

TOPIC: FUNERAL

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SERUA, M 56yrs.

FUNERAL

In the olden days when a person dies the news of this death is firstly taken to all his relatives. Some people would be chosen to perform the duty of carrying out the message.

If the person - whose duty is to carry out the message will enter a house of the dead man's relative, he would sit down on the floor and clap his hands before relaying the messages. In relaying the message, the messenger would do so in a very traditional and formal manner.

When the man dies, a yaqona ceremony is presented to the dead man's relatives which is called the VUGONA in requesting them to dig for this dead man's grave. The relationship yugona comes from the dead man's mother's side. It may be the mother's brothers and other close relatives to the dead man's mother.

In the olden days, grave is not given to anybody to dig it. It is especially the duty of the dead man's mother's side to dig the grave. This is a traditional duty.

After the dead man's mother's side had completed digging the grave, they would return to the ceremony place, in which a ceremony which is termed as MATANILOKOLO is presented to them by the family of the dead man's, especially from the father's side.

In this ceremony, the father's relatives would present the tabua,

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mats, drums of kerosine and also make a yaqona drinking ceremony for them. This ceremony is a sign of thanks giving to the mother's relatives of the dead man's father. The thanks giving for their task in digging the grave.

The mother's relatives is very important in any funerak ceremony because they are the only ones permitted to touch the body of the dead. The mother's relatives would clothe the body and wrapped it up nicely. They are the only ones to carry the body to the church and then to the grave yard.

After the body had taken to the church, it would be brought outside and the people would have their last respect to the dead.

The people who would be carrying the dead body would stand straight with the dead man on their shoulders. The bearers would stand still while all the relatives of the dead man would come and go underneath the dead man, which is held high by the bearers. The relatives would do this about three or four times. This is to show their last farewell to the dead man before he is going to leave them for good.

After the relatives showing their last farewell, the body is then taken to the grave yard to be buried. At the grave a last service is held for the dead man. After the service, the close relatives of the dead, especially from the father's side would present a tabua to the bearers and the mother's relatives in requesting them to lower the dead into the grave and this to bury the dead. This presentation of the tabua is termed as VAKASOBU or the lowering.

It is only after the receiving of the tabua from the mother's side, then only the dead is lowered into the grave. After that the mother's side would bury the dead. Nobody else, beside them, would

take part in the burying of the grave.

After the funeral, all the people would return to the ceremony place where the close relatives of the dead would announce that the ceremony of BURUA (food sharing) would be held at a certain day. In doing this, the close relative would present a yaqona drinking ceremony and hence announce a certain day. In doing this, the close relative would present a yaqona ceremony and hence announce about the BURUA ceremony. This ceremony is held two or three nights after the burial. In this ceremony, the close relatives would provide a big feast - in which to be shared - among the people and close relatives of the dead who had turned up during the funeral ceremony.

Another ceremony in which a big feast is prepared during a funeral ceremony is called the BOGIDRAU or the 100th night. In this ceremony both sides of the dead would participate. In this ceremony or the presentation of this ceremony, the very close relatives would cut and collect some gasau or reeds. They would be taking these reeds to the vasu or relatives from the mother's side of the dead man. The reed is taken and presented to a household of the mother's side at the same time the reed presenter would announce to the household that they should provide a pig for the bogidrau ceremony. This is somewhat like an order but it is received respectfully from the other party. The reed is taken and presented to them. The reed presenter would go to another household, present a reed and ask the household to provide mats for the ceremony. He would go on presenting reeds with different duties laid out to the relatives from the mother's side. By doing this, the ceremony of the bogidrau or 100th night is somewhat like catered by the vasu or relative from the mother's side.

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On the 100th night, all relatives would bring forth their mats, food,

materials pr tabua as was requested by the reed presenter during the VITISINA. All these are brought to the funeral place. Once everything are brought forth, it is then shared among them all the I YAU (materials, tabua and everything) is divided into three parts.

The first part in which the yau or riches is divided into is for the dead's mother and her relatives. The second part is for the father's side, especially where his mother comes from. The third part in which the yau is divided into is for the grandfather, especially from where his mother comes from. This third part would get the best yau or riches. This section from the grandfather's side is called the VUNIYAKA or yaka tree. All the riches which have been collected for the bogidrau or 100th night ceremony would be shared among the three category of people as mentioned anove.

During this ceremony the very close relatives of the dead would spread a very nice pretty looking mat on the ceremony place and placed a big tabua on top of it. This simply have it's own meaning. This signify the breathe 'cegu' of the man who had died. In this presentation of the tabua the very close relative would inform the vasu (mother's side) that they are returning the cegu then where it really originated from. This would have to be a very big tabua.

I forgot to tell you that when a person dies, the close relatives would placed a tabua under the bed of the dead man. This tabua is known as to be the dead man's kali or pillow. This particular tabua is taken from the dead man's bedding shortly before going down to the grave to be buried. The tabua can only be taken by any one of the vasu or relative from the mother's side.

That is how funeral ceremony is done by the elders of this place.

- Thank you, I wish to ask some few questions regarding our topic of conversation. I wish if you could tell me, if a chief dies could you tell me who will carry the message of his death and to whom the message would be carried first to and would there ~~be~~ something to be taken with as the message is taken across.....

In traditional custom of this place, no tabua or yaqona is presented in the carrying out of the message. The messenger would just enter into the house, sit down next to the door, clapped his hands and then relay the message. The message is often taken to the mata or ambassador of the different places in the area of Serua. For instance the mata or ambassador of Korolevu. In announcing the death of the chief, the messenger would not tell the name of the chief, instead he would name a hard strong woody tree mentioning it that it has fall. Hearing this, the listener would at once know what the message had said.

- Could you tell me what will happen after the message has been told? After the message had been told to the relatives, they would at once prepare for the ceremony. The relatives would prepare mats, food which is dalo, yaqna, yams, or pigs in to help the relatives in the running of the ceremony.

- I heard that in the funeral ceremony, the BATI (traditional guards) played a vital role, such as the preparation of the grave. Is this so in Korovisilou?

If a chief dies in this place, the bati (guardsmen) would take control of such a task, but if any commander dies, the VUGONA or mother's brothers would be responsible in the preparation of the grave.

- I wish if you could tell me what the bati (guardsmen) will do in the preparation of the grave?

In our place over here, if a chief dies, the bati would take watch or guard at the grave of the chief for at least 10 nights. They would be there watching the grave and drinking all day and all night until the tenth night.

- You mentioned that they would be taking little food during their watching. I heard that people watching the chief's grave would be forbidden to touch their food or even touch their cigarette. Is this true over here?

In this place of ours, the bati or guardsmen would mix their own yaqona and drink around the grave yard. People would bring food to them and they are allowed to touch their food. But all the time they would remain silent to show their respect for the death of their chief.

- Could you tell me the difference between the funeral ceremony of a chief and a ceremony of a commoner?

If a chief dies in this place, there would be no crying. No one is allowed to weep and raise his or her voice. The davui or conch shell will continually be blown and this would go for nights and days. The bati or guardsmen would be responsible for this blowing of the conch shell. They would be replacing one after the other but the sounding of the conch shell would continue.

- I wish if you could explain to me what materials or presents are given to the Bati or guardsmen by the close relatives after the funeral ceremony.....

It would be a big presentation of gifts. Food for would also be provided for them by the close relatives. But if the chief died, the people of the village of the whole village would provide gifts and food for the bati or guardsman. In the sharing of the materials

and food, from the big and best is given to the bati.

- Speaking about the funeral, is there any tabu to be observed?

In any funeral ceremony in this area, the close relatives - especially women - of the dead man would come and stayed inside the funeral or ceremony house for ten whole nights. During this ten nights the women would remain inside the house doing nothing. ~~The~~ close relatives of the dead would cater from the women. These women ~~would~~ would be forbidden to go outside aimlessly or to do any work. They would be forbidden from having any bath until the tenth night. All the time, they would remain sleep. After the tenth night, there would be a yaqona ceremony presented to them. Materials or gifts would be presented to them also. This ceremony is called the DOLA NI KATUBA or the opening of the door ceremony. The process in which the women remain inside the house is called the BIKABIKA. After the tenth night, they are free to go outside, and also free to have their bath. There is a special food presentation which is called the SILIWAI. This is especially for the vathing for the women. The other food is for the tenth night ceremony.

- I wish if you could tell me about the good or feast prepared on the tenth night, how it is prepared and presented?

On the tenth night, the vugona or the mother's brothers would go to the grave and reconstruct the grave by nicely placing the stones around the grave. This is called the TUVA VATU. The food is prepared include pigs cows and dalo cooked in the lovo. Also on that daytoo, as I have mentioned before the feast of Siliwai would also be presented.

- You mentioned about the ceremony on the 10th night. Could you tell me more about this ceremony and how it is prepared?

Well, during the 100th night all the VASU (mother's side) would come with their gifts and presents of food and including their sticks or reeds as I have mentioned already before. All the food and gifts would be collected and piled into a very big heap. This very close relatives (father's side) of the dead would come and divide the big heap to be shared among both relatives. As I have mentioned before the first share would go to the mother's side of the dead. The second share would go to the father's side. This especially from his mother's side. The third share for the grandfather is called the VUNI YAKA (yaka tree). The share consists of Fijian materials including the food.

- Is there anything else you would like to tell about the funeral ceremony?

For any funeral ceremony in this place the vugona (mother's side) after the tenth night ceremony would make a yaqona ceremony to honour the death of their vasu. On this yaqona ceremony they would promise to wear black clothing until the 100th night. The older men would grow their beard (unshaven) until the ceremony for the 100th night.

- You mentioned about the tabu of the ~~sweeping~~weeping in the funeral ceremony of a chief. Could you tell me as to why the conch shell is blown and the lali is beaten in the death of a chief.

The weeping of the people does not sound respectable. So when the conch shell is blown continuously and the lali is beaten, it signifies the sorrow of the whole people in the village and also it sounds respectable.

- You mentioned about the bati whose duty is to sound the conch.

Can any one else be there to blow the councg?

No, Only the bati is allowed to touch the shell and blow the councg.

No body else is allowed to do that.

- You told me that the ~~digging~~^{digging} of the grave is done by the bati. Could you tell me if the bati return to the village after completing the grave or would they remain at the grave yard until the body of the chief is brought to the grave to be buried?

After the digging of the grave, the bati would remain at the grave yard waiting ~~for the~~ for the arrival of the chief's body. It is only after the burial of the body then shall they return to the village.

But if a commoner dies, the grave digger could just cover the completed grave by leaves and go to the village. Until they say that this is the hour in which the body is taken to the grave.

- I wish if you could tell me what tools were the bati in the early days were using in the process of grave digging?

In the olden days, the ancestors were using stone axes for the digging of grave. They use their hands in the shovelling of the earth. There was no spades in those days.

- I wish if you could tell me more about the chief's grave. Is it forbidden for anyone to go there or anything of that sort. I wish if you could tell me more about that?

In this place, no one is allowed to walk to the grave of the chief. Only the bati could do that. If the grave yard of the chief needs cleaning, only the bati are allowed to go and clean it up. No one else. It's tabu. If the bati (guardsmen) are going to clean up the chief's grave, the close relatives of the chief would prepare a feast for them after the cleaning. The cleaning of the chief's

grave is done once a year and it is often done near Christmans. Often the cleaning is done, one or two weeks before we have our Christmas.

- Could you tell me what is happening during the time the chief died and the time the body is taken to be buried?

In the olden days if a chief dies, the body is in the house all the time for about fifteen days. The reason for that is that, every relatives of his could get the message of his death and also give them time to come and to attend the funeral ceremony. This fifteen days would make sure that all relatives are going to be present for the funeral. For 15 days nights, the corpse would remain in the house.

- You mentioned about the keeping of the dead body inside the house for fifteen days. No doubt the smell would be irritating and also there water would be flowing from the body. I wish if you could tell what the elders would do in case of this, would there be a special leaves for this or.....

There is a special oil to be annointed to the chief's body when he dies. This oil would preserve the body. The body would not smell or smell of any water to come from the body. The body would not smell very badly. The oil would keep the body in good shape up until the 15th night or day.

There is a leave which is called the TOTO which is mixed with another leave (more and name I have forgotten) and thouroughly mix with oil. These leaves are made into oil which is then annointed into the body'of the chief.

- Thank you very much Sailosi. I wish to thank you for relating me all these things which used to happen in the olden days.

THANK YOU VERY MUCH.

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