changing circumstances, mirroring the dynamic nature of both media and culture. Therefore, it is evident that comprehending media life is inseparable from understanding social life as a whole. The sociocultural systems within ethnic tribal communities not only shape their social behaviours but also inform their media life, reinforcing the interdependence of the two. The experiences of everyday life within these communities are culturally deterministic, defining the nature and characteristics of their media life. In essence, these narratives illustrate the enduring power of culture and tradition in shaping societies, showcasing how media becomes the conduit through which societies communicate and preserve their values, beliefs, and identity. As we delve deeper into the study of various cultures and their media practices, it becomes increasingly clear that the two are intertwined, and a comprehensive understanding of one necessitates an understanding of the other.

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