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## The Socio-economic life of the Nyishis' of Arunachal Pradesh

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### Abstract

*Nyishi is the single largest tribe of Arunachal Pradesh spreading in six districts namely Papumpare, Lower Subansiri, East Kameng, Kurung Kumey, Kra Daadi and Upper Subansiri district. Traditionally socio-economic status of the Nyishis' is determined by the numbers of mithun (*Bos frontalis*) and ornaments possessed. Social and religious practices of the Nyishi were unorganised and unwritten earlier. On other hand many social evil practises like Tapiaparnam, Sacrifice to evil spirit, child marriage, polygamy, clan-war, revenge system, fine system etc were prevalent. Social system of the Nyishis include living pattern, marriage system, judiciary system, food habits, religious life or faith and belief, dress and ornaments and dressing pattern, discipline or behaviour of people etc. And economic life of the Nyishis rely on agriculture, forest, river resources, fish, meat and vegetable vendor, livestock, barter system, hunting and fishing, arts & crafts and handloom etc. And there is no regulatory framework to monitor the price fixation in the commercial or business activities.*

**Key words:** - *Barter system, child marriage, revenge system, river resource, hunting and fishing, craft and handloom.*

### Introduction:-

Arunachal Pradesh is situated in North-Eastern part of India where 26 major tribes are found having their own socio-economic life and status. Some of the major tribes are Tagin, Galo, Adi, Apatani, Nyishi, Monpa, Mishmi, Nocte, Tangsa, Wancho etc. The Nyishi is the single largest tribe of Arunachal Pradesh dwelling in five districts namely Papumpare, Lower Subansiri, East Kameng, Kurung Kumey, Kraa Dadi and Upper Subansiri district. Traditionally socio-economic status of the Nyishis are determined by the amount of mithuns (*Bos frontalis*), ornaments and other valuable wealth like movable and immovable properties. It is observed that social system of the Nyishi was not in organised manner earlier and even today the Nyishi society norms, worship, commercial activities, facts and beliefs are not in written form. In this context many research scholars are putting huge efforts to convert them into written form. social system of the Nyishi includes living pattern, marriage system, judiciary system, food habits, religious life, facts and beliefs, dressess and ornaments and manner of dressing, discipline or behaviour of people etc besides many social evil practises earlier in society like Tapiaparnam, sacrifice to evil spirit, child marriage, polygamy, clanwar, revenge system, fine system etc but today due to impacts of modernisation and introduction of formal and non-formal education

system in Arunachal Pradesh some social evil practices within the Nyishis community are minimising or reducing day by day.

Every community possesses natural and human resources in varying proportions and economic life of the Nyishis relies on agricultural economy, forest economy, river resource, vegetable vendor, livestock, barter system economy, hunting and fishing, arts, crafts and handloom etc. Economically Nyishis are self sufficient through agricultural production and other economic activities.

### **Social life of the Nyishis:-**

#### **Family:**

The family is only social institution that changes while transforming man from biological to social being. It is the first social institution to shape an individual to adjust himself or herself to the society. Monogamy and polygamy practices are prevalent in the Nyishi society. A man and his wife or wives, married son and their children, unmarried son and daughters form a family. In facts Nyishi houses are built large enough to accommodate on an average ten to fifteen family members and each family manages own ways of economic unit to sustain their family and has own hearth and granary. Senior most or eldest son of the family get preference to keep front or entrance hearth in Nyishi dialect "Front hearth" is known as Bootu Emeey. Bootu means a front and Emeey means a Hearth. All the members of the family respect him and he decides major decision of the affair of concern family; decision like marriage and obedience to elders is the part of discipline for Nyishis children. So, elders get respect and honour in Nyishi society.

#### **Religious life:-**

The Nyishis' believe in sun and moon gods called as Donyi Polo. Nyishi worship SUN and MOON and name of the religion of Nyishis' is DONYI POLO. The place of worship is known as NYEDAR NAMLO. Religious beliefs and worship of Nyishi was not in organised form and consequently the majority of Nyishis have been converting into other religion such as Christian and Muslim.

But today Nyishis has begun to establish its own religion in organised and systematic manner. Earlier there was no NYEDAR NAMLO, only people remember all mighty sun and moon during unpleasant time. There was no systematic and proper procedure of worship and place of worship like other religions; church for Christians and masjid for Muslim. The people of Doimukh had started a religious movement for unification of worship of Nyishis and created a divine place called NYEDAR NAMLO to worship Donyi-Polo. The believers of Donyi-Polo attend NYEDAR NAMLO every Sunday to offer prayers to almighty DONYI POLO and a priest plays major role during prayer time and after completion of prayer, the priest sprinkle spiritual water to everyone in NYEDAR NAMLO to purify the spirit of the believers and to heal sick person. In Nyishi dialect Priest is known as NYUB.

In Nyishi especially those days when hospital facilities were not available, a priest per-

form traditional rites to treat ill person. Even major health problems were cured in those days through rites. In Nyishi, this process of curing is known as UYE BENAM.

UYE means evil spirit that cause sickness and diseases. Nyishi sacrifices some valuable things like mithuns, goats, pigs, hens, dogs, etc to UYE in order to treat sick person and priest plays a role of mediator between UYE and sick person. This system is also one major causes of conversion of many Nyishi into Christian religion because only a rich class of Nyishi can perform UYE Panem means sacrifice to the UYE.

### **Marriage System: -**

In Nyishi marriage system parent decides and arrange marriage for both boys and girls with the people of equal status in the society. This is called arrange marriage. Love marriage also exists in Nyishi society. In love marriage girls and boys decide their marriage themselves by considering choice and preferences.

Matrimonial alliances were a means to gather allies to defend against attack from enemies in earlier days. In customary law of Nyishi, a man is allowed to marry more than one wife. A man can marry any woman but in customary law special provision is made to marry his maternal uncle's daughters, sister in-law and his mother's sister which is very popular practices as such marriages secure an individual more love and affection and it is believed that wives out of such marriages rather look after the properties well in comparison to the other women.

An ideal marriage in Nyishi tribe is one that is arranged through negotiation between families of grooms and the brides or men of their representatives like eldest men of family members or eldest of village or gaon bura of the concern village. Adolescence age is the best age of marriage as Nyishis' believe in earlier days. However marriages in Nyishi community often depend on economic factors that's why only son of rich family could marry early and rich men could marry more than one wife.

Before the starts of a marriage process, the parent of the both bride and bridegroom go for omen reading separately. In Nyishi, omen reading is known as PUCHU KOKANAM or PEEUP CHEKANAM. In omen reading, chicken or eggs are used. PUCHU means chicken and PEEUP means eggs and KOKANAM and CHEKANAM means a process. The priest or expert elders of the village read the omen. If omen result is favourable then they send marriage proposal to the bridegroom and negotiation of marriage start. Omen reading was also done during the wives pregnancies. This is called testing of pregnant woman whether baby is a girl or boy. If omen result is girl they start marriage negotiation.

After negotiation is completed, they starts a marriage procession. In Nyishi, marriage procession is known as NYEDA. During Nyeda, bridegroom carries numbers of mithuns ( Seeb), pigs ( Ere), dember( Roasted meat), knives (Oyo), cloth ( Paree Ajj), fermented millets (Opo) along with performance of *buyya* and *edhed* (Priest chanting during marriage procession) and bride family reciprocates and gives a valuable local ornaments to the bridegroom, local ornament such as *Tassang* or *tassee* (beads), tallu or taal ( Plate made of silver), dupin, Kooj, Huhi etc.

### **Social evil practices in marriage system**

- 1) **Tapia Parnam:** - Tapia Parnam is a forceful marriage system practised earlier in Nyishi tribe of Arunachal Pradesh. Suppose, if a woman is unwilling to marry a particular man, they used to look her up in wooden stock called Tapia and forcibly have sex with her and she is released only after she gets pregnant. In such condition girls were left no option in her life and compelled to marry with him. Tapia was one of the biggest social problems during olden days in Nyishi society.

### **The Causes of Tapia Parnam occurred or arise from basically three reasons**

1. The first reason, when girl's father takes loan (loan may in the form of cash or kind) from other man, and if he is unable to return the loan on time, he allows to solemn the marriage of his daughter to the loaner.
2. The second reason, when girl is force to marriage with old man
3. The third reason, when they captive girl during clan or other war.

### **2) Polygamy:-**

It is the system in Nyishi community that a man socially accepted to marry more than one wife at a time. Many innocent girls have been trapped under this system because generally girls don't get freedom to decide their life partner. Even 40 years old man can marry a 20 years old girl under this system due to compulsion from family pressure. A decade ago polygamy was practiced in order to increase agricultural production and to protect themselves from the attack from enemies but today it became a fashion for elite class people.

### **3) Child Marriage:-**

Girls and boys are forced to marry in teenage by family and teenage girls are forced to marry a 40 years or above aged man are the perfect explanation for child marriage practising in Nyishi community. This is one of the worst social evil practiced by Nyishi tribe in Arunachal Pradesh. There was high rate of child marriage in decades ago but due to impacts of education and modernisation, such evil practices have been minimised day by day.

### **Dress and ornaments**

The Nyishi dress is broadly categorised into two types i.e. 1) the dress of well-to-do family including the priest and 2) the dress of the common people and there is a manner and procedure of wearing dress for both men and women in Nyishi society.

### **The Nyishis' Men dress and ornaments**

Dress including Bopia (wear at head), Hegin or gingpung (underpants), Paree Ajj (wear to cover body from chest to abdomen portion), leehi (wear in leg), ruprubing (wear by both men and women at ear made up of silver), and Nyishi men smoke a local tobacco product with selee made up by metal or cane pipe, Lorum (made up of cane and wear just below the knee), Tama genam (it is also made up of cane which is worn at waist), lagge ( it is also made up of cane which is worn in left hand), Nara ( made up of cane which is worn at back to carry meat

and other goods), Chukh ( made up of animals skin and which is worn in left side used to carry small goods) and Oyo (means a knife which is carried on left side used to clear jungle, domestic related work and defence purpose), Tasse or Tassang ( men beads carry at neck) etc.

### **The Nyishi women dress and ornaments**

Nyishi women dresses include Dumping (made up of cane and metal like cup which is worn at head), Tasse or Tassang (local women beads which is worn on neck and reach up to breast), Rubing or rubin (ear ring of Nyishi women).

The Nyishi ornament can be categorised into wearing and non-wearing ornaments. Such categorisation can be made on the uses of the ornaments among Nyishi. The social and economic status of Nyishis are determined on the possession of ornaments. Man who possesses large amount of Nyishi ornaments is treated as rich man of the society and enjoys a good status in the society.

The wearing ornament of Nyishi includes- Tassang or tasse (beads), Huhi (bracelets), Kozi (Bangles), munye (small beads), Dumping or dumpin, Juhee or junghang (horn shape), Rubing (ear-ring) etc. These ornaments are mostly worn by women folk.

The non- wearing ornaments of Nyishi includes- Taal or Tallu (Metal plate), belle or Bellang (small metal plate), mazi or majji (metal like bell). The cost of these items are costlier in comparisons to wearing ornaments. For instance, in Nyishi customary law one mazi is equal to 10 or 20 Mithuns. Price of one mithun is approximately Rs. 35000/- (thirty five thousand) and cost of mazi will be Rs. 35000 multiplied by 20 is equal to 7 lakh (source: discussion with village elders and price was fixed by traditionally which is subject to change from time to time).

### **Food habits of Nyishi**

Rice is the stable food of the Nyishi community of Arunachal Pradesh. Maximum Nyishi settled in countryside depends agricultural and forest products like Tasshi, Yeer oo, Potto oo, hoka oo, Hoor oo, Honyir oo (oo means vegetable in Nyishi dialect). Agricultural products like rice, maize, millets, yam, cucumber, pumpkin, papaya, banana etc and they have their own preferences and choices of food.

Traditionally Nyishi preferred boiled process of cooking food and vegetables. Food items consist of cooked rice, meat, boiled vegetable and OPO (local beer).

### ***The following are the process or methods of cooking food among the Nyishi:-***

#### **1) Boiled food method (HAISERNAM): -**

Boiled foods are most common and easy process of cooking food among the Nyishi tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. Along with boiled rice, fish, meat and vegetables are also boiled while adding local spices like ginger (takhi), bamboo shoots (Hehu or heyup), and black pepper for added taste and are eaten. This process is known as “HAISERNAM”

#### **2) Smoked food (RAMSENNOOM): -**

Smoked process of food in Nyishi dialect is known as “RAMSENNOOM”. Fresh meat and fish are not always available every day. Besides domesticated animals like hen (Poro in Nyishi dialect), Pigs (Ere in Nyishi dialect), Goats (Sebin in Nyishi dialect) etc, other source of getting or acquiring meat and fish is hunting and fishing. Hunting is known as “SORU RUNAM” or “NORO GANAM” in Nyishi dialect and fishing is known as “GUYEE MENNAM” Guyee means fish and Mennam means killing in Nyishi dialect of Arunachal Pradesh. It is quite impossible to kill animal every time and more over domesticated animals are not meant to be killed everyday. So when large amount of meat are gathered at a time through various means, the left over are smoked in order to retain the meat for future consumption.

### **3) Roasting food (BAALDENAM): -**

This is a process of food cooked for self consumption. In Nyishi this process is known as “BAALDENAM” which means drying fresh meat and fish above the burning fire with bamboo stick. Some wild roots and plants are also taken in the same process. The roasted items give pecuniary delicious and unique and such delicious items are very good with rice beer called OPO.

### **4) CHELLDENAM: -**

This is one of the traditional ways of cooking food items like fish and meat. In this process meat and fish are put on tender leaves and tightly packet and burn under the hot fire for some time. After some time it has to be taken out from fire and eaten. Such traditional process is known as CHELLDENAM in Nyishi dialect.

### **5) CHENDUFELDENAM: -**

This is also another process of cooking food. In this process, rice, meat and fish are put into bamboo and burn into fire till it is cooked and ready to be eaten. Such cooking process is known as “CHENDUFELDENAM” (In Nyishi dialect) Chendufeldenam process is done specially during picnic time and dry picnic with friends.

## **Health and Hygiene**

The Nyishis who are living in urban areas are conscious about health and hygiene and its importance but as we go to rural periphery the condition of health and hygiene is worst. The dwelling house are built over raised platform and each hearth has its own compartment called “CHERE” and all activities are centred on and around the hearth, they sit, sleep, gossip and entertain. Pigs, goats, hen, mithun, cow and other domesticated animals roam underneath the house. There is no proper system of toilet. Defecation is generally done in the nearby jungle of the house. Due to such practices, different varieties of flies, mosquitoes and other insects breed and subsequently became the root causes of several types of diseases. Drinking water are usually collected from nearby water or through “KAMCHO” and “SOOKUM”. It may cause several diseases because such water gets polluted.

## **Festival of Nyishis**

Nyishi people celebrate basically three festivals namely Nyokum Yullo, Boori Boot

Yullo and Longte Yullo. Nyokum Yullo is the main festival of Nyishi in Arunachal Pradesh. It is celebrated every year on 26th February. Nyokum is comprised of two words “Nyok” land and “Kum” means a gathering and Yullo means a celebration or festivity. This festival is closely related to entire process of harvesting and other cultivation related rituals. Main motive of Nyokum Yullo is to invite deities and asks for blessing so that there may be more and more production of food grain in the next harvesting year or seasons. So that famine, insects, animals and drought may not destroy crops. People seek blessing from god and goddess for not only crops but for also production of more and more domesticated animal and for the well being of human being and motto of celebration is also to get rid of various fatal diseases from the village. Nyokum Yullo celebrates irrespective of caste, colour, and religion etc. Meat, OPO, rice, etc are distributed and traditional games and sports are also played.

### **Economic life of the Nyishis**

Agriculture is the main occupation of Nyishis of Arunachal Pradesh. Due to low education level, less development and isolated from the rest of the world, the economical status of the Nyishi is under progressing economy. Extreme mountaneous and hilly terrains also pose a hindrance in economic growth or advancement of tribal people of Arunachal Pradesh. Traditional economy of Nyishi is predominant based on shifting agriculture, besides agriculture occupation, hunting, fishing and gathering are also economic activities of Nyishis of Arunachal Pradesh. Any economic production is for self-consumption, there is no surplus production for sell in the market earlier. But agriculture products like rice, maize, millets, oranges, pumpkins, sugarcanes, etc are available during winter.

Economic life of Nyishis is changing with the changing time and due to increase of education level, today Nyishis are employed in government under various capacities like clerk, teachers, doctors, lawyers, peon, engineering etc.

### **Agriculture:-**

The primary occupation of Nyishi is agriculture, hunting and fishing and gathering. Large numbers of Nyishi men and women are employed in agriculture sector in rural areas of Nyishi dominated districts of Papum pare, Kurung Kumey, East Kameng, Lower Subansiri and Upper Subansiri district of Arunachal Pradesh. Agriculture practises are basically of two types: - Jhum cultivation and wet rice cultivation. Jhum cultivation is known as “REEP RONGO” in Nyishi dialect and wet rice cultivation is known as “SOPHA RONGO or ESSH RONGO” ESSH means water. Jhum cultivation is a primitive style of cultivation, it is shifting cultivation and this cultivation is old method of agriculture. In jhum cultivation rice, millets, maize, ladies finger, cucumber, pumpkins, chilly, banana, ginger, bean, etc are produced. Wet rice cultivation is practised in lower region of Nyishi areas, lower part of Papum Pare, East Kameng, Upper Subansiri and Lower Subansiri. Rice is the main product of wet rice cultivation system and house where agriculture products are stored is known as “NOSHU” in nyishi dialect. Women play a vital role in agriculture sector. Women are responsible to maintain agricultural field since from beginning to time of crop gathering. Men play a little role in agriculture sector. Methods of jhum cultivation are unscientific and primitive method of cultivation in tribal people of Arunachal Pradesh.

Hunting and fishing is also a primary economic activity of the Nyishi. Surplus amount of meat and fish killed during hunting and fishing are sold in the market. Basically hunting and fishing is done for self consumption.

### **Barter System in Nyishi:-**

Barter system is practised in economic activities of Nyishis. Agriculture products and other necessary commodities are not available with each and every members of the village. In order to meet their requirement people just exchange commodities with commodities, this system is known as “JEKO JEPE” in Nyishi dialect. For instance, rice is in excess with Mr X but he doesn't have maize then he exchanges maize with rice from Mr. Y. Mithun is also a medium of exchange in barter system in Nyishi community of Arunachal Pradesh.

### **Forest resource:-**

Nyishi economy is also depended on forest resources. Especially timber business is one of the profitable businesses for tribal people of Arunachal Pradesh. In addition to agriculture products Nyishis get subsidiaries consumption items from the forest in form of vegetable like YEER OO, POOTO OO, DOSSI HOGYI OO, POPPU OO, HOR OO, HOKA OO, and HONY-ER OO etc. The surplus of these vegetables are sold in the market. A bundle of these vegetables are sold in the market at the rate of Rs 10 to 15 per bundle. Majority of people sustain their living by selling timber and cane at countryside and deal such business with plain people like Assam, West Bengal etc. Timber business is much demanded in capital complex of Arunachal Pradesh, since timber is essential material to carry out construction of building, roads and to build houses. People earn huge amount from timber business normally they earn Rs 80000 to 100000/ from per truck and expenditure involved to convert into finished material or product by using labour and material may be about Rs 10000 to 15000/ per truck ( labour charge and cost of material). So there is huge profit in timber business. Forest resources including timber, canes, bamboo, leaves, vegetables, are available. Forest resource is a natural gift to the mankind. In daily market at Itanagar, Naharlagun, Nirjuli. Nyishi women sell vegetables which are collected from the forest. It is found that bamboo business has too established in capital region of Arunachal Pradesh and per bamboo is sold at the rate Rs 100 to 200/- depends on quality and variety. Bamboo and cane are used in making NARA (Bags men used to carry goods)), Egeng (women used to carry goods), OYO BUHIYA (Knives covers), UDU (like mug), chairs, SEEB SOHIA or SEEB SHAHA (Rope that used to captivate mithun and other wild animals), UDER, TAHUM, LOGGS, SAHUAM (hanging bridge), GUCHU (small Bridge made to cross small river), CHUHA and PAHA or CHUCHA, NAAM (HOUSE), NOSHU (store house), PEWTER (used to keep hens and birds) etc, out of all mentioned items NARA, EGENG, and OYO are mostly found prospective for commercial and economic for Nyishis of Arunachal Pradesh.

### **River resource:-**

Nyishis economic life is also depends on the river resource. Main resources from river are fishes, sand, stone gravel etc. Fish is a delicious item. Local people catch fish especially for daily consumption and if surplus available it is sold in the market. There is also some section of



Nyishi society who manages their family's economy by selling fish in the market. Local fish is highest demand in the market. In Nyishi dialect fish is known as "GUYEE" local fish are sold at the rate Rs 200 to 300 per kilogram. There are several traditional methods of killing fish such as LOGGS (scaffolds), SEPPE (Long erected bamboo in mid of river), AEKAR PANUM (Fishing hook), TAHAM GANUM (Shape like bucket), EDEIR GANUM (it is like a cylinder shape), ESSHE (spreading of net), BOTERTENAM (blocking of small river to collect fish), RITH TENAM (it is local fish hook made up of tender leaves).

**Livestock:-**

Nyishi rears animals like pig (erre), goats (seben), hen (poro), mithun (seeb), cow (Shaw) etc for self consumption, barter system and festival and ritual sacrifice but in modern world now these animals are converted into business commodities in the market of capital complex as well as at rural market of Arunachal Pradesh.

S/no	Animal	Price at per kg (in Rupee)
1	Erre (Pigs)	180
2	Seben (goats)	280
3	Poro (Chicken)	260
4	Seeb ( Mithun)	300
5	Shaw ( cow)	120

**Source:- Naharlagan market (price are subject to vary from time to time)**

**Arts, Crafts and Handloom:-**

Nyishi men are very expert in making arts and crafts by using bamboo and canes without formal training. NARA, EGGEN, OYO or URYU, BOPIA, SELLEI or SELLENG, HUKHU or HUKHUNG, GALYE, PATHA are products of Arts, crafts and handloom. Following are some of the products of arts, crafts and handloom at market price or rate.

S/no	Local products	Rate or price in market(in Rs)
1	Nara	100 to 1500
2	Eggen	1200 to 1500
3	Oyo or uryo	3000 to 6000
4	Bopia	2500 to 10000
5	Sellei or selling	1500
6	Hukhu or hukhung	200
7	Galye	1000 to 1500
8	Patha	15 to 500

**Source:- Itanagar Market (price are subject to vary from time to time)**

There is no legal regulatory system of price fixation for local product. The price varies on nature of uses and size of the product.

### **Remedial Measures to eradicate social evil:-**

There are so many social evil practises in Nyishi society like Tapiaparnam, animal sacrifice, superstitious beliefs, revenge and fine system, child marriage, polygamy, etc. To eradicate such social evil from the Nyishi society, education and behaviour change is the best ways and time to time awareness program should launch at rural areas to remove social evil from grass roots. Government of Arunachal Pradesh and Nyishi based social organisation like Nyishi Elite Society (NES) and All Nyishi Students' Union (ANSU) should take initiative by conducting an awareness and consultative talk with uneducated villagers of rural areas to remove all social evil. Revenge system is also one of the ugly practises among Nyishi of Arunachal Pradesh. In order to remove child and polygamy girls education is necessary so each and every family or parent should put maximum effort to educate girls. In last education is a main tool to remove all social evil from the society.

### **Conclusion:-**

Traditionally, Nyishis economic activities are mostly depended on agriculture, forest and river resource and domesticated animals (livestock). Nyishis are economically self sufficient in nature and Nyishi possess rich socio- economic and cultural life. Mithun and Ornaments and dress play a significant role in determining their status in Nyishi social life. They are doing business activities related i.e. forest resource and river resource. After satisfaction self or family consumption rest of surplus products of agriculture are sold out in the market to earn profit. Due to changing of time today Nyishis are also engaged in a foreign production business in local market in the form of retail outlet.

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