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Nyida (Marriage Ceremony) of the Nyishi of Upper Subansiri 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, a primary unit of the society. This family further requires interrelations with other members of the society for the continuation of their roots of existence. Thus, 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 the mankind. But this marriage between two souls needs recognition in 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 the Nyida (marriage ceremony) of the Nyishi people of Arunachal Pradesh, India. 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 datas. The secondary data's were collected largely from books, articles and materials from Museum.

Keywords: Nyida (marriage ceremony), purpose, Nyishi people of Arunachal Pradesh, India

1. 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. Indian writers like *D.N.Majumdar* and *T.N.Madan* define marriage as, 'it ensures a biological satisfaction (that of sex) and a psychological satisfaction (that of having children) on the individual plane and on the wider collective plane, it ensures a two-fold survival that of the group and its culture.'

This definition of marriage is also applicable to the Nyishi of Arunachal Pradesh. Marriage for them isn't isolated phenomenon. It is a socially recognized institution. Mere meeting of boy and girl 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 leads to procreation, which is essential for survival of all forms of human society.

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 Upper Subansiri District too have their own unique marriage procedures. In the earlier time, as soon as the *Nyim Kognam* (proposal for marriage) was conducted, the type and date of Nyida (marriage ceremony) was fixed by Nyibu (priest) on examining the yolk of an egg and the chicken's liver. All these are done by the 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 Frontalis), bundles of *Edin*(meat) of either *Soa*(cow),*Erek*(pig),dried fish etc, start flowing from the house of the bridegroom till the final day of Nyida.At every *Edin* and *Opo* sent from the bridegroom's house 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 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 gift between both the bridegroom and the bride's parties. Further, in the earlier days, the responsibility of paying the bride price and arrangement for Nyida, were mainly done by the groom's father and his kin members. However, with the passage of time few changes have cropped up in the performance of the Nyida. Now-a-days, without proper marriage arrangement the couples start living together. Therefore, they perform 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 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 argument on the day of Nyida.

Among the Nyishi, there are different types of Nyida. All these Nyida 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 four types:-

- DAAT NYIDA
- JIRKUM NYIDA
- TADO NYIDA
- DUKUR NYIDA

1.1. DAAT NYIDA

The Daat Nyida is the largest of all 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 2 mithuns, 18 numbers of bamboo jars filled with *Opo Ponia* (pure filtered opo), 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 eji/Zera* (Erie shawl). This is the most formal approach of Daat Nyida. The Nyishi call this custom as *Nichhachat* and the 2 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 or his parents offer Maji (Tibetan bell). It is a symbolic indication of performing Daat Nyida, the expensive marriage ceremony. The Maji giving custom is called *Sob Punnam*. After a year of settlement of Daat Nyida; the bride's parent's gives a *Deoghantic* (*Big Maji*) to the bridegroom. This custom is known as *Makbohiri*. After receiving the Maji, the members from the bridegroom's family goes to the house of the bride again with a mithun, which they called *Makbo Sob*. While they go to handover Makbo Sob they again offer Topum Eji and lots of meat and Opo. They do it strictly according to the custom of the 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 day 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 *Tesis* (necklace of beads), *Lackos* (bangles), *Majis* (large brass bell), *Bet* (brass bowl), *Ju* (small brass bells) and *Tal* (large brass plate). She holds a valuable *Orok* (sword) in her hand and a round metal cap called *Dumluk* with *Ju* (small metal bells) hanging from the rim and *Dumpen* on the head. In the ears she wears *Rutak* (metal earrings) and laded with *Topum Eji* (*eri shawl*). Only in Daat Nyida the bride has her retinues who is also richly decorated. She 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 from the groom's house with Opo and food, constantly raising shouts of *hoi...hoi...hur...hur*, which is termed as *Hoi-Pekdan*. It is a mocking opposition to the bride's entry to the house. There is much dancing accompanied by shouts and swinging of sword. After the reception they proceed together to the house of the groom who receives his bride on the gate of his house. He leads her by holding her by the right hand to the entrance of 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 are 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 a wooden and bamboo gate made especially for the occasion, the bridegroom's mother helps 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 (priest). As soon as the Nyibu finishes with his chanting, the groom's Kins and Clan members starts shouting *hur...ru.ru...hur...ru, hoi...hoi* and dancing hand in hand in circular form. This process is called *Kobatendom* or *Goin Tennam*. It is a sort of welcoming the bride in the new home 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 *Majis*, *Makbo Tesi*, *Habo Tesi*, *Pebar Tesi*, *Ju*, *Bet*, *Tal* and *Orok*. 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 bamboos altar is constructed near the house. This altar is an elaborate structure to which are tied one or two mithuns according to individual's 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 rice powders 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 the procedure is followed by 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 is the arrow 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 sacrificial mentioned are carried on with continuous chanting of the Nyibu. The next day the guest and the bride's party departs taking with them shares 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 service, 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.

Sr. No.	Items	Quantity	Price
1.	SOB/Mithuns (Shorsob, Makbosob and three more Sobs)	05	
2.	Erek/ Pig	02	
3.	Eki/Dog	01	
4.	Boiled Meat	30 Bundles	Rs 40000-45000
5.	Smoked Meat	30 Bundles	Rs 40000-45000
6.	Al/Salt	10 Packets	
7.	Opo Pobum/basket of millet beer	20 Baskets	
8.	Opo Ala/Filtered millet & rice beer in bamboo jar	40 jars	
9.	Topum Eji/Eri shawl	Nos. vary	

Table 1: Items Given by Bridegroom's Family to Bride's Parents on Daat Nyida
Sources: Personal Interviews

Sr. No.	Valuables	Quantity	Price
1.	Majis /Brass metal Bells	03 -06 (Nos.vary)	Rs 50,000 - 80,000 each
2.	Tesis/Bead Necklace	06	Rs.10,000 - 50,000 each
3.	Ju/ Small Brass Bells	12 -15	Rs.5000 – 10,000 each
4.	Lacko/Brass Bangles	02	Rs.30,000 – 40,000 each
5.	Bet/Brass Bowls	01	Rs.5000 – 10,000
6.	Tal/Brass Plate	01	Rs.20,000 – 30,000
7.	Orok/Sword	01	Rs.40,000 – 50,000

Table 2: Valuables Given to the Bridegroom's Family by the Bride's Family on the Daat Nyida
Source: Personal Interviews

1.2. JIRKUM NYIDA

Jirkum 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 both 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 procedure of Jirkum Nyida is similar to the Daat Nyida.

1.3. TADO NYIDA

It is the smallest Nyida among the other Nyida. 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 2 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, Ju, Maji, Tesi and Bet from paternal relatives in order to offer it to the Groom's family. If not the bride and her family might be mocked by the Groom's family. All these exchanges take place in the house of the bride instead of the bridegroom. Further in this Nyida, the bride isn't taken in procession to 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 at 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 honor to the bridegroom's family. At the time of departure of the bridegroom along with his bride from her parental house, a Orok and enough pork meat and bundles of food are given to eat on the way to his home. This custom is called *Agle-ebar Kilig Nam*.

1.4. DUKUR NYIDA

The last form of Nyida is the Dukur 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 former Nyida and negotiate for another Nyida which may be either Daat or Jirkum Nyida depending on the capacity of the families of the Bridegroom and the Bride.

1.4.1. Tado Halle

The Nyida form of marriage is the privilege of those people who can afford to do it in the Nyishi society. And those who can't do Nyida there is another type of marriage recognized by them which is termed as Tado Halle. It requires mere payment of 1 or 2 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 also 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 time the same Nyida performed by separate individuals are different and also the valuables exchanged. However, the above mentioned exchanges are the most accepted mode of payment that had to be made in each Nyida.

2. Conclusion

In the earlier days the core aspect of conducting marriage was the payment of bride price. It was argued by the elder members of the society that bride price had to be paid to the girl's parents because they not only gives birth to the girl but also nurtures and fulfills all her requirements. So, bride price is considered valid compensation for such a long period of rearing the girl. But these argument and belief are unaccepted in the present scenario. Now-a-days, greater portions 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 and party in their honour. 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 interaction with the people of other cultures and societies. However, it is the responsibilities 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

Nyida	:	Marriage ceremony
Nyim kognam	:	Proposal for Marriage
Nyibu	:	Priest
Pip chikanam	:	examination of Omen on Yolk of an egg
Porok Rokchin kanam	:	examination of Omen on chichken's liver
Opo	:	Rice and Millet Beer
Sob	:	Mithun(Bos Fontalis)
Erek	:	Pig
Eki	:	Dog
Sibin	:	Goat
Edin	:	Meat
Maji	:	Brass Bell
Tal	:	Brass Plate
Bet	:	Brass Bowl
Ju	:	Small Brass Bell
Tesi	:	Necklace of colourful stone beads
Lackos	:	Brass Bangles
Rutak	:	Silver and Brass Earrings
Dumluk and Dumpen	:	Metal Headgear
Orok	:	Sword
Lump/Potem	:	Mediator
Opo Ponia	:	Pure filtered Opo
Topum Eji/ Zera	:	Eri Shawl
Bhag	:	Front
Nyoes	:	Back
Eri and Upuk	:	Bow and Arrow