

314

TOPIC: FUNERAL

Investigator: Miliana R.

INTERVIEWED: Timoci Mokuvakaca.....73yrs, Tavuki, Kadavu.

SUBJECT: THE DEATH OF A HIGH CHIEF IN TAVUKI

I will only tell you of what the people and in our village is expected to do when a chief dies and it's true Fijian customs and tradition that is observed. It is something precious and dearly when you know that some village or places still observe everything about their culture in their homes, for it is these things that we are greatly known of, our respect and honour for the members of our community and to our chiefs. When it is known that a chief anyone along that line is getting weak, the older men and other villagers will gather and drink YAQONA together so that they can watch over their chief or someone like him. There will be complete silence while the chief is resting. His family and his close relatives will prepare everything they need and have the things ready in case something happens.

When a chief dies, the MATA NI VANUA and his BATI will do their duty. The MATA NI VANUA will stand by and he is the one who will inform the chief's distant relatives and any other person who have the right to know. He will take a SEVUSEVU with them to present before them and then he will tell them of the

bad news. The BATI will see to the place where his body will be laid to rest. When a chief die, no one is allowed to cry but the DAVUI will be blown to signify the cry of the people and their mourning. It will be blown day and night, and their are people who helps in blowing it. It will be stopped after his body has been buried. The blowing of the DAVUI is a very hard task but since its our culture we have to do it no matter how hard the job is. If the sound of the DAVUI is not heard for sometimes, those people responsible for it will be punished or ORE. ORE is the punishment for lack of respect to a chief or infringement of native custom. The blowing of the trumpet shell is done by the MATA which signifies that they are representing their village and leading the people in the mourning for their chief. The BATI will be dressed in Fijian traditional costumes with their I WAIU or war club over their shoulders. They will surround and watch the place where the chief is lying awaiting burial. They will lead and give orders to all that is to be done where the funeral assembly is held. No one is allowed to laugh out loud or to yell from anywhere. If by any chance, someone disobeys the BATI'S orders and yells or shouts, that person can be put to death by the BATI people and no one can say anything about it. The BATI will also take the SAU and place it inside the house where the chief is lying. The SAU is a long piece of MASI that is placed inside the house, it marks the place where the women will sit. Not everyone is allowed to sit in there but the ladies are chosen to go in. The rest of the ladies

will help the others in the kitchen, anywhere where help is needed. When the women are inside, and the chief's body is also in the house, no one is allowed to talk or whisper in there. The women will only bow their head and remain silent throughout. This is a very sacred thing because if anyone disobeys the BATI that person can die or something unpleasant could happen to him.

This is happening because in the olden days, our ancestors really take these things seriously and they do their job devotedly. So, its MANA or power of something to happen, still lives with us today.

The death of a chief is one that needs total respect and honour if the culture is observed. The people of Tavuki will be mourning and taking care of everything when their chief dies.

The TABUA will be used, mats of all kinds and sizes, the Fijian GATU is also taken out either to be presented or used as clothes. All these Fijian items and things will be taken out by the women of the village when a chief dies. The men will prepare the food for the IOVO like the taro, yams, any amount will be dug up. If the dead chief's body is kept for three days and the three days are over, some people will go out to the reef to get some corals and it is scattered inside the house where the body is laid. Everything that is done either to the chief's body or anything connected to the chief's death will be the ~~BATI'S~~ order and command. The BATI will

set a date that the chief will be buried on and it could be one week after his death. After that, the Bete will go to see those people responsible for the digging of the chief's grave. The digging of the grave will be made and some from the BATI will help in it but they are not allowed to touch their food when they sit down to eat. They will be given food to eat by someone else. This also applies to smoking. If they want to smoke, someone will hold the reed, a hole on the side that house the cigarette and the reed is given to their mouth. This is because of the respect and honour they are paying for the last time for their chief. When the digging is still progressing, all the diggers are forbidden to go back to the village to sleep there or do anything beside it. They will stay near the grave and dig it until the burial of their chief is over. It is strictly forbidden to anyone of them to leave the grave-yard until everything is done. They believe if anyone leaves the grave-yard before the chief is buried, it shows that they haven't got any respect for the dead chief. The burial day arrives and the blown of the DAVUI can still be heard. Four of the BATI will get ready, they will dress in traditionally, in true Fijian custom. These four men will carry the chief's body that is nicely wrapped up in mats and tapa or GATU. There weren't any coffin in the olden days but the bodies are wrapped up. The mats and a bundle of it is also prepared. These mats will be buried with the body. When the body is taken for burial, the MATA will keep on

blowing the DAVUI until the body is put down beside the grave. There will be complete silence after that. During this time, all the ladies and men will bow their heads to pay their last respect to their chiefs. Children are not allowed to go to the chiefs burial grounds or the SAU TABU. Also, the villagers are not allowed to set foot there since the place is sacred and it shows the chief's SAU. If anyone goes there uninvited or on their own free will, something terrible can happen to him. The SAU of all chiefs is something that's not to be neglected or taken lightly of. When the body is lowered into the ground, a BATI will go down inside to place the mats nicely again and to make sure that the body is correctly placed, not one-sided.

The chief's relatives bring mats and other gifts to the funeral. These things are called the I REGUREGU. These gifts brought to the house of a deceased person shows that they want to come together again and pay their last respect to their relative or friend who has now been called to rest. When the funeral gathering is still going on, the relatives will be expected to be where they should be. After the burial, all the people will return home and the chief's close relatives will present a TABUA or Whale's tooth to those who came to the REGUREGU asking them if they could stay until the four nights are over. During those four days and nights, the men and ladies who are very close to the chief will stay and mourn for their chief's death and reflect over the chief's

days and his ruling. They will remain until four nights. During those days and nights, the people will pass the time drinking YAQONA. After the fourth night, a MAGITI is prepared and everything else beside it is done. This MAGITI will be given to those who stayed inside the house where the chief's body was laid to await its burial. This MAGITI is called the BURUA. The BURUA is a means of saying THANK YOU to the people for their coming. After the BURUA is shared out, the people will return to their individual homes. On the fourth night, the chief's close relatives and family may begin their TABU. They won't be allowed to smoke, drink yaqona or do anything else while they stay in the dead person's house. After everyone has left, the relatives staying behind will stay at the chief's house. They will stay there until ten nights and this is called TONITONI. When the nights is over, a MAGITI will be prepared and those who stayed behind will make use of it. After ten nights, they will again wait for the 100th's night. For those who stayed behind they will try to get to know one another, their identity and their YAVUSA'S. On the 100th night, the relatives, friends and the family will meet again where they will present their clothes to the VASU. When they take off their Fijian clothes, it will be accompanied by gifts like mats, tabua, gatu, etc. This is known as the VAKATARAI SUIU. At this time, their TABU is over and they are allowed to break their TABU. They will collect all their gifts like the GATU, the KUMI or Tongan

cloth, the MASI, the mats, whales tooth and they will take these things to the UIU NI MATE and they are the VASU. When these gifts are presented to their relatives, then they will be able to free themselves from their TABU. For some women who are closely related to the dead person, they will continue wearing their clothes showing respect to their lost relative and the ladies hair are also trimmed after four nights. But for the men, they will grow their beard. These only happen when a chief or noble men dies. After the VAKATARAISUIU everything is finished.

- Could you talk more about the BATI'S accomodation during the time they watch over the chief's body?

The BATI will stay in the chief's home boundary and will watch everything that's happening there. If anyone tries to enter without permission or makes a lot of noise inside, they will be severely punished by the BATI. The death of a chief means a lot to them and is considered sacred. They could use their war clubs on anyone who disobeys their words. The well-known of a chief and his honour is done by his BATI. Their words is followed by the villages and this shows the high position they own in a society.

- Could you talk more of what happens when the body awaits burial and when it is taken for burial?

The ladies will prepare the mats and other native matts that will be placed inside the cave and top of this, the body is laid. The grave could be three yards deep in case the body won't be able to fit in there. The mats and other gifts

will be taken to the grave where it is nicely arranged to cover the ground or grave. This is done inside the grave. It is only done by women.

- What is usually done on the fourth night?

On the fourth night or day, three cows are killed which is presented as the BURUA. After it is presented, then the people who came to the funeral will then be able to go back to their homes. For close relatives in that village, they will remain to look after the others who stay behind. After everything is done, then the occasion is over. If the villagers did their best for their chief, the chief's relatives will also do their best for them.

- Is there any TABOO our ancestors used to observe?

There is to be complete silence in the village. If say, an animal or dog walks freely around the village, it can be put to death. The DAVUI will be the only sound heard and it will be finished after the chief has been buried at the SAU TABU or grave-yard for chiefs.

- Would you like to say more on this subject?

I would like to advice you, young people of today, that our culture is disappearing slowly and some don't take our culture seriously.

The result is that, trouble arises and someone can really get hurt after that. So take care of your culture.

THANK YOU.