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# The Donyi-Polo Cosmos: Sun and Moon Mythology in Mising Folktales

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## Abstract

*The symbols of the Sun and Moon form the central axis of Mising cosmology, ethics, and ritual life in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. Donyi (the Sun) and Polo (the Moon) are imagined as parents, witnesses, and ancestral lawgivers whose gaze binds human conduct to a larger moral and ecological order. This article analyses five narratives— "Origin of Ali a Ye Ligang," "Abotani and Abotaro," "The Dark Spot on the Moon," "Lightning and Thunder," and "The Rite of Calling a Soul Back"—drawn from an authoritative corpus of Mising folktales. Through close reading, it shows how these stories encode ideas of cosmological origin, divine ancestry, oath-taking, taboo, shame, reciprocity with nonhuman beings, and environmental responsibility. Rather than treating Mising solar–lunar beliefs as a fragmentary "tribal religion" or primitive astronomy, the study argues that the Donyi Polo complex functions as an Indigenous moral philosophy and knowledge archive. Solar–lunar mythology emerges as a living intellectual tradition that continues to shape cultural memory, ecological ethics, and contemporary Mising identity.*

***Keywords:*** *Donyi-Polo, ecological morality, indigenous cosmogony, Mising oral tradition, solar–lunar mythology*

## Introduction

The Mising of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh maintain one of the richest oral traditions in the Tibeto-Burman region, transmitting cosmology, genealogy, ecological memory, and social ethics chiefly through story and performance rather than scripture (Pegu, 2016; Taid, 2016). Within this world of narrative, the divine pair Donyi and Polo

are central. They are invoked in ritual chants, used in oaths, and referenced in everyday idioms, so the sky becomes a constant reminder of moral visibility (Religious Belief and Practice of Mising Community of Assam, 2019; Taid, 2016). For Mising narrators, the Sun and Moon are intelligent beings who see, hear, judge, and intervene in human affairs and who embody truth, justice, fertility, agricultural order, and ancestral lineage as overlapping forms of "light" (Misra, 2023; Taid, 2016).

The folktale corpus assigns sex, personality, and kinship roles to heavenly bodies, turning astronomical phenomena into characters rooted in family and village life (Finnegan, 2012; Taid, 2016). In "Origin of Ali a Ye Ligang," Donyi and Polo instruct Abotani in techniques and ethical obligations of cultivation, including ritual apologies to animals harmed while protecting crops. In "The Dark Spot on the Moon," rivalry, shame, and misdirected punishment become a moral explanation for lunar markings, while "Lightning and Thunder" translates a broken taboo into a permanent separation mapped onto the sky (Taid, 2016). Even the healing rite of calling back a lost soul depends on Donyi and Polo as witnesses to vows, making dishonesty impossible in principle (Hallowell, 1960; Taid, 2016). Across myths, etiological tales, agricultural legends, and ritual narratives, the Sun and Moon form the moral spine of the community.

These materials unsettle earlier anthropological habits of describing Indigenous cosmologies as preliterate superstition or proto-scientific commentary (Bascom, 1954; Malinowski, 1926). Eliade (1959, 1963) argued that cosmology is often ethical before it is astronomical because the sky is experienced as a zone of truth. Lévi-Strauss (1978) treated myth as a sophisticated mode of thought equivalent to philosophy but articulated through narrative. Smith (1999) insisted that Indigenous stories are not mythic scraps awaiting rational interpretation but legitimate knowledge systems combining history, law, and ethics. The Mising tales illustrate these positions: they encode rules about cultivation, taboo, shame, reciprocity with animals, and the binding force of speech.

The Donyi Polo complex is therefore better understood as a cultural philosophy than a marginal "tribal religion" (Misra, 2023; Pegu, 2016). Through narrative fiction, Misings depict a universe in which human conduct and cosmic order correspond: ecological irresponsibility and moral failure radiate outward into a sky that remembers them (Eliade, 1959; Finnegan, 2012). Solar–lunar mythology is not decorative but foundational—one of the chief media through which identity, ethics, and environmental relations are transmitted (Berkes, 2008; Smith, 1999).

## Literature Review

### Myth as Knowledge

Claude Lévi-Strauss famously argued that myth is a mode of thinking: it handles the same logical problems as philosophy but does so in concrete images and stories rather than in abstract concepts (Lévi-Strauss, 1978). In the Mising context, this is visible in the tight linkage between stars, planets, and social relationships: the Sun and Moon are not passive lights but figures that teach, punish, measure, and witness, encoding rules about kinship and land use in narratives about the sky (Taid, 2016; "Mising Folklore:

The Matrix of the Mising Society and Culture," 2021). The Abotani cycle in particular acts as what Lévi-Strauss would call a system of categories, distinguishing human and nonhuman, kin and stranger, permissible and forbidden through storied events rather than doctrinal statements (Lévi-Strauss, 1978; Dumézil, 1970).

This implies that Mising solar–lunar tales should not be read as clumsy attempts at scientific explanation. They handle questions of law, inheritance, ecological reciprocity, and shame by projecting them onto an animated cosmos whose movements can be read as commentary on human behaviour (Eliade, 1963; Berkes, 2008). Myth here is not ignorance; it is a compressed form of social and ecological knowledge.

## Cosmos as Moral Space

Mircea Eliade argued that in many societies, the sky is not a neutral physical zone but a place of truth that cannot be deceived and therefore acquires juridical functions (Eliade, 1959, 1963). Mising ritual language reflects this directly when the Mibu, during the rite of calling back a soul, addresses Donyi and Polo as witnesses to his promise to care for the patient, thereby turning the sky into a moral courtroom (Taid, 2016). In such narratives, the heavens are less a backdrop for natural events than an active archive of human acts: stains on the Moon, the perpetual chase of thunder and lightning, or the unblinking gaze of the Sun all mark moral breaches that cannot be erased (Eliade, 1963; Finnegan, 2012).

In this moral cosmos, lying, betrayal, or the neglect of obligations leave traces in the visible world, which means that ethical conduct is always already public, even when formally hidden from other humans (Hallowell, 1960). The Mising stories, therefore, instantiate Eliade's claim that cosmology is a moral field as much as a physical one.

## Indigenous Knowledge and Narrative Sovereignty

Linda Tuhiwai Smith's critique of colonial research emphasises that Indigenous stories were long dismissed as superstition or "myth" in a pejorative sense, even when they clearly transmitted environmental information and ethical systems (Smith, 1999). In the Mising case, tales about Abotani learning cultivation, apologising to animals, or negotiating with spirits encode practical ecological knowledge about soil, water, and nonhuman agency alongside moral instruction (Taid, 2016; "Environmental and Ethical Issues in Mising Folklore," 2016). To treat such narratives as mere folklore is to miss their epistemic status within the community.

Smith also insists on narrative sovereignty: the right of Indigenous communities to define their stories as knowledge, law, and history (Smith, 1999). By reading Donyi Polo tales as philosophical texts in narrative form rather than as quaint legends, this article aligns with that decolonising move and resists the colonial trope of the "tribe without history" (Smith, 1999; Bascom, 1954).

## Functional Roles of Myth

Bronisław Malinowski saw myth as a charter for social institutions, providing

legitimising stories that locate present customs in primordial time (Malinowski, 1926). "Origin of Ali a Ye Ligang" functions in precisely this way: it explains the agricultural festival as a re-enactment of Abotani's first cultivation under the patronage of Donyi Polo, thereby giving the ritual a hereditary sanction rather than a merely pragmatic justification (Malinowski, 1926). The tale not only narrates technical steps of sowing and protecting crops but frames them as obligations established in sacred time, which is exactly what Malinowski meant by myth as a practical charter.

Other Mising tales also illustrate functionalist points. "The Rite of Calling a Soul Back" gives a narrative rationale for the *doli jo sag* healing rite; "Lightning and Thunder" encodes sexual taboos; and "The Dark Spot on the Moon" makes honesty a cosmic concern (Taid, 2016). In each case, the story legitimates practice, making compliance feel like fidelity to ancestral precedent rather than external coercion (Bascom, 1954; Finnegan, 2012).

## Methods and Procedures

This study uses as its primary corpus *Mising Folktales*, the Sahitya Akademi volume compiled, translated, and annotated by Taburam Taid (2016). Taid's collection brings together around sixty narratives recorded from elder storytellers in multiple Mising villages, with the original Mising texts printed alongside Assamese or English translations and contextual ethnographic notes, making it an unusually rich written record of an oral tradition (Taid, 2016). Within Mising literary and intellectual circles, this volume is widely treated as an authoritative reference for canonical tales and ritual narratives, and it provides an appropriate base for close reading (Pegu, 2016; "Mising Folklore: The Matrix of the Mising Society and Culture," 2021).

From this corpus, five tales were purposively selected because they feature Donyi and/or Polo in explicit roles as ancestors, teachers, or witnesses and because narrators and Taid's own commentary repeatedly identify them as "Sun and Moon stories" central to the Mising moral universe (Taid, 2016). These are "Origin of Ali a Ye Ligang," "Abotani and Abotaro," "The Dark Spot on the Moon," "Lightning and Thunder," and "The Rite of Calling a Soul Back," which together cover domains of cosmological origin, agriculture, oath-taking, taboo, shame, and moral judgment (Taid, 2016).

The reliability of this textual corpus operates on two levels. First, Taid is himself a Mising scholar whose work rests on long engagement with community elders and ritual specialists; his book names narrators, places of collection, and performance contexts, allowing casual or dubious material to be excluded (Taid, 2016). Second, between 2018 and 2024, informal conversations with elder storytellers and Mibus in parts of Lakhimpur and Dhemaji districts confirmed that these five tales remain widely known, frequently told, and ritually relevant today (Author, personal communication, 2019–2024). In several cases, more than one version of a tale was recounted; these variants were used to verify core plot structures and ritual details, and notable divergences are indicated where they alter the moral emphasis (Finnegan, 2012).

All English quotations from the tales in this article are taken from or checked against Taid's translations, with minor stylistic adjustments for fluency, and with key kinship terms, ritual formulae, and culturally specific words retained in Mising or

Assamese (Taid, 2016). Where such terms occur, they have been back-translated with the help of native speaker consultants to ensure that ethical and cosmological nuances are not flattened into generic equivalents (Smith, 1999). The sample of five tales out of roughly sixty is not meant to be statistically representative; rather, it is a small, thematically coherent set of narratives that enjoy clear cultural authority as "Donyi Polo stories," and thus carry particular weight for understanding how solar–lunar imagery organises moral and ecological thought (Bascom, 1954; Finnegan, 2012).

The methodological aim here is interpretive reliability rather than quantitative generalisation. By grounding analysis in an authoritative published collection, cross-checking with living storytellers and ritual practitioners, and concentrating on a cluster of tales that align cosmology, agriculture, and ethics, the article seeks to ensure that its readings reflect narratives that are both textually stable and socially recognized within Mising tradition (Smith, 1999; "Environmental and Ethical Issues in Mising Folklore," 2016).

## Results and Discussion

### Donyi Polo as Ancestral Parents

In Mising cosmology, the Sun and Moon are not remote gods but members of an extended family tree. The foundational tale presents Abotani, the first human, as marrying Karmi, daughter of Donyi and Polo, and thus founding a lineage that descends directly from the sky (Taid, 2016). This single genealogical move collapses the gap between divine and human, so that ethics become obligations owed to cosmic parents rather than impersonal rules (Dumézil, 1970).

The idea that the Misings originated in Ki-ling Kangge, an otherworldly home, further strengthens this sense that migration is not merely geographic but cosmological: to come down to earth is to move from a celestial ancestral house to a terrestrial one (Taid, 2016; Religious Belief and Practice of Mising Community of Assam, 2019). In Dumézil's terms, this is "mythic genealogy," where divine descent provides the architecture for social ethics, because kinship with gods makes moral failure a betrayal of family rather than a technical violation (Dumézil, 1970; Malinowski, 1926).

### Agricultural Teaching and Ecological Ethics: Origin of Ali a Ye Ligang

Ali a Ye Ligang, the main agricultural festival, is legitimised not by astronomical calculation but by a myth of divine instruction. Abotani's early attempts at cultivation are thwarted as birds and animals consume his crops, until he turns to Donyi and Polo, who teach him how to prepare the field, fence it, and ritually apologise to the creatures harmed in its defence (Taid, 2016). The tale encodes concrete ecological ethics: forests should be cleared with restraint, crop protection must avoid wanton cruelty, and human life is indebted to the nonhuman beings whose habitats are disrupted (Berkes, 2008).

The ritual apology, in which each animal and bird killed is named and asked forgiveness, contradicts stereotypes of "tribal" hunting as indiscriminately violent and

instead frames cultivation as a morally fraught but necessary compromise with other forms of life (Berkes, 2008; "Environmental and Ethical Issues in Mising Folklore," 2016). The closing scene of communal song, dance, and feasting recalls Malinowski's point that ritual re-enacts sacred beginnings: Ali a Ye Ligang is not a seasonal entertainment but a periodic return to the moment when Donyi Polo first taught ethical farming (Malinowski, 1926).

**Donyi Polo as Moral Witnesses: The Rite of Calling a Soul Back**

In "The Rite of Calling a Soul Back," a starving boy named Dorgin risks losing his soul, and a priest performs a healing ritual on the condition that Dorgin's family will feed him once a year (Taid, 2016). The promise is not treated as a private agreement; the priest explicitly calls on Donyi and Polo to see and hear his vow, summoning the sky as witness. In a cosmos where Sun and Moon are ever-present relatives, speech uttered under their gaze acquires the status of binding law (Hallowell, 1960).

This story establishes several moral axioms: words bind; vows are never purely private; and the sky, as Eliade suggests, is a zone where nothing can be hidden (Eliade, 1959). Dishonesty here is not primarily a crime against human courts but a betrayal of one's ancestors, whose eyes and ears are imagined as extending through daylight and moonlight alike (Hallowell, 1960; Taid, 2016). The tale also functions as a charter myth for the *doli jo sag* ritual: it explains why the rite exists, what obligations it imposes, and why failing those obligations invites misfortune.

**Moral Failure and the Marked Moon: The Dark Spot on the Moon**

"The Dark Spot on the Moon" offers a moral rather than scientific explanation for lunar markings. In the tale, a deception involving rice cakes and a substituted package of excrement results in Polo, the Moon, being struck by the misdirected filth, leaving a permanent stain (Taid, 2016). The comic surface masks a serious proposition: shame leaves visible marks; deceit cannot be fully concealed; and the sky bears witness to family injustices.

By writing moral failure into a permanent astronomical feature, the tale embodies Eliade's idea of sacred time that is continually re-entered. Every time people look at the Moon, they re-encounter a primordial act of deceit and its consequences (Eliade, 1963). The Moon's smudge becomes a nightly reminder that wrongdoing lingers in memory even when the original actors are long gone. That injustice often harms the innocent more than the guilty (Finnegan, 2012).

**Desire, Taboo, and Cosmic Distance: Lightning and Thunder**

In "Lightning and Thunder," Panoi and Panbor are siblings whose relationship is shattered when Panbor's forbidden desire is discovered; the ensuing chase moves into the sky as Panbor becomes lightning, forever pursuing Panoi, who has become thunder (Taid, 2016). Every storm re-enacts the drama of desire, shame, and pursuit, transforming a taboo transgression into a cosmic pattern. The narrative allows the community to

talk about sexual boundaries indirectly but forcefully by projecting them onto the most dramatic phenomena in the sky (Bascom, 1954).

Scholars once tended to reduce such myths to naïve weather explanations. However, Malinowski's functionalist reading alerts us to their social work: the story naturalises prohibitions by inscribing them into a landscape that children and adults alike cannot ignore (Malinowski, 1926). The ever-pursuing thunder and ever-fleeing lightning materialise the idea that some wrongs create distances that can never be closed, only circled endlessly.

**Donyi Polo and the Architecture of Social Ethics**

Taken together, these stories present Donyi and Polo as protectors of morality rather than tyrannical gods. They require no elaborate temple cult and no doctrine of fear; their authority is quiet, continuous, and woven into both ritual and gossip (Misra, 2023). In Mising speech, people still say "Donyi Polo is watching" as a way of reminding one another that wrongdoing is visible even when it seems concealed from neighbours (Taid, 2016).

Lévi-Strauss notes that myths create systems of categories that separate order from chaos and define prohibitions (Lévi-Strauss, 1978). The Donyi Polo complex builds such a system without written codes or scripture: lies stain the Moon; illicit desire becomes storm; broken promises haunt the soul; and careless farming demands apology (Taid, 2016). In this sense, solar–lunar cosmology provides a legal and ethical architecture in an oral society, doing for the Misings what law codes and theological treatises do in literate cultures (Finnegan, 2012).

**Cosmology as Ecological Knowledge**

From a contemporary standpoint, harvest rituals and flood chants are often sidelined as folklore, yet "Origin of Ali a Ye Ligang" reveals sophisticated environmental reasoning. When birds and animals destroy Abotani's first crop, the narrative teaches that domestication must be balanced with respect for nonhuman "persons" whose lives are disrupted (Taid, 2016). The subsequent ritual apology, in which dead animals are named and acknowledged, functions as a mnemonic device for ecological impact (Berkes, 2008). Berkes has documented similar patterns of ritualised reciprocity among other Indigenous groups, where offerings and stories maintain respectful relations between hunters and animal "persons" (Berkes, 2008). In both contexts, environmental ethics are carried not by written conservation laws but by narrative and ceremony, enabling children to internalise ecological responsibility long before they encounter formal schooling (Berkes, 2008; "Environmental and Ethical Issues in Mising Folklore," 2016). Ali a Ye Ligang thus joins a wider set of Indigenous practices in which sacred origins confer legitimacy on sustainable land use.

**Myth as Historical Memory**

Although folktales are not chronicles, they preserve social memory in narrative form. In "Abotani and Abotaro," the claim that humans descend from Ki-ling Kangge

asserts cosmic rather than tribal origins, rejecting stereotypes of "backward" peoples (Taid, 2016). Colonial ethnographies often implied that such groups lacked history, a notion Smith has sharply criticised as part of the ideological toolkit of colonisation (Smith, 1999). By insisting on celestial ancestry and on Abotani as the first farmer, Mising stories place the community at the centre of a moral and agricultural history that begins in the sky. Abotani's continued presence in ritual as a culture hero underscores Malinowski's observation that myth sustains social organisation by providing models for behaviour (Malinowski, 1926). Every act of cultivation echoes his first sowing under Donyi Polo's instruction; every festival dance re-enacts a remembered beginning (Taid, 2016). In this way, myth acts as historical memory without relying on archives.

**Moral Time and Cosmic Permanence**

"The Dark Spot on the Moon" and "Lightning and Thunder" both show how moral time is stretched into cosmic permanence. The mark on the Moon is not framed as revenge but as a reminder: shame does not simply evaporate after the event but remains visible in the nightly sky (Taid, 2016; Eliade, 1963). "Lightning and Thunder" likewise eternalises a single broken taboo into a chase that recurs whenever storms form, suggesting that some consequences cannot be undone, only lived with. Eliade describes this as the making of sacred time, where a primordial episode is cyclically re-entered whenever humans participate in ritual or even when they simply look at the relevant natural sign (Eliade, 1963). For Mising children, the sky becomes a book of remembered acts rather than a neutral expanse, teaching moral lessons without explicit didacticism (Finnegan, 2012).

**Hierarchy without Tyranny**

A striking feature of the Donyi Polo system is the relative absence of divine cruelty. Sun deities in other mythologies often demand sacrifice and obedience under threat. However, in Mising stories, Donyi and Polo appear as benign guardians who lead, teach, and observe rather than as punitive rulers (Misra, 2023). The Mibu in "The Rite of Calling a Soul Back" fears shame before the sky more than he fears physical punishment; moral order rests on honour, mutual obligation, and relational accountability (Taid, 2016; Hallowell, 1960). Hallowell's description of Ojibwa relational spirituality—where religion is a network of relationships among persons, human and other-than-human, rather than a set of dogmas—offers a useful comparative frame (Hallowell, 1960). The Mising case fits this model: Donyi and Polo are treated as relatives to be respected and thanked, not as tyrants to be appeased. This undermines the stereotype of "tribal religions" as fear-based and implies a vision of law in which memory and respect are stronger regulators than terror.

**Story as Law**

In the absence of written legal codes, stories perform juridical work. Each of the five tales examined here hides a legal principle in metaphor: "Lightning and Thunder" enforces sexual boundaries; "The Dark Spot on the Moon" polices honesty; "The

Rite of Calling a Soul Back" protects vows; and "Origin of Ali a Ye Ligang" codifies ecological responsibility (Taid, 2016). Lévi-Strauss noted that myth often handles social contradictions by transforming them into structured narratives: desire that breaches kinship becomes a perpetual chase; deceit that harms the innocent becomes a permanent mark on a celestial face (Lévi-Strauss, 1978).

The result is a moral universe in which the natural order is ethically charged. Thunder must follow lightning, just as consequence follows transgression; stains on the Moon cannot be washed away, just as a certain memory of wrong remains (Eliade, 1963). In this system, law is not in a book; it is in the stories that everyone knows and in the sky that everyone sees.

**Gendered Harmony of Sun and Moon**

Although the Donyi Polo complex does not articulate a formal theology of gender, the tales subtly assign distinct roles to Sun and Moon. Polo is associated with night, fertility, calm, and the quiet recording of shame; Donyi with daylight, clarity, and public visibility (Taid, 2016). In "The Dark Spot on the Moon," Polo bears the stain of Donyi's duplicity, suggesting that injustice can fall on the innocent and that the record keeper of wrongs is not necessarily the wrongdoer (Taid, 2016). Male authority is therefore shown as fallible, and the cosmos remembers this. On the human plane, this division mirrors a social pattern in which women often carry memory through song and tale. At the same time, men occupy more visible ritual positions, yet neither sphere is dominant in absolute terms (Thrupp, 1962). Donyi and Polo, taken together, represent equilibrium rather than hierarchy, a point that aligns with historical observations about gender complementarity in many agrarian societies (Thrupp, 1962; Finnegan, 2012).

**Myth and the Everyday World**

The Donyi Polo of folklore are not confined to ritual settings; it filters into the moral vocabulary of everyday life. Oaths may still be sealed with invocations such as "Let Donyi Polo be my witness," and elders may caution children that deception cannot be hidden from the Sun and Moon (Taid, 2016; Religious Belief and Practice of Mising Community of Assam, 2019). In such moments, the distinction between mythic past and practical present collapses: cosmology becomes a continuous commentary on current behaviour. Malinowski argued that myths endure only while they function as practical charters of culture (Malinowski, 1926). Mising tales exemplify this principle: they are recalled whenever decisions with moral weight are made, whether in disputes, marriages, or land matters, and thus remain socially active rather than museum pieces (Bascom, 1954; Finnegan, 2012). Oral tradition here performs the same externalising function as written law in literate societies, storing norms outside individual memory yet making them widely available.

**Solar–Lunar Mythology as Ecological Education**

The environmental teachings embedded in the Abotani cycle amount to a form of

ecological education for an oral society. The instructions to clear land responsibly, defend crops without cruelty, apologise to displaced beings, and give thanks for fertility all appear in narrative and ritual form rather than as written rules (Taid, 2016). Children learn these obligations not from textbooks but from stories and festival performances in which they participate. Berkes notes that many Indigenous societies encode ecological knowledge in symbols, stories, and rituals, enabling new generations to internalise sustainable practices almost unconsciously (Berkes, 2008). The Abotani–Donyi–Polo tales fit this pattern: Ali a Ye Ligang is simultaneously a celebration, a moral lesson, and a rehearsal of proper relations between humans, land, and other beings ("Environmental and Ethical Issues in Mising Folklore," 2016). To dismiss such performance as superstition is to miss its sophisticated pedagogic function.

**Morality without Hell or Reward**

One notable aspect of the Donyi Polo cosmos is the absence of elaborate doctrines of heaven, hell, or post-mortem reward and punishment. Wrongdoing is not primarily sanctioned in a separate afterlife court; it is written into the world people inhabit as stains, storms, and broken relationships (Taid, 2016). The worst fate is not divine torture but becoming like thunder, condemned to chase one's own error forever without being able to erase it. Eliade suggests that when ethics are inscribed in cosmology, the universe itself becomes a law book (Eliade, 1963). Under Donyi Polo, people are not told that the gods will punish them; they are reminded that Donyi Polo see them, and that this visibility itself is the constraint. Moral order is maintained by shame, honour, and the desire not to betray ancestral watchers rather than by fear of torture, which aligns with Hallowell's portrayal of relational spirituality grounded in respect and reciprocity (Hallowell, 1960).

**The Sun–Moon Pair as Ancestral Lawgivers**

Although scholars sometimes label the Donyi Polo system "religion," the tales resist easy classification within standard theological categories (Misra, 2023). There is no exclusive worship, no centralised priesthood devoted solely to the Sun and Moon, and no scriptural canon. Instead, Donyi and Polo operate as ancestral lawgivers and moral companions: humans behave ethically because their cosmic parents taught them, not because a distant sovereign commands them. Hallowell's notion of religion as a network of relationships rather than a body of doctrine captures this configuration (Hallowell, 1960). In this model, the Sun and Moon are senior kin; humans owe respect rather than blind obedience; morality is social rather than strictly theological; and ritual is gratitude rather than submission (Hallowell, 1960; Pegu, 2016). The Mising world is therefore comparatively free of fear-based theology: the sky watches but does not terrorise.

**Myth as Resistance to Colonial Narratives**

During the colonial period, European anthropologists and missionaries in Northeast India habitually described Indigenous cosmologies as irrational, chaotic, or unfinished, and translated Donyi Polo as "pagan gods" in need of replacement (Smith,

1999; Misra, 2023). Such portrayals helped justify interventions in ritual life and education by suggesting that Indigenous peoples lacked sophisticated moral systems. Linda Tuhiwai Smith argues that these narratives of inferiority are central to colonial control and must be dismantled if Indigenous knowledge is to be recentered (Smith, 1999).

The Mising folktales discussed here contest these colonial narratives. They reveal complex ethics, environmental responsibility, gender complementarity, and philosophical reflection, all transmitted orally rather than in written theology (Taid, 2016; "Mising Folklore: The Matrix of the Mising Society and Culture," 2021). By locating human origins in the sky and by casting Donyi and Polo as educators, witnesses, and guardians, the stories assert that law, agriculture, and cosmology long predated colonial presence. No missionary brought morality to this society; it was already written into the lives of the Sun and Moon.

## The Sky as Archive

A recurring motif in these folktales is that the sky has a memory. The Moon's smudge, the streaking chase of thunder and lightning, the Sun's unblinking gaze during oaths—all signal a universe that records human acts (Taid, 2016). In oral cultures without extensive writing, public symbols and landscapes often serve as external memory devices, and here the sky itself becomes an archive of moral stories (Finnegan, 2012). Finnegan notes that nonliterate societies rely on visible, shared cues to sustain communal memory, whether in built structures, ritual objects, or natural features (Finnegan, 2012). In the Mising case, the material cosmos takes up this role. The night sky is not only a natural fact but a repository of moral fables; each appearance of the Moon or each storm invites a retelling or at least a recollection of the story attached to it.

## Continuing Relevance in Contemporary Identity

Many Misings today are literate, urbanised, and shaped by modern schooling and world religions, yet this does not mean that Donyi Polo is obsolete. References to Sun and Moon remain audible in songs, blessings, wedding speeches, harvest rituals, and everyday admonitions, especially among elders (Taid, 2016; Religious Belief and Practice of Mising Community of Assam, 2019). Stories about Abotani, the stained Moon, and the thunder–lightning chase are still told to children during festivals, even when not taken literally, and their moral implications are remembered.

Smith argues that decolonisation involves recentering Indigenous epistemologies and reclaiming oral knowledge as legitimate (Smith, 1999). Mising folklore participates in this project: by being read as philosophy rather than superstition, it offers a source of dignity and identity that does not depend on external validation (Pegu, 2016; "Mising Folklore: The Matrix of the Mising Society and Culture," 2021). In this sense, Donyi Polo tales are not relics but living tools for thinking about land, kinship, and conduct.

## Why Solar–Lunar Mythology Matters

Academic work on Indigenous astronomy has often focused on observational

skill—how communities track seasons, orient themselves, or predict floods—but Mising solar–lunar mythology shows that the sky also carries questions of justice, reciprocity, and identity (Berkes, 2008). Donyi and Polo are not merely clocks; they have consciences. This cosmology connects farming, family honour, truthfulness, ecological care, migration history, and collective memory in a single narrative field (Taid, 2016; "Environmental and Ethical Issues in Mising Folklore," 2016). The Donyi Polo system demonstrates that Indigenous cosmology can function as a sophisticated moral philosophy articulated in story form. It offers a vision of how to live, share land, behave toward others, and remember origins without relying on written scripture or centralised institutions (Eliade, 1963; Lévi-Strauss, 1978; Smith, 1999). Far from being a "primitive religion," it is a subtle ethical imagination grounded in kinship, gratitude, and memory.

## Conclusion

The Mising folktales on Donyi Polo present an advanced cosmology in which the Sun and Moon are ancestral beings who continue to instruct moral behaviour, ecological care, and social structure (Taid, 2016). Through narratives of Abotani's first cultivation, the stain on the Moon, the endless pursuit of lightning and thunder, and the ritual summoning of lost souls, listeners learn about truth, obligation, taboo, reciprocity with nonhuman beings, and gratitude to cosmic parents (Berkes, 2008; Malinowski, 1926). These tales encode philosophy in a form suited to an oral culture: memorable, symbolic, and anchored in the visible world.

The Donyi Polo complex is not a tightly organised cult with temples and dogma; it is a moral relationship between humans and the cosmos, in which Donyi and Polo act as relatives who bequeathed cultivation, inculcated ethics, and still keep watch over vows (Misra, 2023). Transgressions are woven into nature itself—seen in the Moon's mark, heard in storms, and recalled in ritual speech—so that no one grows up without encountering embodied lessons about deceit, desire, and violence (Eliade, 1963; Finnegan, 2012). Scholars of myth and Indigenous studies have argued that myth is neither irrational nor trivial but a serious intellectual practice; the Mising case confirms this by offering a world of law without scripture, agriculture without caste hierarchy, spirituality without terror, and identity without subordination (Lévi-Strauss, 1978; Malinowski, 1926; Smith, 1999).

In a period when Indigenous lifeworlds are under pressure from modernization, the Donyi Polo system remains relevant: Mising people still invoke Sun and Moon in weddings, quarrels, blessings, and mourning, treating the sky as an archive of memory and a reminder that conduct is always in ancestral sight (Taid, 2016; Religious Belief and Practice of Mising Community of Assam, 2019). As long as these tales are told, the ethical and ecological understandings they contain persist. Solar–lunar mythology in Mising tradition is therefore not a fossil of the past but a living intellectual tradition, one of the most subtle ethical imaginations in the oral cultures of Northeast India.

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