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The Ritual and Mythological Significance of Iti-Takey in Galo Society

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Abstract

The paper explores the cultural and mythological significance of *Iti* (rice flour in its various forms) and *Takey* (ginger) in Galo various ritual performance and taboos related with them. According to Galo mythology, rice is a divine gift from the goddess of agriculture and prosperity. Therefore, it holds a sacred place in Galo ritualistic performances. Ginger in Galo community, is considered as a sacred herb. It is used in purification rituals and is believed to be effective in warding off evil spirits. Iti and Takey are used in auspicious occasions to bless participants and objects of importance. During the *Mopin* (the main festival of Galo community) celebration, Iti and takey take the central place in the ceremonial rituals of the festival. The smearing of the combination of Iti and Takey is believed to purify, bless and protect the person from unseen dangers. Through ritual practices, myths and folktales, this study demonstrates cultural significance of Iti and Takey in Galo society.

Keywords: Galo society, sanctity of rice, symbolism of ginger, Goddess Mopin, Purification rituals in Galo community, cultural anthropology.

Introduction

Galo is one of the major tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. They have a rich culture deeply rooted in oral traditions which lay the foundation of their social and cultural beliefs. They lead an animistic life which enable them to connect more to the everyday object in a deeper level, strengthening their connection to the natural and the spiritual world (Kamsi, 2025. Pp 36-37). The significance of *Iti* (Rice flour and its products) and *Takey* (Ginger) in Galo culture is one great example of their profound connection with the nature. Iti and Takey are far more than food items; they are considered sacred. Hence, they occupy a very important place in the day-to-day life of Galos and their religious rituals.

This article analyses the importance of Iti and Takey within Galo community. It also demonstrates the origin of the beliefs behind Iti-Takey by analysing the myths associated with them.

Methodology

This study has been conducted in seven Galo villages of West Siang and Leparada districts of Arunachal Pradesh namely Kabu, Doyor, Angu, Bam, Nyodu, Tadin, and Jirdin. Both primary and secondary materials have been used for the article. Intensive field works have been conducted in different villages for the collection of data. Voice recorders, video cameras and journals were used to gather data. The target interviewees for the data collection were Priests, village elders and intellectuals of the Galo community. Before conducting the interviews, the participants were made fully aware of the purpose of the interview. Only after obtaining the full consent of the participants, did the author proceed. After the collection of data, a thorough analysis was made to craft the article.

The Importance of Iti in Galo rituals

The term *Iti* in Galo language stands for three things: rice flour, rice paste made of raw rice flour and rice bread. In simpler terms anything which is made rice flour is called *Iti*. *Iti* (in any of these three forms) is considered sacred. It is used in religious ritual along with *Takey* (Ginger). For religious ceremonial use it is referred to as *Iti-Takey*. *Iti* is used in various occasions such as during the celebration of *Mopin* (The main festival of Galo community). During the *Mopin* celebration, *Iti* is smeared on the faces of the participants (Ete, 2020). Smearing *Iti* on someone is believed to bring them good luck and protection from evil spirits.ⁱ During the *Mopin* celebration, one whole day is dedicated to *Iti*, known as the *Iti Alo* (*Iti Day*). This whole day is dedicated to preparing *iti* for the refreshment for the participants on the following day of *Mopin* and also for making rice paste for smearing and sprinkling of on the *Mopin* image, the sacrificial animals and to the participants (Doye, 2015). The *Dosi Ginsi* (A special bamboo basket used for rituals) is smeared with *Iti-Takey* paste during *Mopin* celebration. A *Dosi Ginsi* is primarily used for carrying paddy from the granary and for receiving *Agam* (Blessings) from the deities during *Mopin*.ⁱⁱ When a person dies of old age who has lived a prosperous life, his/her face and body is besmeared with *Iti* to show honour and respect to the dead (Ete, 2020. P.178).

The Myth Behind the Sanctity of Iti

According to Galo beliefs, rice is a divine gift from *Mopin*- the Goddess of prosperity and abundance, and therefore, it is considered sacred. According to Galo mythology the goddess *Mopin* taught humanity how to cultivate paddy. *Tani* (The progenitor of humans according to Galo beliefs), did not know how to perform any agricultural activities. One day while chasing *Kipu Dumpu* (*Kipu* means dog and *Dumpu* a deer in old Galo language), *Tani* wandered into *Gigo Pine*, the heavenly land of *Mopin Moji*. To protect *Dumpu*, *Mopin* imprisoned *Tani* for a few days but released him after his plea. *Tani*, during his stay at the *Digo Pine*, observed that the land was full of prosperity with food and wealth. So, he asked Goddess *Mopin* for some seeds of paddy and maize as compensation of his suffering as a prisoner at *Digo Pine*, so that he can grow some crops for on earth. The generous goddess granted his wish.

Tani returned to earth and, having no knowledge of agriculture, sowed the seeds directly into a barren land without any preparation. The wild birds ate up all the seeds. Dismayed, *Tani* went back to Goddess *Mopin* and explained everything and asked for some more seeds. The generous goddess not just gave the seeds, but this time she gave him the proper instructions for performing agriculture as well. Under the goddess' guidance, *Tani* learned agriculture. (Padu, 2020. Pp. 14-19).

ⁱ An excerpt from an interview with Kamsi, Remo, Galo priest, Doyor village, west Siang district, (A.P) on Feb, 5th 2026

ⁱⁱ An excerpt from an interview with Taye, Darba, a senior villager of Jirdin village, West Siang district (A.P) on Feb. 2nd 2026.

The Galos believes that if goddess Mopin had not intervened, humanity would not be enjoying the divine food here on earth. Therefore, Galo people consider rice as a divine gift from the goddess Mopin; hence, it is sacred and a symbol of good fortune and prosperity.

Importance of Takey/ Take (Ginger)

Ginger which is called *Takey/Take* in Galo language, is far more than just a spice or herb within Galo community. Takey alongside with Iti is used for auspicious religious ceremonies. While Iti is a sign of prosperity Takey can be understood as a sign of purity and protection. Ginger is believed to be an object of purification in Galo society. They use Takey to ward off evil. Galo people carry a piece of ginger like an amulet while travelling, especially during the night time. According to Galo beliefs, the strong smell of ginger keeps the evil spirits away. Mothers always hand their childre a piece of ginger to protect them through the journey.

When a person is sick, some pieces of ginger is sprinkled around his/her bed for protection against evil forces. The Galos believes that when a person is sick and physically weak, their spirits become more vulnerable. During this time, they become an easy target of the malevolent spirits or can easily be hexed by ill-intentioned people.ⁱⁱⁱ The Galos believes that if sickly person is covered in the strong smell of Takey he/she is protected from harm.

The Role of Iti-Takey in Galo Rituals

Iti and Takey are essential in Galo religious performances. Any auspicious ritual in Galo community is incomplete without them. Iti and takey are generally mixed together with Poka (Rice beer) to form a loose paste which is called Iti -Takey. This sacred paste is used for smearing on the deities and the objects of values and the participants wish to and to bless them. It is also sprinkled on the staircase and the main entrance of their houses to invite *Ai Agam* (Good fortune/prosperity/wellbeing).^{iv} The Iti-Takey is used to cleanse object. When Galos bring a new *Adam* (Brass plates and pots used in ceremonies. These plates and pots are treasured in Galo society) home, Galos perform a ritual called *Adam Iti Irnam/ Adam Wtw Wrnam*. It means to smear iti on the Adam. The mixture of rice flour, ginger, and rice beer is smeared on the Adam. It is believed some adams house evil spirits. So, to ward off any evil, this purifying process of Adam Iti Irnam is performed (Boje, M. 2024). The smearing of iti is also done to *Tadok* (Beaded necklaces/ ornaments) upon receiving a new one. It is done as a welcoming gesture and also to appease *Ai Agam* so that more such things may follow.^v

Taboos related to Iti-Takey

As sacred objects, Iti-Takey must be respected. To protect the sanctity of Iti-Takey, Galos follows some strict rules. Someone who is observing taboos are not allowed to use Iti and Takey. A family who is mourning a death of a family member abstains from using Iti and Takey in their house until the end of the mourning period.^{vi} Someone who has performed *Hima Genam* (Carrying the dead body to the grave on the dead's funeral service), is forbidden from consuming any food items made with Iti or Takey for a whole year. Someone who commits a murder or kills someone unintentionally, he/she is

ⁱⁱⁱ An excerpt from an interview with Kamsi, Moken, a senior villager of Angu village, West Siang district (A.P) on Jan. 29th 2026.

^{iv} An excerpt from an interview with Taso, Ipu a senior villager of Tadin village, West Siang district (A.P) on 30th Jan, 2026.

^v An excerpt from an interview with Taye, Darba, a senior villager of Jirdin village, West Siang district (A.P) on Feb. 2nd 2026.

^{vi} An excerpt from an interview from an interview with Loya, Lijum, Gao bura, Kabu village, West Siang district by the author on 3rd Feb 2026

forbidden from consuming Iti and Takey till the end of his/ her life.^{vii} Killing certain animals such as tiger is seen equivalent to killing a human, therefore, a tiger slayer is also forbidden from taking Iti and Takey for the rest of his life (Doye, 2015). The Galo people avoid receiving Iti-Takey from a household whose is mourning unnatural death and other unfortunate incidents. It is believed to bring a likely fate to the receiver's family. A person which is bitten by a snake is also forbidden from using Iti-Takey for a year.^{viii}

Although the use of Iti-takey in auspicious ritual performance is very essential, its use is strictly prohibited in rituals involving malevolent spirits. Even after the performance of these rituals the concerned and his family is forbidden from consuming Iti-Takey for a period of time. During this period, they are not allowed to even take part in any ritual involving the use of Iti-Takey during the ritual performances.^{ix}

It is firmly believed that a taboo related to Iti-Takey needs to be strictly observed. The violation of it is believed to invite *Taik Himek* (Diseases such as Leprosy and Epilepsy) and other incurable diseases.

Myths related to Takey

The Galo mythology speaks of the power of Takey as a protection against all evil energy and the dark mystical beings and spirits. The malevolent spirits and mystical beings believed to be averse of the strong smell of Takey, hence, they stay yards away from it. The strong smell of ginger is believed to draw an invisible line of protection that the evils cannot penetrate.

Long time ago when the humanity was just beginning to take shape on earth, *Uyo* (Demons/ Malevolent spirits) used to roam around dense forest especially during the night time. They would look for an easy prey to feed on whatever they find near the forest. Those days, it was Takey on which humans relied upon heavily for protection from the *Uyos*^x.

The Tale of Abo Tani and Takey (Ginger) Plants

One day *Tani* – the progenitor of Galo people, was working on the paddy field. He worked all day on the field alongside other villagers but the work on his field was unfinished so he decided to stay at the *Nakum* (A hut constructed at the paddy field for resting and short stays during the busiest days of cultivation season). All the other villagers returned to the village, but Tani continued to work. The whole day was spent mending the fences. As the night fell, he prepared himself a meal, ate and fell asleep shortly. After a while he woke to an indistinct sound. He thought it as a nightmare. Moments later, he heard the sound again. But this time he could hear it clearly. It was the unpleasant sound of an *Uyo* – a demon, looking for a prey and it had caught the smell of Tani. Tani could hear the horrifying sound of the *Uyo* circling around his *Nakum* and was terrified thinking these are his last moments on earth and was preparing himself to meet his end. Moments passed, then hours like this. Tani could still hear the *Uyo* circling the *Nakum*, but somehow, he could not reach Tani. After hours of silence battle between them, Tani heard the *Uyo* murmuring to himself in frustration that he could smell a human inside, but just cannot enter the hut due to the strong smell of Takey, which he hated. The smell came

^{vii} An excerpt from an interview with Kamsi, Remo, Galo priest, Doyor village, west Siang district, (A.P) on Feb, 5th 2026

^{viii} An excerpt from an interview with Taye, Darba, a senior villager of Jirdin village, West Siang district (A.P) on Feb. 2nd 2026.

^{ix} An excerpt from an interview with Nyodu, Toli, a senior villager of Nyodu village, Leparada district (A.P) on Dec 1st 2025

^x An excerpt from an interview with Kamsi, Moken, a senior villager of Angu village, West Siang district (A.P) on Jan. 29th 2026.

from the ginger plants planted by Tani's wife. At last, the frustrated demon left Tani unharmed and retrieved to the dense forest where he came from (Geyi, 2021. Pp. 74-75).

The Takey is not only a protection against demons but it also protects the humans against the mischievous intentions of *Yapoms*- the mystical beings of the forest. Such an incident is mentioned in one of the Galo folktales concerning *Ato Japo*- a mythical character of Galo mythology.

The Tale of Ato Japo and Yaja

Long ago, far away in a forest cave, lived a strong and handsome man named Ato Japo. He used to have a beautiful wife and children. A happy family. But he lost them in a tragic incident. Grief stricken, but he still persisted on the path of life alone. A female Yapom named Yaja fell in love with him and started to take care of his household works when he was away. The single man living alone, was shocked to come back to a home nicely tidied up and meals cooked for him. This happened for many days. One day he decided to find out who is behind this, so he took his hunting weapons and pretended to go out for hunt and spied, hiding nearby his cave. After a while he saw feminine figure came swinging on vines of the trees and entered his cave. He went there and confronted her. The Yapom confesses her feelings for him and expresses her wish to stay with him as his wife. Seeing her devotion towards him, Ato Japo excepted her hand in marriage. Yaja gets the consent of her parents; they both get married and starts living a happy married life. Living with a human as a human wife, Yaja adapted into human world and became a bridge between the two worlds. After some time, the Yapom family invites Ato Japo, now their son-in-law on a hunting expedition. Ato Japo accepted the invitation, but Yaja was reluctant to let her human husband go out on the wild alone with the Yapoms. But She could not reveal the reason behind her reluctance to her husband, the fact that Yapoms are fond of sucking on human blood. When Ato Japo was leaving for the expedition, Yaja handed him a piece of Ginger advising him to put some ginger on the wound if he happens to get a cut while he is out there on the expedition. He agrees and leaves,

During the expedition, Ato Japo accidentally gets a cut on his finger. He forgets about Yaja's advice and does not put ginger on it. One of the young Yapom notices the bleeding wound and sucks on it in pretence of stopping the bleeding. Soon all of them gathers and starts to suck on Ato Japo's blood, he falls into the ground unconscious. The Yapoms left him behind and proceeded without him. Upon their return she finds her husband missing. She immediately runs to place of expedition and finds her husband unconscious and in a very critical condition. With the help of a magical herb, she brings Ato Japo back to life and scolds him of ignoring her advice of putting Takey on the wound and they both returned home safely (Nguso, 2021. Pp. 11-30).

This tale of Ato Japo and Yaja tells the importance of carrying Takey while going into the deep forest as a protection against the mischievous Yapoms.

Conclusion

Iti and Takey is a symbol of prosperity, purity and protection among the Galo tribe of Arunachal Pradesh. Any auspicious ritual performance is incomplete without iti and takey. It is considered a divine gift of the goddess Mopin. Therefore, it takes the central role in the celebration of the festival of Mopin. Iti is smeared on the on the image of Mopin to appease the goddess and also on the sacrificial animal as a sign of offering to the goddess. While Iti is the sign of prosperity and divine sustenance, Takey on the other hand is a symbol purification, defence against malevolent forces.

The ritual combination of Iti-takey is used in in rituals for the purpose of evoking the blessings of the deities. From welcoming treasured materials to blessing people in rituals, Iti-Takey plays an important part in auspicious ceremonies. The sanctity of Iti and Takey is not taken lightly. The taboos related with Iti-Takey ensures that its revered properly; at the same time, they also help in balancing social order. It is believed that if the taboos are not observed properly, they may bring misfortunes.

The Galo myths and folktales provide strong backing for the importance of Iti and Takey in Galo society. They are not mere food items but a bridge between the human and the spiritual world. They also serve as an instrument to imbibe moral responsibility to the people and maintaining social order.

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