SOCIO- ECONOMIC OF NYISHI TRIBE OF ARUNACHAL PRADESH
CHANGE AND CONTINUITY

Dr. Nabam Nakha Hina

Rajiv Gandhi University, Arunachal Pradesh, India
nabamnakha@yahoo.co.in/ nabamnyigra@rediffmail.com

Abstract

Change is a part of any society or individual, change is the sign of all-round development. Change is seen in institution, political activities, faiths and beliefs, socio-economic order, food habits, dresses and ornaments, customs and customary law, science and technology. Social change may be through assimilations, integration, through conquest by the other cultures or change may happen tacitly through evolution within the society or community. There are different theorists who have defined social change and condition of social change. Like any other society, change is seen in every aspect of the Nyishi society today. The paper is an attempt to examine the impacts of developments and modernization on the Nyishi society.

Key Words:

Apung (flowers), Durum nam (food and drinks arranged owner of the work) Nyishi (Tribe in Arunachal Pradesh), Pawoo nam(paid for work), Possa( tax paid to Nyishi by Neighboring), Ryee gunam(invitation for work), Reyee angm (goes to on invitation), Reekjoo nam(work for wages).
Introduction

The paper is an attempt to examine the impacts of developments and modernization on the Nyishi society. Change is a part of any society or individual, change is the sign of all-round development. Change is seen in institution, political activities, faiths and beliefs, socio-economic order, food habits, dresses and ornaments, customs and customary law, science and technology. Social change may be through assimilations, integration and through conquest by the other cultures or change may happen tacitly through evolution within the society or community. There are different theorists who have defined social change and condition of social change. The changes are seen in every aspect of the Nyishi society today, in all aspect, like Economic, Believes and faiths, Institutional, Life style, Political systems, Customs and Customary Practices, Games and sports, food habits, Hunting and fishing, Art and Crafts, Health and Hygiene, Marriage and divorce, Music and literature, however this focus only on economic changes in the Nyishi society. In this regard, R. Pidtington writes, “Economic system is designed to satisfy a material wants of the people, to organize production to control distribution and determined rights and claim of ownership within the community”\(^1\).

The traditional economy of Nyishi is interrelated with the custom and practices, faiths and believes folk lore and folk tales, Nyishi always start any work with some kinds of rituals like omen examination, oath and orals and believes in dreams. They start any agricultural activities, selection of site for house construction, journey, marriage, raid etc with rituals. They do rituals for their power, strength and prosperity. While K. Kuppuswamy writes, “in the simple tribal economy there are no separate economic activities. The economic, religious, political activities and other are inter woven. Further tribal economics is basically of subsistence nature in which productions is for direct consumption”\(^2\).

Similarly, K.S Singh describes tribal economy in the following way. “Economy of tribe is a projection of tribal society a response to the ecosystem in which it is placed, its function of production and distribution are governed by the bonds of kinship within or between families’ class and landlord production is based on the exploitation of the resources locally and easily available with the crude technology largely for consumption. Family is the unit of production with little specializations and division of labour beyond that based on sex and age. Distribution of goods is regulated by the considerations of reciprocity. The ideal state of primitive economy is thus described as self sufficient though of a subsistence level non acquisitive, machine and non-monetary”\(^3\).
Economic change among Nyishi

The life of Nyishi is revolving around nature and their economy is also dependent on nature. Nature is the guide and life saving drugs them. The Nyishi agricultural activities depend on nature. When winter approaches the birds called pengchang tagiyak became active and make sound which indicates time for cultivation. The Nyishi adopted slash, trace and shifting cultivation. The Nyoka kanam (survey of plot of land for cultivation) began and followed by rituals for site selection to foresee the future related to that plot. Once they get positive sign they goes for kot-tunam/paogak nam (demarcations or sign of reserved to prevent others). They rectekteenam (clearances of grasses) and the sangnee panam (the falling of tree) continue for a month or two after that it is kept till it is fully dry and ready for burning. By this time pako papuk, cheeppayir, meedmeya became active (birds that indicates the right time for sowing of seeds). These birds are inactive and do not make sound in rest of the seasons. There are some other guide too like trees, flowers, orchid, makam /sokam appung (peach) that of two varities. Kamchue/kamree early varities and kamtee late varieties (peach) sangtoo appung, Pakriyo appung, Daye Das Appung, Toke Yamye and Hakra Appung. These ways Nyishi food cycle were also seasonal and products were only for self family consumption and the surplus were exchange with the needy peoples. The local term for exchange is called Geeko- geepeek nam or geeko nakoonam. The surplus products were bartered as per requirement. The local terms for selling or barter is called kauree (price) for example kauree (price) of paddy could be like beads, disc, bell, brass plate, or may be bosfrontalies, goat, pig, etc. They supplement their requirement with forest products like tachee, tassee, Hussee, Tabbee,(tree flour), Kulung(wild banana), Engging (tuber), because these products were available abundantly in the forest. The fishing and hunting is also one of the important sources of survival, there was no individual immovable property expect some symbolic authorities, Seeth-sukam Athu/Ayu,(owner of drinking water spot), Namchnag Athu/Ayu,(ancestoral settlement place), Nyotum humbeek (hunting and fishing spot which is reserved in the name of particular clan or person). The Nyishi economy were very simply and subsistence.

Nyishi practice mixed cropping consist of different verities of crops like Aam (paddy), Tame( finger millet) Toppu (maize), Tanic (cron), Taya (barley), Amburk (corn), Ata nam (wheat), Engging (long tuber) Gureya (sweet potato), Hullak (round tuber), tappee (pumpkin),
oppumb (gourd), ajuk (gourd), makung (cucumber), yam dik (chilly), Takiyee (ginger), deetee (onion leaf) and varieties of vegetable items like guyang (mustard) Peeha (soybeans), peering (beans), Bayam (brinjal), meak/kheli (tobacco leafs), koopeeta (papaya), kupak (banana), Bapee-bapak (sugarcane), tyi etc. The Rongo are of different types like Ballung (garden), Teening rongo (early harvest crops), Reektee Rongo (late harvest crops). They practice only deep/tumpee rongo (dried and shifting cultivation).

The Nyishi own properties like tasang (beads) of different varieties, Maji (bell) of different verities, Tallu (brass plate), dumping (ornament wear by lady on head), Runghing (special ear ring), belling (ear ring like ornaments), Huhee (disc) Kojii (bangles) of different varieties aroyak (sword, knife etc), Domchik, auhee (Axe) Nangkio (spear), murto (iron spike fixed at arrow head), Muni (small varieties beads).

There are some domestic animals own by the Nyishi like sabbee (bosfrontalies) seew (cow), sabbying (goat), Erik (pig), Purok (fowl), Hasse (cat), ikkei (dog). However, seew (cow) seems to be the recent experience because there is no mentions about seew (cow), in the myths and legend of Nyishi, where as other animals are referred.

The Nyishi are expert in handicrafts like, skin works, weaving, cane and bamboo worked pottery, blacksmith, wood curving and carpentry, basketry and mat weaving. Some of the products are like Eggichumnam (weaving of clothes), Bopia (head helmet), Nara (haversack), Chuk (bag made of skin), Satam (skin used as armour), saruk (skin belt), Tamak (belt made of cane and special plant called tamak or tahiyo), Appiya (small bag for lady), Aegging (rucksacks), Abber/Pakhiya (netted rucksacks), leehee (ankle strap for lady), lurum (knee strap for men), Salong (smoking tube), Hajap/Beedu/Deedu (Bamboo tube for carrying wine or liquid items), Pataek (bamboo tube used for drinking wine and water), Haukung (Bamboo plate), Pyache (wooden plate), Paahew (tools used for weeding), loodap (tools used for weeding), Punnya (spoon), Maning/Arrin/Benda (pointed iron used for roasting), masab (tongs), Huch/Kuta (small basket used for measurement of paddy, maize or millet), Aping (mate of skin or bamboo or cane), Kuwa (netted mate for drying millet), Dungsing (basket for rice stock), oddum (basket for keeping clothes and ornaments, Deekam Pachang (earthen pots), chungkia (small basket) attached to Rabki (hanging platform above fire hearth).kheeting (hanging plat
form above), *rabkhi*, *Err* (bow), *appuk* (arrow), *Patter* (coop/cage for fowl), *Abbeya* (ladder), *duckam* (tough or carved wooden or stone for feeding animal specially pigs), *Layee* (bunch of rolled hair tied at wrist of men during arrow shootings in left wrist), *Tarrek* (small piece of rounded cane fixed at palm for holding arrow pulling), *Eggik* (quiver), *adder* (fish trap). Nyishi people knew the fire making technology too, they manufacture tools called *maddang* (iron) tools used for making fire together with small piece of *Allang* (stone) and wild fiber called *yangmak* collected and preferred form *tamak* tree, when the *maddang* in one hand and piece of white rock struck with little *yangma* at other hand heat or struck produce spark which ignite the soft fiber substance. Another method of fire making is called *mudung* (carrying of fire at long distance by putting millet or rice husk in the bamboo tube), *murr* (traditional torch used at night).

The labour force is mobilized through *Ryee gunam/Reyee angm* (mutual exchange of labour without wage/payment). Another way of labour mobilization is called *reekjoo nam* (labour wages). *Pawoo nam* (paid work). The owner of the work arranged food and drinks which is called *Durum nam*. The labour mobilized in the Nyishi society in broader sense is community work.

However, the advent of modernity and subsequent various development activities have brought tremendous change amongst the tribal peoples of the Arunachal Pradesh in general and Nyishi in particular. The Nyishi contact with Ahom rulers led to expose to new administrative setup, new social set up and new economy. Subsequently British took over the reign of Assam in (1826 A.D). Thereafter British initiated various act, order, notification and regulation. Some of the prominent regulation are inner line regulation 1873, the Assam frontier (administration of justice) Regulation 1945 and the conversion of kind *POSA* collection of Nyishi into currency. Subsequently India got independence in 1947 and initiated development programs. In 1951 first five years plan covered present Arunachal Pradesh. In 1952, National extension services (NES) was started. But Tribal areas of Assam was not given equal importance to that of the other parts of the country and Elwin and Nehru’s philosophy for NEFA to keep tribal of NEFA as Museums specimen got heavy blow during and after 1962 Chinese aggression and NEFA was brought under Indian plan economy.

In 1965 NEFA was brought under Ministry of home affair from erstwhile Ministry of external affairs. In 1948 First ever primary school was established at Doimukh. In 1975 NEFA capital was shifted from Shillong to present Naharlagun and later shifted at Itanagar under Papum pare district. Government introduced local self government at village and many villagers were forced to accept the modern
leadership responsibility with a shy and reluctant attitude and many were given responsibility with threats of dire consequence if refused. They initiated village regrouping and white rice cultivation (WRC). Schools were established at main areas to encourage education and ‘school chalo’ campaigns were initiated. Nyishi boys and girls were scared of going to school and even parents discouraged their children to go to school, even after getting admitted in school many just deserted school and preferred to stay at their home, but some like minded group of students, teachers and modern leaders used to carry out raid to capture the boys and girls and get them in school. The development activities like road connectivity, health and hygiene programmes, irrigation system, fishery, horticulture, loan and semi-loan schemes were launched through IRDP, DRDA, DACD, NSMF, JRY, TRYSM, NERP, RLEG.

The impacts of the modernity are seen in every aspects of the Nyishi society today, the concepts of individual land property have come into the mind of the people. Many are having land possession Certificate and Land allotment document especially in urban center. Many do not continue agricultural activities instead they look for some other sources of income like contract work and government jobs under various department of the centre and state government, in the traditional society agricultural was the backbone of livelihood, even who still cultivate, their product are sold in the market for want of currency. The people have adopted (WRC) white rice cultivation. Many have interest in horticulture, large scale pottery, piggery, dairy, farming, and fishing etc.

Due to road connectivity the multi national and national company products are coming to village and many have started business like grocery, vegetable etc, the people are now introduced to new product like cosmetic items, varieties of bathing and washing soaps and varieties of body oil which were once beyond the reach of the Nyishi people. The people today have bank account and bank balance and own immovable properties like land, building etc.

They prefer to work for money in form of daily wages or payment. Many a time labour from other states is being engaged in their work through payment. The people are shifting to urban center they easily get ready made product like rice, maize, millet, wheat, sugar through FCI and cooperative society shop. People are able to enjoy modern facility like different brands of motor vehicle, Radio, Television, Telephone, mobile, electricity etc, the modern products like steel, aluminum, alloy, plastic, utensil, plate, bag, basket, mat etc have began to replace traditional products.

The inflation of traditional ornament domestic animals own by Nyishi is a headache for them. The cost of one string of *Taduk Tasing* (precious stone which is called beads) was equal to one *sabbe* (bosfrontales). The cost of two string of *Dugli Tasing* (precious stone which is called beads) was one *sabbe* (bosfrontales). The cost of one *Chungrri Tasing* was two or three *sabbe* (bosfrontales). The cost of
two or three *sangmi tasing* was one *sabbbe*. Like was other ornament had its own values as per the time and situation and they used to bargain. They used to exchange ornament with animals and eatable items and eatable item with that of animals and ornament. It seems that the cost domestic animals was higher then that of ornaments and eatable items. But today’s the cost of ornament are much higher then that of animals and modern currency. The cost of one string of *Taduk Tasing* is minimum one lakhes and there is no maximum limit to it. The cost of two string of *Dugli Tasing* is minimum one lakhes and there is no maximum limit to it. In the other hand the cost of domestic animals like *sabbbe* is fifteen thousands to seventy thousands at the most which come across. The sudden inflation of ornament has alienated the majority of the people from being own traditional ornaments and few Nyishi who are well to do have control over it. There is another serious problem added to it is the problems of imitations of traditional ornament which is manufacture and available in the market.

The traditional Nyishi societies fulfill their own requirement with Handicrafts. They busy themselves in crafts making. The Handicrafts is one of the important composites of the Nyishi traditional economy because they had limited trade link with non-Nyishi. Any individual could engage in Handicrafts since there was no division of labours. But today in Nyishi society those traditional products are gradually disappearing because people do not want to engage themselves in art and crafts rather they depend on finished products available in the market. The traditional bamboo, wood, cane products are replaced by the steel, iron, aluminum, plastic, etc. Today young generations are not familiar with the traditional art and Handicrafts because their demand is easily fulfilled from the ready made market.  

**Changes in Architectures**

Art and architecture played very important role in traditional Nyishi society. The Nyishi house used to be very long which could accommodate even up to 200 or more peoples. Each unit of family having hearth separately, two doors at two end of the house called *batung* and *baghu* and family wise outlet in the *khoda* for (*puoruk peereh*) poultry. There is open corridor at *khoda* (one side of the house). Each unit of family is separated with bamboo splitted partitions which separate the *khoda* form rest of the *Nyosa* and *nyodang* (inner side of house) and each hearth is again compartmentalized to maintain privacy, specially sleeping chamber. Practically Nyishi house is divided into various categories and constructed in such a way that it is suitable to its requirement. The houses is always constructed on raised, ground floor kept open for domestic animals, second floor for human accommodations attached with entire requirement, like *poobee, kheeting, rambki* and the top floor is called *Nyakiya* which is used for keeping any articles and eatable items. *Batung* is used for inauspicious purpose and *changpeer* (grander/mortar) is also fixed and *bhagu* is used for auspicious events. The height of *bhagu* is higher then
the *batung* and *bhagu* is always faced towards the morning sunrise. They used wood, bamboo, cane and leaf for house construction but the construction of *nasung* (store house) and *Tabiyo* (small hut at agricultural field or any other location for temporary period) is different. It is of two floors that ground floor is kept open and first floor is used as store. There is no provision for ceiling. Art and architecture is seen in the construction of *Nyubiung* (tomb), *goochoo* (suspension bridge over river), *salak* (single rope trolley over big river), *gopiam* (short valley bridge of bamboo/wooden over torrent/rivulet). ⁶

The way *Nyubiung* (tomb) is constructed and decorated indicate the personality of the dead person whether the person was male or female or whether the person died naturally or unnaturally or whether the person was a grownup or a child. The tomb is constructed in a conical shaped tower and there are numbers of platform in it. For a man they give five platforms and for a woman they give four platforms. At the top conical shaped piece of wood is fixed which is called *ayung papuk*. The piece of bamboo is fixed in the base vertically to connect the *ayung papuk*. Along with *ayung papuk* one *gaye osso* (rope) is also connect from based to top at *ayung papuk*. The base portion is rounded with fence to prevent trespass. Nyishi buried the dead body near residential house.

Today this traditional art and architecture is being replaced by the modern technology like iron, CIG sheets, cement, bricks, stone, sand and pebbles etc. The long house is now replaced by multi-room or multi-storied square or rectangle building, equipped with all modern facility like water, electricity, toilet, bath-room and kitchen attached or separately constructed. The art and architecture are seen in the construction of *yugang* (altar) which involved typical design and structure. There are different structures and designs for different *uyus* (deities). The typical skill of design are seen in works like *koha haknam*, *alam ponam* and *puhi heenam* which involved real skill and designs. ⁵

**Changes in Hunting and Fishing**

Fishing and hunting are very important parts of the Nyishi society. Some of important indigenous hunting methods were *keruk ruknam/soruk ruknam* (community hunting) by using dog. The people are divided into two group first group is of skill archer who hide some way ahead with bow and arrow which are called *toya bua/toya nam* (hide ahead to shot animal) and second group is of chasers who are called *khelee kabu* (the chasing of animals by shouting with dogs). Killed meat is equally shared which is called *sapum maenam* and persons who killed the animal get the special portion of the animals like head, arm etc. The other hunting methods are *kumeya, sogu, cheepak, changpak, gotak, marang/gorang, pochiks, tacheer heenam, chargoo bangnam, uddya gonam, rasup harnam, sagnee tonm, changrunng yheeknam ,bungrungr yabnam.*
Today’s Nyishi hardly know all these indigenous hunting rather they use new technology and weapons like gun of different brand, catapult and traps to kill the animal instantly. Leaving few, most of the indigenous hunting technique are scientific and environmental friendly and modern weapons are harmful and anti-environmental.

There are some indigenous fishing technique also like tamujangnam (using herbal poison in water), pesuk sunam (angling), akar paknam (angling), subu peenam/buktartarnam (diversion of water), seepee manam/pache karnam (traps in the current water), sakam paknam/taknam paknam (traps in vertical/horizontal current water), edder gyanam (trap in water way), langpum pum nam (stone nest used as trap), reetek teeknam (angling with earth warm), aker pumnam (angling), karpum teeknam (jerking of bunch of angle).

These fishing systems are gradually disappearing due to the coming of new technology like bomb, blasting, chemical, pesticides, net of different varieties, electric shocking etc. These new hunting and fishing has completely destroyed the eco-system of the Nyishi areas. The earlier hunt and fishing was done only for family consumption, but today it has been commercialized which have bad impacts. 

**Changes in dress and Ornament**

Like any other civilization dress and ornament are very important aspects. Nyishi used different types of dresses and ornaments, some of them are manufacture locally and some from other society and market. The Nyishi women used to weave pud eggi (cloths) made from fiber of plant which is called puspai. The rest brought from the other parts of the world through trading. The trading/going for marketing to other countries is called Pudung Runnam. The Nyishi had trade relation Tibet and Bhutan which is called Nyeme Nyapak. The trading/marketing with people belong to Nyeme Nyapak is called Nyeme Pudung Runnam. The trade/marketing with plain people is called Ryangko Pudung Runnam.

There was no separate dress/cloth for male and female. The dressing methods of male was kardung (vertical drape) in such manner that two end of clothes is tied around the shoulders and neck and folded middle portion is hanging on the back down to buttock of men. Another way of male dressing style is called layeek (round draped) around the body and pin/tied around chest by taking together the two end and middle of the clothes.

The male members when reach adolescent put on hagging (small piece of cloth draped like panty) to cover the private parts tying one end at back waist passing anus valley and another tied at umbilical cord of one rope tied around the waist. Simultaneously they grow his hair longer which is called pamap. once the hair is grown longer enough they goes for Podum yesksum (knotting of hair) at forehead and gradually followed by dumpeeyapyanam (the long hair is taken towards forehead and divide the hair into three small bunch and crossing each other that make hair bunch and folded in
round shape or flat shape). When the man is grown up they prefer for Podum. In the Podum they used domkio (sharp pointed iron piece/bamboo stick) and boopia (head helmet made of animal skin or cane). In the bopia they put on paga hebung (horn bill beak), Kakam Ganglang (eagle feather), Nangnee ganglang (tail of dronngo birds), Kokam kheeley (eagle claw) and animal skin.

The ear of Nyishi are holed which is called nyarung roonam and put on roonos (small bamboo slid) and gagiee (decorated ornament used as ear ring), they wear ornament called dumchee (strips) put on round head attached to pudum. They wore tamak Uuh (bunch of belt) made of cane and tree/grass fiber called tamak /tahyoo. They also wear saruk (big skin belt), lurum (knee strips).

The Nyishi female also wear cloth almost same to that of male. The pud eggiee was common to all Nyishi. The female draped around the body till knee and tied one portion at right shoulder and kept open the left shoulder and put on puss (cloths strips) around the waist or hukhi (girdle), put on lakang (cane strips put at ankle point). The female grow their hair long which is called pa-map. when the hair is sufficiently grown longer they go for dumpuye in a different style and put the dumpeeeye rounded and put on head, they also hole their ear and put on small bamboo slid called roonos and rungbing (ear ring), coji (bangles) tassing (beads), muni (beads of small varieties especially by female), Dumping (crown of ladies). They drape their leg with cloth or leaf to prevent bites of flies and insects during the work time which is called lupnام/lup punam.

There is tremendous change in the today’s Nyishi dressing; they have started wearing half pants, long pants, under pants, shirt, trousers, neck tie, the shoes and chappals etc, which was not known by the earlier Nyishi people and traditional dressing patterns are disappearing. Nyishi are no more practicing the nyarung roonam (holing of ear) and putting of roonos (bamboo slid) rather they make invisible tiny hole and put on gold, silver and ready made ear ring available at market. The women use plastic/rubber products coji (bangles), hair bands and necklace. The Nyishi cut their hair short, the male no more carry original pudum, but modern ready made pudum is available in the market decorated with replicate beak and they dye their hair irrespective of gender.
Conclusion

The impact of modernity on Nyishi society is faster than the actual development activity in the society, the balance and sustainable development and modernity is the need of the hours. The unmindful act of state may under mind the very socio-economic and cultural value system of primitive but vibrant tribal society into identity crisis hot ball like giving wrong treatment to patient without diagnosing the disease.

References

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