



Research Paper

## Nyida (Marriage Ceremony) of Nyishi People of Kamle District, Arunachal Pradesh

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### Abstract

Marriage is one of the sacred institutions of the human society. It is considered as must and necessary because it is the bond of establishing a family which is the primary unit of the society. This family further requires inter-relations with other members of the society for the continuation of the roots of existence. As such it is absolutely natural to have a pair of man and woman living together. They are inseparable as many other things in the life of mankind. But this marriage between two souls needs recognition in the society through certain procedures or ceremonies. These marriage ceremonies conducted by every individual has its own uniqueness and beauty. This paper describes the beauty, uniqueness and richness of Nyida (Marriage Ceremony) of the Nyishi people of Arunachal Pradesh.

**Keywords:** Nyida (Marriage Ceremony), purpose, type, Nyishi people of Arunachal Pradesh, India.

### I. Introduction

The institution of marriage is an important aspect of the socio-cultural set up in every society. It plays an important role in reflecting the culture of the people and assuming the continuity of the society. A Finnish philosopher and anthropologist *Edward Westermarck* in his book entitled, "*The History of Human Marriage*", (1894) has defined marriage as 'a relation of one or more men and women which is recognized by custom or law and involves certain rights and duties both in case of the parties entering the union and in the case of children born of it. This definition of marriage is also applicable to the Nyishi of Arunachal Pradesh. Marriage for them is not an isolated phenomenon. It is a socially recognized institution. Mere meeting of girl and boy for sexual gratification cannot be called marriage. It must be accepted and recognized by the society. It is an alliance between two souls whose offspring's have social recognition and approval. So marriage led to procreation, which is essential for survival of all forms of human society.

### II. Literature Review

Social organisation has usually been taken as a synonym for social structure. So, social organisation of a small group or a tribe is the organisation of inter related roles at a particular time within an expression of certain permanent or semi-permanent structural principles. Various writers and scholars have presented social organisation of man in their own way, according to the situation demanded. As a result each of them deal on same subject but differ in their content. The following are some of the important books which were consulted and referred by the researcher in his research paper, such as:

Ahuja, Ram (1993) in his book "*Indian social system*" discussed the concept of traditional joint family, clan organisation, marriage rules, kinship and its categories.

Another authors Singer, M. and John, B.S. (1968) in their book, "*Family, Kinship and Marriage in India*", has discussed separately the descent groups, marriage alliance and affinal transactions and so on.

Bhandari, J.S., (1996) in his book, "*Kinship and family in the North East*" has discussed the clan organization, Kinship and marriage system of different tribes of North – East India.

Chutia, Ramchandra, (2003) in his book, "*The Hillmiri of Arunachal Pradesh*" has talked about the domestic life, pattern of house construction and marriage system of the Nyishi (earlier known as Hillmiri) in detail.

Doshi and Jain, (2001) in their book, "*Social Anthropology*" has given the basic concept of the family, marriage, kinship and clan. It was of great help and guide for the investigator because it served as the starter in her research work on Social organisation of the Nyishi (Hillmiri) of Kamle District of Arunachal Pradesh.

Beside these, few more books and research articles from some reputed Journals, whose details have given in the reference section, were consulted by the researcher while writing this paper.

### **III. Methodology**

The research works for this paper was based on both primary and secondary sources of information. Research tools, especially interview, participant observation and questionnaire were extensively used for the collection of primary data. In order to collect primary data, the researcher carried fieldwork in four Nyishi villages under Gepen circle of Kamle District. Since the four selected villages consisted people of different clans, the researcher conducted interviews with the members of each clan separately in order to get authentic informations. Interviews were conducted with the Nyibus(Priest), Gaonburas(Village heads), Gaonburis(Women village heads), village elders of both sexes and few Government officers belonging from the four selected villages.

Questionnaires concerning the subject were prepared and presented to the educated members of the society in order to get diverse viewpoint in the subject selected by the investigator. Questionnaires immensely helped the researcher to compare and contrast the opinion given by different individuals and deduce appropriate answer and knowledge regarding the chosen subject.

As the researcher herself was from one of the village chosen for field study, participant observation was carried out to a large extend in the process of collection of primary data.

The secondary data were collected largely from books, articles and pamphlets. Further, reading materials from library of State museum and important documents from Statistical Department of Arunachal Pradesh, which were relevant to the subject were also consulted by the researcher.

### **IV. Results And Discussion**

To unite two souls through marriage certain procedures are followed by different people in their own ways. It is interesting to note that Nyishi of kamle District too have their own unique marriage procedures. In earlier time, as soon as the *Nyim Kog Nam* (Proposal for marriage) was conducted, the type and date of Nyida was fixed by *Nyibu* (priest) on examining the yolk of an egg and the chicken's liver. All this was done by *Nyibu* on the recommendations of both the Bride and Bridegroom's families. Immediately after the fixation of the Nyida, *Opo* (rice and millet beer), *Sobs/Mithuns* (Bos Fontalis), bundles of *Edin* (meat of either Sob or Soa), *Erek* (pig), *Haasen Ngoi* (smoked fish) etc start flowing from the house of the bridegroom till the final day of the Nyida. At every *Opo* and *Edin* sent from the house of the bridegroom several traditional valuables in the form of *Maji*, *Tal*, *Bet*, *Tesi* etc should be given by the Bride's parents. Finally on the actual day of the Nyida, the girl is sent off from her home fully decorated with costly traditional ornaments and valuables in a large procession accompanied by her family and Kin members of both paternal and maternal to her husband's house. This final ceremony which takes place in the house of the groom may take 2 to 3 days, where several mithuns, pigs, cows etc are sacrificed to entertain the Bride's people and the guest. It is also the day for the final exchange and assessment of the values of the exchanged gifts between the bridegroom and bride's parties. In the olden time the responsibility of paying the bride price and the arrangement of Nyida were mainly done by the groom's father and his Kin members. However with the passage of time few changes have cropped in the conduction of Nyida. Now-a-days, without proper marriage arrangement the couples start living together. Therefore they conduct Nyida at different intervals. Some do it within few months of living together and some after several years of having children and especially after being financially capable. So in many cases the children themselves participate and witness their own parent's Nyida. Further in the present scenario, it is the bridegroom himself instead of the parents and relatives, who make the greater part of the payment of the Bride price and the Nyida arrangements. But in the present time too, once the couple live together, the husband from time to time sent meat of mithun, pig, cow or any hunted wild animals especially deer along with *Opo* to the wife's house and receive valuables in return. Whatever is given and received is recorded by both the parties so that they have no confusion and arguments on the day of Nyida.

Among the Nyishi there are different types of Nyida. All these Nydia's are almost arranged in same way. The only difference is the amount of payment made by the bridegroom in the form of mithuns, bundles of meat of various animals and *Opo* to the bride's family and the amount of valuables in the form of *Maji*, *Tal*, *Bet*, *Tesi* and *Orok* (sword) received from the bride's side. Thus, economic consideration is the sole reason for classifying the Nyida into five types:-

- ❖ *DAAT NYIDA*
- ❖ *JIRKUM NYIDA*
- ❖ *TADO NYIDA*
- ❖ *DUKUR NYIDA*
- ❖ *TADO HALLE*

#### 4.1 DAAT NYIDA

The Daat Nyida is the largest of all the type of Nyida. It is generally practiced among the wealthier family of the Nyishi society. The *Lump or Potem* (Mediator) is the most important man who goes from the bridegroom's house along with the *Nyibu*, bridegroom, his parents and kinsmen to the bride's house for the fixation of Type and Date of Nyida. They go with 02 mithuns, 18 numbers of bamboo jars filled with *Opo Ponia* (pure filtered millet beer), 18 numbers of bamboo baskets filled with unfiltered *Opo*, 10 to 12 bamboo baskets of smoked meat of either pig, cow, mithun etc and *Topum Ejii/ Zera* (Erie Shawl). This is the most formal approach of Daat Nyida. The Nyishi call this custom as *Nichhachat* and the two mithuns which they carry with them alive are called *Shorsob*. The men who bring the mithuns enter the bride's house from the *Bhag* (front) ladder and the carrier of *Opo* and meat enter from the *Nyoes* (back) ladder. Here, the *Lump* starts playing his role to settle the final date and other essential formalities involved during the time of Nyida. Before the departure the bride and her parents offer *Maji* (Tibetan Brass Bell). It is a symbolic indication of performing a Daat Nyida, the most expensive marriage ceremony of the Nyishi. This *Maji* giving custom is called *Sob Punnam*. After a year of settlement of Daat Nyida the bride's parents give a *Deoghantic* (Big Maji) to the bridegroom's parents. This custom is known as *Magbohiri*. After receiving the Maji, the members from the bridegroom's party again goes to the bride's house with a mithun which they call as *Magbo Sob*. While they go to handover the *Magbo Sob* they again offer *Topum Ejii* and lots of meat and *Opo*. They do it strictly according to the custom of Daat Nyida. When the bridegroom's party goes for the last time, the bride's parents give them *Tal* (Brass plate) which they call as *Kin- Kimbo Yerek* and request them for co-operation and sincerity during the whole process of Nyida. Thus both the parties prepare for the final celebration of the Nyida which last for 2 to 3 days in the bridegroom's house. One point worth mentioning is that, in most cases while performing Nyida the bride's parents share the meat and *Opo* given by the bridegroom's party among his Clan members and Affinal Kins in order to get ornaments and valuables from them. These ornaments and valuables thus received from them could be given to bridegroom's family on the day of the Nyida.

On the day of Nyida, the Bride is sent off from her house richly decorated with several qualities of *Tesi* (Bead Necklaces), *Lacko* (Brass Bangles), *Maji* (Brass Bell), *Bet* (Brass Bowl), *Ju* (Small Brass Bell) and *Tal* (Brass Plate). She holds a valuable *Orok* (Sword) in her hand and a round metal cap called *Dumluk* with many *Ju* hanging from the rim and *Dumpen* on the head. In the ears she wears *Rutak* (metal Earrings) and laded with *Topum Ejii* (Erie Shawl). Only in Daat Nyida the bride has her retinue who is also richly decorated. Finally, the bride proceeds in a procession with the *Nyibu* (Priest), parents, kinsmen and friends both male and female carrying valuables for the affinals when they are received by them. The bridegroom's party especially the village youth waits for them not very far away from the groom's house with *Opo* and food and constantly shouting *hoi...hoi...hur...hur...* which is termed as *Hoi Pekdan*. It is a mocking opposition to the bride's entry to the house. The relatives of the groom keep a goat and a dog ready for sacrifice near the entrance of the house. Before her entry into the house the goat and the dog is sacrificed by them to ensure the well being and prosperity of the newly wedded couple. A senior member usually the mother of the groom holds an egg, which the bride receives before entering the house. When the bride receives the egg and places her legs on the ladder leading to the house through the wooden and bamboo gate made especially for the occasion, the groom's mother help her by her arm up to the house. As the bride is received inside the house, they are made to sit side by side near the hearth while the spirits are propitiated by the *Nyibu*. As soon as the *Nyibu* finishes with his chanting, the groom's Kins and Clan members starts shooting *hur...ru...hur...ru...hoi...hoi* and dances with hand in hand in circular form. This process is called *Koba Tennam* or *Goin Tennam*. It is a sort of welcoming the bride in the new house and asking her to live happily with the new people and new surroundings. It is also a form of disclosing the numbers of mithuns, *Opo* and meat given to the bride's parents and the demand of traditional valuables equivalent to their payment from the bride's family. All these are made in the form of singing and dancing. Then both the parties sit together to negotiate the whole affair of the Nyida over drink with *Morom Edin* (smoked meat). On demand by the groom's party various valuables are given by the bride's family such as costly *Maji*, *Magbo Tesi*, *Habo Tesi*, *Pebar Tesi*, *Ju*, *Bet*, *Tal* and *Orik*. The monetary value of these valuables will be around 5 to 6 lakhs which is almost equivalent to the monetary value of the mithuns, pigs, meat bundles, fish, *Opo* etc given by the groom's party.

On the final day bamboo altar is constructed near the house. This altar is an elaborate structure to which are tied one or two mithuns according to individual capacity. This sacrificial altar is considered to be sacred and taboo for menstruating women. In the beginning of the sacrificial ceremony the village girls come with the rice powder and *Opo* and sprinkle them around the altar. The bride then climbs on the altar and pour bit of rice powder and *Opo* on the head of the mithun. The next part of procedure is followed by the bridegroom's mother who now comes forward with a quantity of rice made into dough mixed with *Opo* and feeds it to the mithuns. After this, the bridegroom following the instruction of the *Nyibu* steps in with *Eri and Upuk* (Bow and Arrow) and shoot one of the mithun which is tied to the altar. No sooner the arrow is released cousin of the bridegroom waiting in readiness gives a swift blow on the head of the mithun which now collapse. Other

Kinsmen then finally kills the animal with long sword. All these sacrifices mentioned are carried on with continuous chanting of the *Nyibu*. The next day, the guest and the bride's party departs taking with them the share of the sacrificial mithun meat. They are royally sent off by the groom's party. However in the groom's house, the kinsmen and those who provided manual services especially the clan members in the Nyida stay back to take gifts in the form of valuables to which the groom's family happily renders.

**Table 1: Items given by Bridegroom's Family to Bride's Parents on Daat Nyida**

Source: Personal Interviews

Sl.No.	Items	Quantity	Money value
1.	<i>Sob/Mithun (Shorsob, Magbosob and three more Sobs)</i>	05	Rs. 50,000 to 80,000 each
2.	<i>Erek/Pig</i>	05	Rs. 15,000 to 20,000 each
3.	<i>Eki/Dog</i>	01	Rs. 200 to 500
4.	<i>Boiled Meat</i>	30 bundles	Rs. 40,000 to 50,000
5.	<i>Smoked Meat</i>	30 bundles	Rs. 40,000 to 50,000
6.	<i>Al/Salt</i>	10 packets	
7.	<i>Opo Pobum/Basket of millet beer</i>	20 baskets	Rs.10,000 to 15,000 each
8.	<i>Opo Ala/Filtered beer in bamboo jar</i>	40 jars	
9.	<i>Topum Eji/Eri Shawl</i>	Nos. vary	Rs. 200 to 1000 each

**Table 2: Valuables given to the Bridegroom's Family by the Bride's Family on Daat Nyida**

Source: Personal Interviews

Sl.No.	Valuables	Quantity	Money Value
1.	<i>Maji/Brass Bell</i>	03 -06 (Nos.vary)	Rs.50,000 to 80,000 each
2.	<i>Tesi/Bead Necklace</i>	06	Rs.10,000 to 50,000 each
3.	<i>Ju/Small Brass Bell</i>	12-15	Rs.5000 to 10,000 each
4.	<i>Lacko/Brass Bangle</i>	02	Rs.30,000 to 40,000 each
5.	<i>Bet/Brass Bowl</i>	01	Rs.5000 to 10,000
6.	<i>Tal/Brass Plate</i>	01	Rs. 20,000 to 30,000
7.	<i>Orok/Sword</i>	01	Rs.40,000 to 50,000

#### 4.2 JIRKUM NYIDA

This Nyida is also arranged almost in the same way as the Daat Nyida but a bit lighter in terms of exchange of mithuns, meat, Opo and valuables between the bride and the groom's parties. The monetary cost of Jirkum Nyida would be around 4 to 5 lakhs. Apart from the exchange of valuables the rest procedures of this Nyida is similar to the Daat Nyida.

#### 4.3 TADO NYIDA

This is the smallest Nyida among the other Nyidas. It is also initiated by the *Lump* (Mediator). However, in this Nyida only the formalities are observed sincerely for the honor of the Bride's parents. A maximum of 02 mithuns along with some bundles of meat and both filtered and unfiltered *Opo* are given by the Bridegroom's family. After receiving it, the bride's family start collecting few valuables like *Orok*, *Lacko*, *Maji*, *Tal*, *Bet*, *Ju* and *Tesi* from the paternal relatives in order to offer to the groom's family. If not, the bride and her family might be mocked by the groom's family for not offering anything in return. All these exchanges takes place in the house of the bride instead of the bridegroom. Further in this form of Nyida the bride isn't taken in procession to the groom's house and neither laded with ornaments and valuables. Instead, on the day of exchange of valuables a grand party is thrown for those who stay at the bride's house on that particular night. Next morning, according to the custom of *Humdo Edin* a pig is killed and the pork meat is offered to everyone as a mark of respect and honour to the bridegroom's family. At the time of departure of the bridegroom along with his bride from her parental house, one *Orok* and enough pork meat and bundles of food are given to them to be eaten on the way to their home. This custom is called *Agle Ebar Kilig Nam*.

#### 4.4 DUKUR NYIDA

This is the last form of Nyida. However, this form of Nyida is rarely practiced among the Nyishi. Dukur Nyida is usually performed if both the Bridegroom and Bride's parties are not satisfied with the former Nyida and negotiate for another Nyida which may be either Daat or Jirkum Nyida depending on the capacity of the families of both the parties.

#### 4.5 TADO HALLE

In the Nyishi society solemnizing of marriage through Nyida is the privilege of those people who can afford to do it. And those who cannot do Nyida there is another type of marriage ceremony recognized by them

which is termed as *Tado Halle*. It requires mere payment of 01 or 02 mithuns to the bride's parents by the bridegroom but no question of return payment of valuables from the Bride's side to the Bridegroom. Many a time such form of marriage ceremony takes place when out of poverty and helpless condition, father may give his daughter in marriage to some influential person in the village for future help and exchange of mithuns.

Lastly, I would like to point out that the valuables exchanged between the Bride and Bridegroom's parties during any type of Nyida either Daat, Jirkum, Tado etc vary according to each individual's capacity. So many a times the same Nyida performed by separate individuals are different and also the valuables thus exchanged. However, the above mentioned exchanges are the most accepted mode of payment that had to be made in each respective Nyida.

## V. Conclusion

In the earlier days the core aspect of conducting marriage ceremony was the payment of Bride price. It was argued by the elder members of the Nyishi society that the bride price had to be paid to the Girl's parents because they not only give birth to the girl but also nurtures and fulfills all her requirements. So, Bride price is considered as valid compensation for such a long time of rearing the girl. But these argument and belief are unaccepted in the present scenario. Now-a-days, larger group of educated Nyishi with broader mental outlook don't prefer rather condemn the practice of bride price for their daughters. On the other hand, they prefer throwing a large reception party in their honors. Instead of valuables they expect the Bridegroom and his family to take good care of their daughter in the new family and new surroundings. Thus, the Nyishi society is in transition due to education and interaction with people of other cultures and societies. However, it is the responsibility of the present generation of the society to be on their guard against the onslaught of modernization, so that their rich culture, heritage and value system could be preserved without much damage.

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## **GLOSSARY**

<i>Nyida</i>	<i>Marriage ceremony</i>
<i>Nyim Kognam</i>	<i>Proposal for Marriage</i>
<i>Nyibu</i>	<i>Priest</i>
<i>Pip chika nam</i>	<i>Examination of Omen on yolk of an Egg</i>
<i>Porok Roksin Kanam</i>	<i>Examination of Omen on Chicken's liver</i>
<i>Opo</i>	<i>Rice and millet Beer</i>
<i>Sob</i>	<i>Mithun ( Bos Fontalis )</i>
<i>Soa</i>	<i>Cow</i>
<i>Erek</i>	<i>Pig</i>
<i>Eki</i>	<i>Dog</i>
<i>Sibin</i>	<i>Goat</i>
<i>Edin</i>	<i>Meat</i>
<i>Tal</i>	<i>Brass Plate</i>
<i>Maji</i>	<i>Brass Bell</i>
<i>Bet</i>	<i>Brass Bowl</i>
<i>Ju</i>	<i>Small Brass Bell</i>
<i>Tesi</i>	<i>Necklace of colourful stone beads</i>
<i>Lacko</i>	<i>Brass Bangles</i>
<i>Rutak</i>	<i>Silver and Brass Earrings</i>
<i>Dumluk and Dumpen</i>	<i>Metal Headgear</i>
<i>Orok</i>	<i>Sword</i>
<i>Lump/Potem</i>	<i>Mediator between Bridegroom and Bride's parties</i>
<i>Opo Ponia</i>	<i>Pure filtered Millet Beer</i>
<i>Topum Ejji/Zera</i>	<i>Eri Shawl</i>
<i>Bhag</i>	<i>Front</i>
<i>Nyoes</i>	<i>Back</i>
<i>Eri Upuk</i>	<i>Bow and Arrow</i>