



Traditional Cultural Institutions of the Nyishi of Kamle District, Arunachal Pradesh: An Ethno- Historical Study

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Abstract:

History of every mankind are unique in their own ways. The same is for the state of Arunachal Pradesh. A distinctive feature that sets Arunachal Pradesh apart from other regions of the nation is their lack of a monarchy or empire in their past. The state's history is the history of its people's struggle for continued existence and advancement. The dynastic and caste histories that have shaped the history of other parts of India has no trace in Arunachal Pradesh, therefore making it particularly distinctive. The culture has two important aspects; material culture and non-material culture. The *Nyishi*'s have evolved their own cultural practices in the process of their social formation. Their cultural practices are simple and has been transmitted from generation to generation without formal training. Expert or aged people have handed down their cultural practices in shape of formal training by practical and moral lesson and mocking performances among the peers.

Index Terms: Traditional, Cultural Institutions, Ethno-Historical Study, Nyishi people, Kamle District, Arunachal Pradesh, India.

1. Introduction

Culture is something which man interprets between himself and his environments in order to ensure his security and survival. E.A. Hobel defines Culture "as the sum total of integrated learned behaviour patterns which are characteristics of the member of a society and which are therefore not the result of biological inheritance". It is an essential adoptive mechanism making it possible the satisfaction of human wants in the society. Thus, the culture has different displays through different institutions which in turn are formalized through various activities which a society has adopted and followed. The culture has two important aspects such as Material Culture and Non-Material Culture. The Material culture may include houses, dresses, weapons etc., and non-material culture may consist of dances, songs, music, beliefs, values etc.

II. Material Culture

Material culture is the physical evidence of a culture in the objects and architecture they make or have made. The term tends to be relevant only in archaeological and anthropological studies but it specifically means all material evidence which can be attributed to culture, past or present. It also includes the objects or belongings of human beings including a wide range of physical items like houses, dress, weapons etc. Through their social structure, the *Nyishis* have evolved unique cultural characteristics. They have simple cultural practices which have been transmitted from one generation to the next by expert or elderly people. They have handed down their cultural practices in the shape of formal training by practical and moral lesson and mocking performance among the fellow members. But their cultural traits do not form separate sphere rather they are an expression of the whole system. As a result, their cultural institutions cannot be dealt in isolation from other aspects of life like social, economy, political and religion.

II (a) *Nampom* (Village)

A village is usually permanent with fixed dwelling realm. However, a transient village may exist because of various natural phenomena. Village is a cluster of human settlement or community as a whole consisting of a group of single pattern long thatched bamboo houses. It is normally larger than a hamlet but smaller than a town, with a population ranging from one hundred to three hundred. It is inhabited by those communities of the society who practice subsistence agriculture and other traditional economy activities.

The traditional *Nampom* of the *Nyishi* are located either on the top of the hills or in the smaller narrow valley, surrounded by natural barriers like river, cliff or hill, so that it offered natural barrier and defense from enemy attack. Otherwise, their villages are without any extra protective or defensive mechanism. It is these high hills and rivers that acted as a natural boundary line between two separate villages. Therefore, most of the *Nyishi* villages were located in isolation and difficult to be easily approached by the enemies. Though one village was far apart from another but the houses in each village were fairly close to one another for sociability and defense purposes. The villages of the *Nyishi* are normally very small consisting of not more than 20 to 30 households but not exceeding 50 houses. The most important considerations for site selection to set up villages were availability of water source for drinking, suitable land for cultivation and natural protection from enemy. After locating the suitable site for the village, the *Nyishi* performs omen through *Pip Chikanam* and *Porok Roksin Kanam*. If omen predicts future eventuality and misfortune in the particular area, they abandon the site and look for an alternative area (See *Plate-1*)

Plate 1: View of Traditional Nyishi Village



II (b) *Nam* (House)

A house is a permanent or semi-permanent structure that serves as a dwelling place for one or more families. It serves as an abode of human beings. Similarly, like selection of suitable site for setting up of village, even to see the suitability of the place where house will be built, they invite the *Nyib* to perform the divination such as *Pip Chikanam* or *Porok Roksin Kanam*. If the divination foretells any future eventuality or misfortune, they immediately abandon the place and look out for another place for construction of their *Nam*. Even while constructing the house some rituals and sacrifices are conducted for the protection and wellbeing of the family members. The *Nyib* is called upon to invoke and offer sacrifices to benevolent *Wui* such as *Chijum Boo Wui* (Goddess of Hearth) and *Namra Wui* (Goddess of House) to drive away all the misfortunes and for protection and prosperity of all the family members who will dwell in the house.

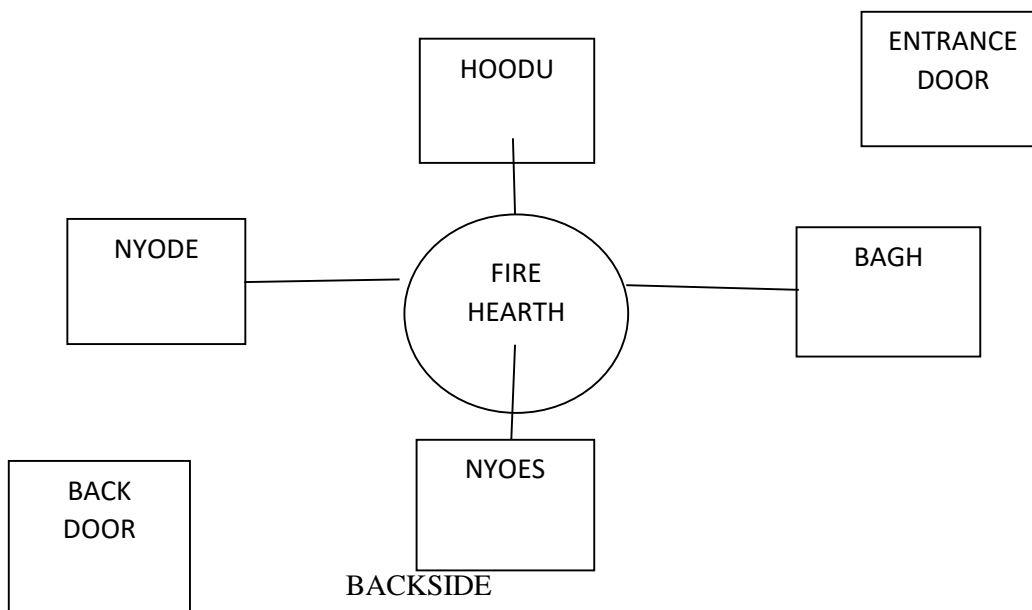
The method and structural design of house construction by the people of Arunachal Pradesh vary from one tribe to the other. The houses of the *Nyishis* are generally long, subject to how many extended families live under the same roof. They followed a joint family arrangement that included their parents, their married sons and their children, along with their brothers and their wives. These long houses of the *Nyishi* are constructed in such a way that the wall and floor are made of split bamboo, roofs are thatched of leaves of *Taak Sin* (Chinese Palm tree) and the houses are raised about 6 to 10 feet above the ground using a timber log. Since the houses were constructed either at the top or by the side of a hill, the height of the raised log posts varied.

The house consisted of one long compartment made of bamboo splits in the centre, open balcony at each end, pigsty and fowl space at the back of the house. The long compartmental room where all the family members resided had entrance door in the front and back door at the end of the house. But it had no windows. Similarly, there are two *Koba* (staircase) made of either bamboo or log of a tree to climb up or down from the house. The interior of the house which consisted of an open space was partitioned on the basis of *Iimik* (fire hearth). Each extended family has its own fire hearth in the same roof of the house. Each fire hearth has its own importance as such the first hearth from the entrance side of the house are called *Tum* which is regarded as the most respectable place and as a result it was always meant for the elder most of the family. All the middle hearths are called *Leppa* and it was meant for the *Leppa Nyim* (middle wives) or *Leppa Aa* (middle sons) and their family. The last hearth is called as *Tumko* and it was meant for the *Nyim Honiya* (last wives) or *Aa Honiya* (last son) and his family. (See Plate-2)

Plate 2: Traditional Nyishi House



Diagram 1: Showing four sides of Iimik (Fire Hearth)



Source: Personal Observation during field study.

Similarly, the four sides of the fire hearth have their own names and for specific purposes. The side near the entrance door is called *Hoodu*, where the guest usually sits and towards its wall are hung the horns and skulls of hunted animals (*Somen-Dumpo*). The opposite side of *Bagh* is called *Nyode* which is meant for the women of the family, because it is believed that benevolent *Wuis* like *Yirne-Gone Wui*, *Sutum Bote Wui* etc resides there. It is also the place where *Wui Riigi* (Sacrificial alter) are constructed and all sacrificed items are hung on it such as, *Sob Arre and Dumpo* (horns and skull of sacrificed mithun) and *Erek Ee* (Pig jaw with teeth). The side towards the back door is called *Nyoes*,

which is a working place for women folk where *Opo* (rice/ millet beer), grain and other materials are kept. It is also the place where the women during menstruation period stay. The side just opposite of *Nyode* is called *Bagh* which is the most respectable place in the house. It is exclusively meant for the male head of the family. It is also believed to be the place where spirit of prosperity resides. So, *Geli Pakka* (ritual performed to spirit of prosperity) rituals and sacrifices are conducted there and all the sacrificed animal's horns and jaws are hung towards its wall. It is also the sleeping place of the family.

Above the fire hearth are placed *Kera* which is a hanging tray of several layers for drying grain, meat, firewood etc. Above the *Kera*, there is *Naka* (ceiling made of bamboo splits) where *Opo*, unused baskets, extra fire woods and other household items are stored. *Naka* is connected to the floor of the house with notched ladder made of bamboo called *Koba*. At the backside of the house, they build *Erek Guhm* (Pigsty) which is made of small round bamboo. Even all the fowls are reared at the backside of the house in *Piitir* (caged made of bamboo splits).

In the *Nyishi* society construction of traditional house was very tough and toilsome because their houses were very long. It was very challenging for a single family to construct its own house. As a result, it was a community-based work which was reciprocal in nature. They considered it as a social obligation where all the male members of the village were engaged in the entire process of house construction such collection of materials, digging holes for laying the posts, tying the bamboo frame, thatching the roof and finally covering the house with criss- crossed bamboo splits. The longevity of *Nyishi* house was not much because of the use of perishable materials like bamboo, wood logs and leaves. So, after 10 to 15 years again new house had to be constructed by them. If not new, repairing and maintenance of the same house becomes necessary for them.

Construction of house is systematically planned within one year before the final erection of the house. During this planning period collection of materials takes place due to non-availability of materials and also for drying up of the cut down wooden logs. Another reason for collection of materials ahead is for fast and smooth finishing of the house construction without any hindrances. The entire number of raw materials required for one house varies depending on its size. In the entire process, from collection of raw materials to putting up of the house, sufficient *Iichin*, *Iidin*, *Opo* (millet beer) and vegetables are provided to the helpers by the house owner.

The construction of the new house begins with the village folks demolishing the existing house. Before demolishing, the owner shifts all their household items to the neighbouring house and stay there till the new house is built. The length of the house is determined by the number of elementary families that will live together. Whereas the breadth and height of the houses are nearly identical in each *Nyishi* village. The time required to construct the house is determined by the size of the house, the number of helping hands, and their technical knowledge. If it was very long, automatically the time requirement was longer. However, the usual estimated time for completion of house construction was between 3 to 5 days.

The *Nyishi's* household goods typically consisted of farming, hunting and fishing gear, such as *Ujuk* (dried gourd object for picking liquid items like water and *Opo* from bigger container), *Upum* (dried gourd vessel for storing *Opo*), *Pumchuk* (dried gourd vessel for serving *Opo*), bamboo vessels like *Patak*, *Dujab* and *Selek* for storing or fetching water, *Piichi* (Earthen or aluminum pot for cooking), *Uff Taak* (mat made of taak), *Nara* (bamboo haversack), *Tagte* (bamboo mug), *Dutub and Dusin* (big size bamboo container for storing rice, millet etc), *Oph* (made of bamboo for winnowing), *Peche* (bamboo mat for drying grain), cane and bamboo baskets like *Agle*, *Ebar*, *Och*, *Dola*, *Chuchak*, *Pajab* etc. Hence, naturally available materials were either directly used or else used as raw material in producing the household articles. Apart from them, other artifacts found in the household were in the shape of decorative items such as heads, horns and skins of hunted animals such as *Sudum* (deer), *Seb* (monkey), *Sutum* (bear), *Suspop* (porcupine) etc. Inside the house either in *Nyode* or *Nyeos* side of the house is hanged towards its wall various ceremonial objects such as of horns of sacrificed *mithuns*, jaws and teeth of sacrificed pigs and numerous designs made of bamboo strings. All these displays are symbolic expressions of the social prestige of the head of the households, who take delight in these decorations.

II (c) Dresses and Ornaments

Food, cloth and shelter are the basic needs of every man. Food to satisfy the hunger, cloth to cover and provide warmth to the body and shelter to shield the body from sun, rain and wind. According to the history of mankind, in the beginning man roamed freely like animal without cloth. Gradually, due to extreme cold they began to experiment with things available in the surrounding to cover one's body. Initially they began to use leaves and bark of trees followed by hides of animals. Then along with the progress of the society, there came the discovery of cotton plants and use of wools from furred animals. Thus, bark from trees and animal skins started to give way to woven textiles in the form of cotton and woolen clothing. Since then, in an effort to make clothing more enticing and appealing, man has been experimenting with new fabrics, patterns, designs, and shapes. The same goes with the *Nyishi* of Kamle region. Since time immemorial, there came about changes in the clothes that were worn by them. In order to know the types and the changes in the dresses and the ornaments that were wore by Kamle *Nyishi*, we have to depend on the writing of two groups of writers from two different periods. The first groups of writings are from British administrators and British writers. The second

group of writers consisted of an Indian administrators and Indian writers. They are all writing from different angles and viewpoints.

Earlier British administrators cum writers such as *E.T Dalton*, *Verrier Elwin*, *C.V.F Haimendorf*, *G.W Dun* etc., in their respective books has elaborated in detail the types of dresses and ornaments that were initially worn by both the sexes of Kamle Nyishi who were erstwhile called as Hillmiris. Based on the description of the masculine attire of Kamle Nyishi given by *E.T Dalton*, “they were lightly clad which consisted only of loin cloth and a sleeveless flannel woolen coat. Their hairs were gathered to the front, where it protruded out from the forehead in large knobs which was covered with a piece of hairy hide of bear. Round the head a band of small brass or copper knobs linked together was tightly bounded. Rich and influential persons wore ornaments of silver in their ears, shaped like a wine glass and quite large”. So, like women they too wore ornaments such as earrings, braided strings below the knee and colourful bead necklaces around the neck.

While travelling they wore an elaborate headgear of cane called *Bopa* which is decorated with a hornbill beak behind, a black bear skin in the front, a buffalo horn, porcupine quills, a claw of golden eagle and a long bird’s feather hanged down the back (*See Plate-3a*). *Bopa* was used to protect the head from harsh sun and rain. Their top robe consisted of a cloth that was draped around their bodies and fastened on both shoulders, while their underneath outfit was a scarf that was connected to a cane work girdle between their legs. On top of their upper robe, they wore *Tas Nara*, a black cloak worn over the shoulders like a half coat which was created from the blade-like skin of palm trees which from distance resembles the skin of a bear. These blade-like palm skins are cut, dried and then tied together to produce the furry coat. During warfare, they wear *Sotam* (shield) made of *Mindik* (Buffalo) skin and *Sutum Alak Lagbu* (arm gear) made of *Sutum* (bear) skin to protect the body from getting harmed. All the time except while sleeping man always hung around his neck a small knife called *Habo Rikchik* for multiple purposes.

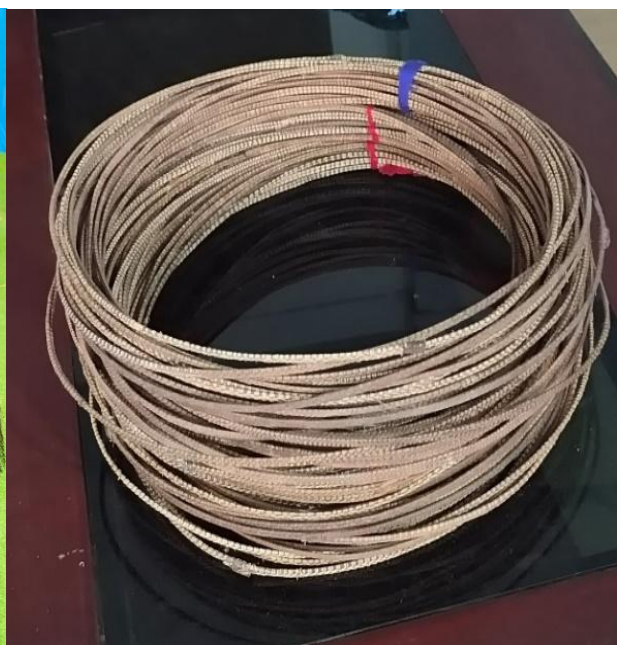
On the other hand, a woman's attire included of a short plain skirt that stretched from her waist to her knees, attached to a broad leather belt which is ornamented with tiny brass bells known as *Huyik*. On top of the skirt, they wore a singular cane crinoline of cane which was called as *Uukh* (*See Plate-3b*). They wear a belt of plaited cane work girdling around the upper body just under the arms and cover their breasts with a fragment of fabric on top. They used *Taab Lobo* (comb made of sugarcane) for combing their hair. Their hair was consequently carefully plaited into two tails that hung down their backs, with a clean parting in the middle. Beautifully designed silver and brass ornaments were worn by the women as earrings (*Rutak and Rubin*), bracelets (*Lacko*), metal waist band *Huyik* and finely braided strings of cane or bamboo peeling in the anklets. Their headgears were made of metal and were called *Dumpen and Dumper*. They wore enormous varieties of *Tiisi* (bead necklaces) around their necks of multiple colours, such as, *Templa, Sibuk, Sitor, Pebar, Simen, Babluk, Minle, Jenjap* etc. Small girls wore *Onyap* which was a metal disc tied in a thread and wore below the pelvis to cover their private part. Some bead necklaces such as *Tiisi Pebar, Simen, Sitor and Lirum* are also worn by male on specific occasions.

Plate 3: (a) *Bopa* (Male Headgear)

(b) *Uukh* (Several braided/plaited cane rings worn around the waist by woman)



(a)



(b)

The second group of later writers who also wrote on dress and ornaments of Kamle Nyishi are the Indian officers and writers such as *B.B. Pandey, J.N. Chowdhury, Ramchanda Chutia* and others. In their writings there came about slight changes in the dresses that were worn by the Nyishi women due to their interaction and further conduction of trade with the people beyond their borders. Man began to cover themselves with *Ejj Jera* (off white *Eri shawl*) which was imported from Assam. This shawl is wrapped around the body from chest to knee and the tip of the *Jera* is secured on both the sides of the shoulders from behind. A long strip of red cotton cloth is tied around the abdomen. Nicely braided bamboo peelings called *Lolum* are tied below the knee. Their distinctive hair knot, known as *Podum* and *Bopa* (headgear) remain unchanged, setting them apart from other neighbouring tribes. However, the hair knot was worn only by adult men. Like women, they too wear bead necklaces of different colours and sizes. Like their men folk, the women too began to wrap themselves with *Jera Ejj*. As a result, the cane brassiere which was used to cover the upper part of the body was no longer used but *Uukh* which was a crinoline of cane work around the waist was still worn above the *Jera Ejj*. Regarding ornaments used by the women, it was same as was described by the earlier writers. So, the dress and ornaments worn by the Kamle Nyishi was unique in themselves and it greatly helped them in identifying and distinguishing them from other neighbouring tribes like *Tagin, Galo* and *Apatani* (See *Plate-4a and 4b*)

Plate 4: Nyishi Couple in (a) Traditional Attire and (b) Modern Attire.



(a)



(b)

II (d) Food and Drink Habits

Food and drink are one of the primary needs for the endurance of mankind on earth. It determines the fundamental nature of man's relation to his surroundings. Man's early history is the narrative of his struggle with the environment, out of which he obtained things for his survival. Man's search for food is rooted in his habits since the day he originated in the universe. His first habit of procuring food was by gathering the wild fruits, roots, nuts and leaves. With his inquisitive mind various hunting tools was discovered leading to another habit of eating the flesh of hunted animals, birds and fish. These modes of getting food were self-sufficient till the population was sparse. But slowly with the growth of population and irregularity of natural supplies, men were gradually compelled to search for more long-term means of subsistence. This resulted in men controlling over the animal kingdom through domestication. Similarly, in due course of time they began to control the plant kingdom as well through agriculture. Even in the method of agriculture, man through their mental skills developed many effective ways to produce more food for the growing population. Ultimately, it was agriculture as a mode of procurement of food that gained predominance over earlier sources such as gathering and hunting. Thus, progress has been made by man from the stage of hunting and gathering to sedentary agriculture which later developed more due to use of modern agricultural tools and techniques, thereby, resulting in production of varieties of food products.

In earlier days, the food habits of almost all the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh depended on shifting cultivation with the exception of *Khamti, Singpho* and *Apatani* who were traditionally acquainted with terrace and wet rice cultivation. The same goes for the Nyishi people of Kamle whose main source of food came from *Rikth Nongo* (jhum field). Their primary food consisted of *Iichin* (rice), *Tem Mirik* (millet flour), *Top* (maize), *wild potatoes and roots like Engh, Igin Nyinyek, Igin Yab, Iginsida, Hash, Nyiro, Dodil*, etc., which were grown in the jhum field. Besides these, in jhum field they grow large varieties of vegetables such as *Nyirik* (leaf of wild potato), *Muku* (cucumber), *Taph*

(pumpkin), *Mopleh* (watermelon), *Yuluk* (chilli), *Peran* (local beans), *Tek* (ginger) etc. Uncooked rice is called *Aam* or *Iimbin* and when cooked in boiling water it is called *Iichin*. Excess water from boiling rice was also consumed as soup which was called *Iichin Abakh*. *Aam* (rice with its husk) was first taken out in *Peche* (bamboo mat) and then dried in the sun or above the fire hearth. The dried *Aam* was then pounded in local pounder called *Chipar* and *Eddi* to separate it from its husk. The husk free rice is called *Iimbin* and this *Iimbin* when cooked in boiling water, it is called *Iichin*. Cooked rice (*Iichin*.) was taken twice a day, early in the morning before going to the field and in the evening after returning from field. Other cereal supplementary to rice was *Tem* (Millet) which was used both as food and liquor. Dried millets were pounded into flour in *Chipar*. This millet flour called *Tem Mirrik* was mixed with water to make a paste out of it which was then wrapped in *Kokam* or *Kopak* (banana) leaves and baked in the fire. This baked millet flour was consumed by them. Sometimes millet flour was also eaten by mixing it in hot water. Other important supplementary food was *Toph* (maize) which was grown in every *Rikth Nongo* along with rice or millet. Tender *Toph* was eaten raw and the matured ones were eaten either boiled or burnt in front of the fire. Similar to the *Toph*, even wild potatoes were also eaten in the same way. Along with vegetables grown in the field, they consume variety of leafy vegetables such as *honyor*, *tapin*, *hoglap*, *hoyik*, *Papuk* (banana flower) etc., which were either grown wild or some grown in the *Rikth Nongo*. The leafy vegetables were either boiled with bamboo shoot or steamed on the rice pot by placing it on the top layer of the cooking rice. Another important edible item that was gathered and eaten by them was *Hiku* (tender bamboo shoot). *Hikus* that were brought from the jungle were cut into extremely tiny pieces and then fermented and preserved at home for later consumption. *Hiku* along with chilli and ginger was used as spices in cooking vegetables, meat and fish. It was used in both raw and dried form. Dried bamboo shoot is called *Huyub* and it was dried either in the sun or above the fire hearth.

Another indispensable food habit of the *Nyishi* was the consumption of varieties of meat of both wild and domesticated animals, birds and fish. The meat of domesticated animals consumed by them were *Porok* (chicken), *Erek* (pig), *Pajab* (duck), *Soa* (cow), *Iik* (dog), *Sibin* (goat) and *Sob* (mithun). Likewise, meat of hunted wild animals eaten by them were *Sudum* (Deer), *Seb* (monkey), *Sutum* (bear), *Tak* (Squirrel), *Suspop* (porcupine), *Suhin* (wild chicken), *Socha* (jackel), *Sep* (wild cow), *Sor* (wild pig), *Sojo* (flying squirrel) etc. Besides, they also consumed varieties of *Ngoii* (fish) such as *Tinyir*, *Talo*, *Nguri*, *Ngupii*, *Ngujha*, *Tusum* (prawn), *Toch* (crab) etc. All the meat, fish and rice that were relished in their meal were either in boiled or roasted form. All the surplus meat and fish were preserved by drying and smoking them in the *Kera* (tray) which was placed above the fire hearth.

Opo is the name for the kind of liquor consumed by the *Nyishi*. Millet or rice are the ingredients of *Opo* and sometimes both are mixed with the burnt rice husk. However, the most preferred *Opo* is made only of millet. Even the *Opo* which is paid as part of bride price should be made of millet only. The *Opo* is prepared by a simple method through fermentation. The dried *Tem* (millet) or *Iimbin* (husk free rice) are thoroughly boiled in water till it is fully cooked. Then, the cooked *Tem* or *Iimbin* are taken out and spread in *Peche*, *Dola* or *Och* (Bamboo Mat) to cool down. After it is fully cooled, locally made yeast called as *Opop* are thoroughly mixed for fermentation and the mixture are stored in *Pubum* (very large conical bamboo basket) or in *Pah* (medium square or cylindrical sized bamboo basket) which is made air tight with *Kokam* and *Kopak Okh* (banana leaf). In case of rice *Opo* it is stored for 10 to 15 days and for millet *Opo* it is stored for nearly one month for complete fermentation. After it has been become *Nama* (fully fermented), the required quantity is taken out in *Opo Roju* (bamboo basket with small holes) for brewing the *Opo*. Boiling water is poured in very small quantity into the *Opo Roju* by using *Ujuk* (small gourd object). The brewed *Opo* is stored in either gourd or bamboo containers like *Pumchuk*, *Upum*, *Kumju* etc.

Their most preferred liquor is *Opo* and it is an indispensable item in every occasion of the *Nyishi* life. During any social, political and religious ceremonies, *Opo* is extensively used. Not only this, any visitors and guests visiting the house are offered *Opo* as a sign of welcome and love. It is also given as a part of bride price to the bridegroom's family. At home, there is no restriction in its consumption. As such, it is consumed by every man, women and even children. Usually, male folk consume it like water, right from the morning till they sleep. They are so used to it that they are never intoxicated by its use.

II (e) Death and Burial Rites

One of the key elements of burial practices and convictions of all the tribes in Arunachal Pradesh is the belief in life after death. According to their beliefs, a person's physical body and soul separate upon death, while the soul that remains without a body travel to the realm of the dead. This realm of the dead is considered to be the next world which is believed to be populated by the departed souls as well as the spirits. This naturally suggests that in order to placate the spirits responsible for the death as well as to ensure the serenity and satisfaction of the departed soul and the grieving family, burial services must be appropriately carried out.

Same is the belief about death and burial rites among the *Nyishis* of Kamle. They clearly distinguish between natural and unnatural deaths and prescribe specific reasons and burial rituals for the respective death. Since ageing drains a person's life expectancy, death from advanced age is regarded as natural. But when someone passes away too soon from ailments or accidents, such deaths are considered as unnatural. Any unnatural death is thought to be caused by *Almane Wuis* (malevolent spirits) and *Oroms* (ghost). Therefore, they believe that a sick person may die if he fails to

make the necessary offerings to placate the specific *Wui* that is causing the sickness. Besides sickness, other unnatural deaths caused by malevolent *Wui* are murder, drowning, burning, falling from steep hills or gorge, suicide, missing while going to jungle for hunting, fishing etc.

They believe that when someone passes away, their immortal Soul called *Yal Bobo* is carried away by the *Wui* (spirit) who has caused his death and is kept as a *Nyira* (slave) in his house for certain period. Furthermore, they think that the *Yal Bobo* departs the physical body via the shoulder. The *Nyishi*, like their adjacent tribes such as the *Apatani*, *Tagin*, and others, believe in the presence of the land of the dead known as *Neli*, which is thought to be deep beneath the earth. *Yal Bobo* travels from the domain of spirits to *Neli* and become an *Orom* (ghost). They believe that *Neli* is not different from the real world. In *Neli* also there are hills and rivers and *Oroms* living there also cultivate food. It is in *Neli* all the dead husbands and wives meet again, live together and bear children. But after ten years later the ghost parents die and turns into a small butterfly. The *Yal Bobo* does not normally return to trouble the living persons. It is only when they transform into an *Orom*, they revisit frequently to haunt and trouble the living ones. So, to appease the *Oroms*, several rituals and sacrifices are undertaken by the *Nyib* on the request of the affected person. The *Oroms* of unnatural dead are believed to be the most dangerous and evil one. Such *Oroms* are known as *Gir-Girom Oroms*. They may create problems to their living members. So, elaborate rituals and taboo as directed by the *Nyib* has to be properly and strictly maintained by the family and relatives.

The *Nyishi* have their own way of conducting the funeral rites. Consultation of omen through egg is very important in every aspect of their life. As a result, when a person is at the point of his death, the family members place an egg in his hand which goes with the dead body into the grave, so that when his *Yal Bobo* makes the last journey to the other world, it may be able to test the omens on its way. At the death of a person, the whole family members, relatives and well-wishers visit and sit around the corpse for mourning. The dead body is buried on the next day itself if all the family members are present. If not, it may be delayed for one day, so as to enable the far-off family members or relatives to have the last glance of the deceased. When burial preparation is going on, *Nyib* is called to conduct the burial rituals and sacrifices. Sacrificial animals may be of mithun if it a well-off family or a pig or a fowl for poor family. Such sacrifice is called as *Nintan*. The *Nyib* in his chantings calls upon the *Wuis* to look after the wellbeing of the *Yal Bobo* of the dead person in the other world. He also cautioned the *Yal Bobo* about the difficulties and dangers lying on its journey to the land of the *Wuis* and the land of the *Oroms*.

Burial is the only way of disposing the corpse by the *Nyishi*. There is no common burial ground. In fact, it is buried near the house by digging a deep hole large enough for the dead body to be kept. While digging process goes on, *Len Koba* (Bamboo staircase like structure) of about 15 to 20 feet height is built near the burial place. *Len Koba* is constructed considering it as the house for the dead one. It is decorated with bamboo shaves and splits. Very close to the *Len Koba*, a *Riigi* (bamboo altar) is built where animals like mithun, pig, cow or others are sacrificed for the deceased person (*Sob Pelik Nam*). The body of the deceased is wrapped with *Ejj Jeera* (Eri shawl) before being taken for burial. On the day of burial, the corpse is carried to the burial spot from *Pim Perr* (back door) of the house by the male family members or relatives on bamboo stretcher. If the *Koba* of the house is in dilapidated condition then new *Koba* is constructed in the back side of the house to carry away the dead body. The body of the deceased person along with his belongings consisting of food, *Opo*, cloth, utensils etc., is buried into the grave. After lowering the body into the grave, it is covered with pile of woods, stones and finally the soil which was initially dug out. Above the soil filled grave they place a small stone where the chest of the buried corpse is supposed to be. This they do it because they believed that the stone will restrict the movement of the *Orom* (ghost). Above the grave a rough shed or enclosure is built and the whole area is fenced with small bamboo sticks in crisscrossed patterns. A platform is built in front of the shed and upon it two to five replicas of monkeys are made to stand with their arms stretched out. A *Tiche* (smoking pipe) are placed on the mouth of the monkeys; and small bamboo baskets containing *kokam* (leaf) packets of food and tiny *Udus* (bamboo tubes) filled with *Opo* (millet beer) are made to carry on their back. Of all animals, they choose monkey because they believe that monkeys are expert in climbing and negotiating different terrain. As such, they are the permanent porters for the dead person. Such arrangements for the dead person are done by them because of their belief in the other world. Their conception of the other world is the continuation of the earthly world but with changed conditions. Therefore, they have profound worries about the well-being of their departed ones in their long and solitude journey to the land of the *Wuis* and *Oroms*. So, they consider it their prime duty to provide the dead ones with food, drink, tobacco, firewood and also monkeys as porters.

After the burial of the deceased is over, the *Pai Hekak* (purification) ceremony takes place. All the people including family members who participated in the funeral process go down to the nearby streams or rivers for bath or wash up. The *Nyib* concludes the *Pai Hekak* ceremony by sacrificing two fowls separately for the deceased's family and the others. He then breaks an egg, mixes it with water and sprinkles it with a bunch of bamboo leaves over the whole people who assembled there. During this whole process, the *Nyib* through its chanting make an appeal for the peace of the departed *Yal Bobo* (soul), solace for the bereaved family, well-being and long life for those who came for the funeral.

After burial, the *Doga Baa* custom is carried out by one of the eldest family members of the deceased person for 5 to 7 days in case of adult and 3 days for children. In *Doga Baa*, a symbolic meal is prepared for the deceased in a small fire hearth which is built inside the enclosure of the grave. After one year, in the name of the deceased person a final sacrifice is offered in the form of mithun or pig depending on their social status and economic capacity.

III Non- Material Culture

Non- Material Culture refers to abstract or non-physical ideas. As such any aspects of culture that is intangible, that which cannot be touched but can be felt such as songs, dances, music, poetry, beliefs, thoughts, values, etc., are an example of non-material culture. They are living traditions, skills or customs that people practices. Unlike material culture like buildings and artifacts, non-material cultures are something that people experiences. They are also practices that have been passed down from one generation to another. As such, non-material culture can be an inherited traditions as well as a contemporary practice. It gives the people, communities and countries a sense of place and identity.

III (a) Dance

Dance is the stylized rhythmic movement of any parts of the body to express some emotions, ideas or to narrate a story. Dances and music vividly reflect the social and cultural life of the *Nyishi* people. They are spontaneous expression of their feelings and sentiments. The dances performed by them on different occasions are classified as ceremonial dance, war dance and festive or recreational dance. There is no regular training for these dances since they are natural and unprompted. Small girls join the dances of the elders by observing and imitating all the dance movements. Dances for male are very simple and done only on special occasions such as *Nyida* marriage, war dance or victorious dance etc. Earlier they had dance costume only for war dance and such dance was performed only by male. In addition to their regular dress, they used to wear *Sotam* (body armour) made of *Mindik* (Buffalo) or *Sutum* (bear) skins around the chest, *Tas Nara* (black fibre cloak made of palm tree's blade like skin), *Tas Bopa* (black fibre hat made of palm tree's blade like skin) and *Sutum Alak Lagbu* (hand glove made of bear skin).

Regarding other dances they used to wear their usual dress. Man used to wear a loin-cloth and a piece of *Ejj Jeera* wrapped around the body reaching half way to the thighs, a *Bopa* (hat), *Orok*, few bead necklaces and plaited cane rings around the wrist and below the knee. Two types of dress were worn by woman. First one is similar to the man; a plain *Ejj Jeera* wrapped around the body reaching below knee and tied at one side of the shoulder. The other dress consists of a plain black wrap around and a blouse. The ornaments worn by them were varieties of bead necklaces, metal earrings, metal bangles, cane anklets, several plaited cane rings around the waist and metal head dress.

The ceremonial dance of the *Nyishi* is called as *Boyen or Koba Tennam* dance. This dance is a *Nyida* dance which is performed when the bride is brought to the husband's house. At the entrance of the bridegroom's house a temporary bamboo gate is constructed by them to block the entrance of the bride's party. On arriving near the bridegroom's house, the male members of the bride's party start shouting *hur-ru! hur-ru! Hoi! Hoi!* in chorus and dancing by tapping the floor with bent knee and swords brandishing in the air. While dancing they cut down the temporary gate and enter into the compound of the groom's house. Similarly, on the other side the same dancing and shouting are done by the bridegroom's male party. When the dancers of both the party meet, there is jolting between them for few seconds and finally they shout and dance together. At night, again inside the house of the bridegroom, there is ceremonial dancing and singing by the male members of the bridegroom in which they through chorus singing gives a detail account of the of the *Nyida* celebration.

War or victory dance is called as *Pujuk Juknam*. This kind of dance is performed when they return victorious in warfare or hunting. In case of human being, its left hand and hair knot of the slain enemy and in case of animal its head are brought by the warriors to the village. When they arrive in the village, the trophy brought by them is placed at the top of a bamboo pole which is then raised at the centre place of the village called *Gol Pu*. A *Nyib* is invited to perform the *Hur Hamp* ritual by sacrificing mithun or pig so as to forbid the spirit of the slain enemy to harm the slayers. After the sacrificial ritual is over, the adult male members of the village dress up as warrior with *Sotam* (shield made of bear's hide) in left hand and *Orok* (sword) or *Niibu* (spear) in right hand staged a mock fight in the *Golpu* by shouting and dancing so as to celebrate their victory. This kind of dance is termed as *Pujuk Juknam*.

Recreational or festive dance is called as *Nitin* and *Ponung* Dance. *Nitin* dance is a recreational dance which is preformed after the harvesting of crops from the agricultural field. It is usually performed by both girls and women, who dance by swinging their hands and moving their feet forth and back. They dance in group and sometime circle round the bonfire in anti-clockwise. They dance on folk songs which is sung by the dancers themselves or one expert singer sings which is repeated by others in chorus. Another kind of dance is called as *Ponung* dance. It is a festive dance because it is generally performed on special occasions such as during *Boori Boot* festival, for welcoming and entertaining the guest. This dance is led by a *Ponu Nyib* (leader of the *Ponung* group) who should be expert in singing the folk song for the dancers. She holds a sword upside down in the right hand. Such sword has a round iron disc loosely fitted to its hilt which on shaking by the *Ponu Nyib* produces rattling sounds due to its round iron disc. She stands apart from the dancers and her dance move is also different from the dancers. She just moves her body back and forth by

tripping her feet to and fro. She sings, dances and produces musical sound by the sword in her hand. The dancers not only dance on her song and rattling music but also repeat the song in chorus (*See Plate-23*).

III (b) Song and Musical Instruments

The traditional song of the *Nyishi* is called as *Bege*. It is basically a folk song which is sung on different occasions. Such as *Bege* sang on *Nyida* ceremony are *Nyem kamnam*, *Nyida Nicha*, *Nyem Aasha*, *Chitum Duyum* and *Nyida Nitin Bege*. *Naane Denam Bege* is sung during mithun sacrifice, *Sii Nyemar Bege* is sung during funeral, *Gut Gumre Bege* is for prosperity. They do not have many musical instruments. Traditional valuables such as *Tal* (brass plate) and *Huik* (brass bell) are the musical instruments used during dance and marriage ceremonies. Without *Tal Denam* (beating of brass plate) *Nyida* ceremony is considered as incomplete. Some locally made bamboo musical instruments were played during leisure time such as *Gonga* (mouth organ), *Tamak Maksho* (violin), *Pur/Tupu/Pipa* (varieties of flute).

III (c) Games and Amusements

The kind of games played by *Nyishi* was simple yet vigorous requiring a lot of strength and energy. They were played and amused by children, grown up adults and even elderly persons because they gave recreational enjoyment and relaxation to them. Some of the indigenous games played by them were *Bobo Binam* (Swinging to a tree on a rope), *Roka Sinam* (Long and High jump), *Oso Boka Sinam* (Tug of War), *Irr Upuk Aaka Sinam* (Archery), *Muku Pitu* (human see-saw) and *Siida Nyarka Sinam* (stick wrestling). One of the noteworthy features of the traditional games of the *Nyishi* was that, all the games could be played with the locally available materials and as such was inexpensive and easily accessible.

V. Conclusion

Thus, the *Nyishis* have developed their own cultural traits in the process of their social formation without much interaction with the other cultures. They have simple cultural practices which have been transmitted from generation to generation by expert or elderly people. Like the culture of other parts of India, their culture also consists of material and non-material cultural aspects. The Material culture comprised of village structures, types of houses, dresses and ornaments, food and drink habits and death and burial rites. The non-material culture comprised of dance, song, traditional musical instruments and games. All these cultural practices are very simple in nature and reflects their synergy with their natural environment.

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