

**The Sarawak Museum Journal****Vol. XXXIV No. 55****December 1985****ISSN: 0375-3050****E-ISSN: 3036-0188**

Citation: Hashim bin Awang A. R. (1985). Supernatural Elements in the Traditional Melanau Concepts of Illness Causations: A Preliminary Observation. The Sarawak Museum Journal, XXXIV (55): 47-52

SUPERNATURAL ELEMENTS IN THE TRADITIONAL MELANAU CONCEPTS OF ILLNESS CAUSATIONS: A PRELIMINARY OBSERVATION**Hashim bin Awang A.R.**

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To the Melanau illness is associated with a situation that indicates pain or discomfort and also suffering. To be ill means to be in pain, discomfort, and to suffer. The suffering is three-fold, namely:

(i) to suffer means to be passive. A sick person is cut off from the active life to the extent that he is unable to obtain his own food. He is helpless and is at the mercy, or care of other person or persons. The rhythm of his active life has been disturbed.

(ii) suffering is not only limited to the patient, but also to the spouses as illness is hardship. This is the time when they must give special attention, especially serious illness, to the patient to ensure that he does not feel alone or neglected.

(iii) besides pain, discomfort and suffering, the patient is also subjected to fear, that is, fear of death. Death is a very critical point of the life-cycle. Death will lead the sickman to an unknown world. As such it further creates anxiety which would be detrimental to the sick man, his family and spouses.

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- (iii) besides pain, discomfort and suffering, the patient is also subjected to fear, that is, fear of death. Death is a very critical point of the life-cycle. Death will lead the sickman to an unknown world. As such it further creates anxiety which would be detrimental to the sick man, his family and spouses.

Under such circumstances they need an explanation to lessen the distress felt by the family or spouse and the sick man. There are two forms of explanation that are offered by the Melanaus. There are illnesses that are due to the influence of natural and supernatural forces (Hashim, 1980). Illness may be due to 'soul-loss', breach of taboo, spirit possession or object intrusion (Clement 1932). Ultimately and intimately most illnesses are related in some ways to evil spirits. Based on their world-view and beliefs about illness, illness may be grouped into two:— magical and religious. Magical illness is believed to be due to magical (human) manipulation of forces, while the other type is the illness due to supernatural forces, such as God.

Most Melanaus believe that spirits are responsible for almost all types of illness. Besides that all events of their lives have some connection with supernatural agency of spirits. To them the spirits are quite distinct from souls of the dead. The souls of the dead are not malevolent and they roam harmlessly in the neighbourhoods of their former homes.