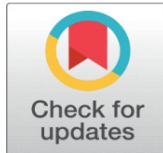


TRADITIONAL ECONOMIC INSTITUTION OF NYISHI OF KAMLE DISTRICT, ARUNACHAL PRADESH

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ABSTRACT

The traditional economic activities of mankind were to great extent regulated by prevailing ecology and environment. In every human society the main objective of economics was to satisfy the physical means of subsistence of people. The distinct living conditions due to its geographical barriers and history of long isolation from the mainstreams, the economic life of Nyishi of Kamle District, Arunachal Pradesh like other societies, has been continuously evolving and has undergone many changes on different lines as compared to the rest of the country. They remained confined to their respective society and evolved their own economic institutions having certain unique features. The evolution and growth of the economic life of the people has been very slow and appeared to be unchangeable before the dawn of India's independence in 1947. It has been seen that the traditional economy of people revolved around the natural world and its forces. Thus, their traditional economic life was different from rest of the people of India. And this difference was more marked in the method of agriculture, hunting, fishing and livestock etc which were the most important economic activities for them in their hilly terrains.

Keywords: Traditional Economic Institutions, Different Economic Activities, Reasons and Purposes, Nyishi People of Kamle, Arunachal Pradesh

1. INTRODUCTION

Economics is one branch of social science that studies the production, distribution and consumption of goods and services. It is believed that the term economics comes from the ancient Greek used for management of a household administration. In every human society the main objective of economics was to satisfy the physical means of subsistence of people. There are number of definitions on economics. Raymond Firth states that, "Economic Organization is a type of social action which involves the combination of various kinds of human services with one and other and with non-human goods in such a way that they serve given ends"

Due to its geographical barriers and history of long isolation from the mainstreams, the economic life of the people of Arunachal Pradesh like other societies, has been continuously evolving and has undergone many changes on

different lines as compared to the rest of the country. It has also been seen that the traditional economy of these people has resolved around the natural world and its forces. As Verrier Elwin, has rightly pointed out, “for centuries, the real ruler of the tribal bodies has been environment; it has shaped their bodies, directed their arts, forced babble on the tongues, it has been their governor, their policy maker”.

There was some interaction between the Nyishi people and various tribes of Arunachal Pradesh and as well as with the people of the neighboring state especially with Assam, yet the extent of this interaction was too small to have any major impact on the traditional economic life of the people. As a result, their economic life has advanced on different line when compared with other people of the state, owing to isolation and their unique living condition resulting from difficult terrain. The traditional economic activities practiced by them in the past have been described as follows:-

2. AGRICULTURE

Agriculture was the primary traditional occupation of the Nyishi. It was the backbone of the people. As such their traditional festival was associated with the agricultural practices and they were observed in particular season corresponding to various phases of crop cultivation. The kind of agriculture method adopted by them was shifting cultivation, which is also known as Slash and Burn or Jhum cultivation. For the Nyishi it was addressed as Nungo. Mostly the virgin land in the forests and on the hill slopes were used by them for jhumming for several generations. Since it was done in slope areas in the hills, it was not an easy one and quite hazardous and toilsome. Jhum cultivation was supported by other economic activities such as gathering, hunting, fishing and breeding livestock. Since concept like ownership of land was not developed in the remote past, all the village lands whether productive or unproductive originally belonged to the community as a whole. As such every members of the village were free to cultivate, graze livestock construct house etc in the village land until the evolution of concept of ownership of land.

The Nyishi adopted various tools and techniques in the cultivation. Most of them were indigenous which were made of bamboo, cane, wood and stone. But later on some iron tools were also used by them, especially Orok (sword), Hiigi (Axe), Kar (spade), Khurpi (Hoe) and Riga Lolom (knife) which were put into use for miscellaneous purposes, like clearance of the jungles, cutting down the trees, construction of shulu (fencing) etc. They used Ukk (hand weeder) for removing weeds in the field, Agle (bamboo and cane basket) for collection of food grains, Aabar (bamboo and cane basket) with hole at the bottom end for collection of firewood and Oobo (rain coat made of bamboo) for protection from rain and heat. Chuchak (small bamboo and cane basket) was used for carrying seeds for seedlings. Nara (bamboo or cane backpack) was used by men folk during hunting, fishing, gathering etc. It was one of the oldest practices of agriculture by which tribal people sustained their needs. In this economic system, the farmers grow food for their family and small surplus were bartered for other products. Furthermore in this type of cultivation, the tribal people rotate the field instead of rotating the crops. The agriculture field was generally abandoned after two or three years of harvesting and people shift to another field, leaving the

old site for natural fertilization. The entire grown up members in the family were the unit of production as well as consumption. In some cases Nyira(slaves) were also engaged in cultivation by the owner.

The Nyishi refer jhum cultivation as RikthNungo. The first process of cultivation was the selection of suitable land through WiyuKokanam (examination of chicken liver and egg yolk to ascertain the suitability of land for cultivation). At times dream also played an important role in selecting a plot of land. Generally, nearby hills are selected for cultivation especially the land which receives sufficient sun's rays so as to protect the crop from wild animals as well as for better care of the crops. Selection of site was followed by cutting of jungles. Orok(sword), Hiigi(axe) and Miidi(metal hand glove to rub stones for igniting fire) were used to clear the forest. Generally, clearance of forest is done by the male folk and women support them by preparing and providing food and Opo (millet beer) at regular interval. After the cutting process is over, the site is left for almost 2 to 3 weeks for complete dry up. From the month of February till April are the periods when the processes of shifting cultivation takes place.

After the drying process was completed, the next stage was to set fire to all the dried trees and grasses. They used miidi and dried sticks and leaves for setting fire. After burnt down, they collected burnt up logs and woods in one place and again burn them completely till they turn into ashes. They did not use any manure rather the ashes were left over the field for manure purpose after the final completion of the burning process. The process of setting fire was followed by sowing seeds. They sowed the seeds by EmchikChiknam (dibbling),Kiilik/Dulik (digging) and Aam Pagnam(randomly spreading of seeds). This process was harmoniously done by both male and female folk. Dibbling was done by women by using Lolom (dibbling stick) and man was engaged in digging. For example, Topp (maize) seeds were dibbled, Egin and Engh (local -potatoes) were dug under the soil and Tem (millet) seeds were spread randomly over the field. To protect the crops from wandering animals, they erected Sulu (fencing) made of bamboo and wood logs. The bamboos and wood logs were tied by rope made out of cane and climber plants. The fencing surrounds the entire agricultural field. The fencing was also the symbol of one's owned agricultural field. They also constructed a Nungo Tabo (rest house) in the field. In this NungoTabo they took rest and cooked their meal. Also, the harvested crops were kept in the Nungo Tabo for temporary period till they were taken to Nusu (Granary which were located in the village).

Aam/ Embin(rice) Topp(maize) and Tem(millet) were the main crops cultivated by them. They also cultivated vegetables in the jhum cultivation like Yuluk(chilli), Taap(pumpkin), Egin and Engh (local potato) Peran (ocal beans), Muku(cucumber), Moble(local watermelon) etc. All the harvested crops especially rice and millet were first stored in the Nungo Tabo and then gradually shifted to the Nusu(Granary). According to the requirements of the family crops are taken out from the Nusu as and when needed. Their staple food were Tem(millet), Topp (Maize), Imbin (Rice) and local potatoes. They also grew fruits like Untri(orange), Tubb (sugarcane), Kopak (banana) etc.

Thus, the above mentioned were the processes which were involved in the Jhum cultivation of the Nyishi. Since, the harvested foods from Jhum cultivation were not self sufficient for them, so to fulfill the economic shortage of the family, they were engaged in other economic activities such as gathering, hunting, fishing, domestication of animals, trade etc.

3. GATHERING

Gathering of eatable products from jungle or nearby areas was another secondary occupation of the Nyishi. It means collecting fruits, leaves, and plants etc that grow wild for food. Though their areas were covered with dense forest and

infected with wild and dangerous animals and leeches, they marched on to such areas to meet the food shortage of the family. At times, they even marched a long distance to procure such eatable products. Green leafy vegetables such as Hor, Tapin, Honyor, Hojik, Takapaya, Nyiriketc were initially gathered from jungle. Gradually all these vegetables began to be grown in the Nongo or near their house in the form of kitchen gardening. Another important food item that was gathered by them was Hiku, Hichur, Hiba, etc (tender bamboo shoots of different types). Tender bamboo shoot that was brought from jungle were cut into different shapes and preserved at home for consumption. They were used as spices in cooking vegetables, meat and fish. They were used in both raw and dried form. Dried bamboo shoot was called Huyub. Tilli, Tukuketc were some wild fruits that were collected from the jungle. Kullu (wild banana) was collected from jungle to feed pigs and also used as food to trap rats and birds during Odd Gonam.

4. HUNTING

Like the entire human race, hunting was one of the earliest occupations of the Nyishi before they learnt the art of cultivation and made it their permanent means of livelihood. Even after agriculture became their primary occupation because of various adversities associated with jhum cultivation, hunting was one of most preferred subsidiary economic activity of the Nyishi. However, in the present day, hunting is considered as unlawful activities and is termed as poaching, which means unlawful killing, trapping or capture of any animals and birds. Any person can be arrested and imposition of fine for being involved in poaching.

Hunting was practiced to hunt wild animals and birds for food, trade or recreation. Hunted animals and birds from the jungle were considered as the most precious food items. As such it was given to the most closed and loved ones. Even during marriage the hunted animals and birds had great role to play. Special guests in the marriage are supposed to be fed with such food items. The hilly and far off areas in the villages which were covered with dense forest and where jhum cultivation was not done were used as hunting spots. This hunting domain was owned by the whole villagers and anybody could hunt at his own will in any part of such forest area. The hunting tools used by them were in the form of Orok(sword), IrrUpuk(bow and arrow), Niibu (spear), sharp stone tools and different trap methods such as Odd, Gore, Patak, Odap, Guju, Guchik etc for trapping different animals. Hunting has also religious implications involving ritual and taboos. Successive failures in hunting are considered as Yubur(misfortune). In that case certain rituals are performed by the hunter with the help of Nyib (priest) and certain taboos are maintained by him. Some of the animals hunted by them were Seb (monkey), Sor (wild pig), Shudum (deer), Shutum (bear), Seep (wild cow), Takh (squirrel), etc. In group hunting, the person who shot the animal is considered to be actual owner of the hunt and as such the head and the skin of the animal is given to him. Intestines of the hunted animal are cooked and eaten by the members of the hunting group in the jungle itself. Rest of the body parts of the hunt are equally divided among the hunting members after they return back to village.

Besides hunting, fowling in nearby forest areas is another traditional subsidiary occupation of the Nyishi. Trapping, shooting and killing of number of birds is solely for consumption purpose. Some of birds hunted by the Nyishi are Pichik Paga(hornbill), Pumb(eagle), Tipin(Bat), Pirsin-Pirik (wild hen or cock), Takh(squirrel)etc.

Hunting was the most preferred secondary economy activity. It was of great help in meeting the food scarcity of the family during Dirr Yare period (famine). The

meat of the hunted animals and birds were used for different purposes such as for personal consumption, barter trading, gifting to the relatives and for marriage ceremonies. Flesh of hunted animals are also given by the daughters to her parents and paternal Kins and Kins in order to receive traditional ornaments and valuables such as Maj, Tal, Bet, Takom, Ju, Lacko, Kotak etc.

5. FISHING

In olden days fishing were done in the river or stream as gifted by nature. No man made fishing pond or structure was constructed for catching fish. However, different techniques were adopted for fishing which included spearing, angling, trapping and hand catching. It was one of the traditional economic activity where both male and female could be equally involved. Koros (rivers) like Kamle, Subansiri and their tributaries and streams were the main areas for carrying out fishing activities by the Nyishi. Both men and women folk were very expert in catching fish from the designated areas. As a result they never returned empty hand whenever they went for fishing. Moreover, in those days plenty of fish were available because of less population and protective environment condition.

The Nyishi used various indigenous techniques for catching fish such as, Lipum, Sibok, Sip penam, TakomPenam, Rip Binam etc. Poison made from barks, roots and fruits of certain trees were used for catching fish. Indigenous tools like Ehkar (Hook and rope), Nibu (spear), Roju (bamboo basket) etc were also used by them for fishing. Free hand fishing was also carried out in small rivers and streams where fish was naturally found in abundant. Free hand fishing was a favorite pastime for Nyishi women and children.

Various locally made poisons were used by them to catch fish especially in winter. The bark of trees like Thnir and Ris, the fruits of Taag Chaa tree and roots of Ripik tree were used for preparing the poison. Though fishing was a subsidiary economic activity, it greatly affected the economic condition of the Nyishi. They were used not only for personal consumption but were also a product which was shared among relatives. In social events especially in marriage there was huge demand for fish. The dried fish is one of the special food items which are fed to the respective marriage party and also to the guests.

6. LIVESTOCK

Rearing of animals and fowls were another traditional subsidiary economic activity of the Nyishi since time immemorial. Different animals and fowls were tamed for different purposes. Some of these animals were kept and taken care in built up areas within the premises of the house and some were left unattended to graze freely in the surrounding jungle. Taming of animals and fowls were important not only for economic reasons but it also had a great role to play in the social and religious life of the Nyishi. During the occasion of marriage, birth ceremony, death rite, settlement of disputes, cultivation etc exchange and killing of different animals and fowl takes place. Even during conduction of different religious rituals also various animals and fowl were sacrificed.

Of all the reared animals, the most important and prestigious animal was Sob (Mithun) whose scientific name is *Bos Frontalis*. One who possesses the maximum number of Mithuns is considered to be the richest man in the Nyishi society. So, mithun was a status symbol and as such determined the economic status of Nyishi in their society. Though Mithun is a tamed animal, it is left open in the jungle to graze freely. Only occasionally they are brought in the village to feed them with salt by the owner

or caretaker. So, mithun is basically a semi-domestic animal. In the Nyishi society, bride is obtained by payment of bride price in the form of Mithuns. In festivals and in religious rituals, sacrifice of Mithun along with other animals and fowls takes place. Its flesh is one of their favorite delicacies. Mithun also served as mode of payment during settlement of disputes or crimes committed.

Next to Sob, another animal which occupied an important part in the socio-religious life of the Nyishi is Erek (pig). In every household several pigs are reared because of its utility. Along with mithun, pigs also formed a part of bride price, payment for settlement of cases and sacrificial animal in festivals and religious rituals.

Besides mithun and pig, another important livestock of the Nyishi are Porok (fowls). They are kept in large numbers by every family. The egg and liver of Porok are essential items for divination. As such they are of great demand for sacrifices in the socio-religious ceremonies or rituals. Whenever any near and dear ones visit the house from far off fowls are killed and its cooked meat are served to them. Other animals which are reared by them solely for human consumption are Aapaseh (cow), Siibin (goat), lik (dog) etc.

7. TRADE

It is generally said that the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh lived in isolation from the rest of the world and also that there was very little interaction amongst the various tribes. Yet, from the very early days, various tribes had established trade relations amongst themselves and with the outside world. The trade which the tribals did was rather a compulsion for them since they had to depend on the outside world for the supply of some of the basic requirements of life such as salt, metals, cotton and woolen cloths etc.

Similarly, the Nyishi of Kamle since long time conducted trade relations with the plain people of Assam and also had inter-tribal trade relations with neighbouring tribes like Apatanis and Tagins. The entire trading system was based on barter system because use of money as a medium of exchange was not known to them until the coming of British.

According to Alexander Mackenzie, the hills of the Nyishi areas have different mountain passes called Duars across their foothills, which served as routes of communication and contact with the plains of Assam. British records mentioned nine (9) passes in Darrang and Charduar Districts and six (6) passes in Lakhimpur District of Assam. These definitely related to the passes through the plains of Assam. A considerable volume of trade was carried on during the Ahoms and the British periods between the Nyishi and plains people of Assam through these passes.

For several generations the Nyishi of Kamle visited the plains of Assam especially during cold season for hunting, fishing or conduction of trade. The trade carried out by the Nyishi with the people of Assam on regular basis consisted of hill products such as ginger, chilies, bamboo-shoots, rubber, madder (dye), wax, etc. In return they imported Assamese items such as salt, iron implements like daos, knives and axes, metal utensils, clothes, beads etc. Animals like goat, pig, cow etc were also brought from Assam. Sometimes the Nyishi used to conduct direct trade relation with the people of Assam and sometime it was through Apatanis as an intermediary between them and the Assamese people. Moreover the Apatanis not only regularly imported goods from Assam, but they themselves produced cotton cloth, iron implements and salty substance made of vegetable ash, which were bartered for

Nyishi products like pigs, dogs, fowl, Mithuns, fiber rain-coats, fiber rain-hats, plaited cane and grass belts, Tibetan beads, bells and daos.

The Nyishi of Kamle had no direct trade relation with Tibetans. But articles of Tibetan origin could be seen in every Nyishi villages in the form of stone bead necklaces of different colour, bell-metal discs strung into women's belts, swords and other brass valuables. In fact, it was through one of their neighbouring tribe namely Tagins, they could procured all these Tibetans goods. In exchange they bartered with Tagins various forest products such as hides, skins, musk, madder, dyes, cane-rope, ginger, chilies, meat of domestic and wild animals etc. As a result, the trade between the Nyishis and the Tagins has a great significance in their economic and social life because in the Nyishi world, the Tibetan articles like Tal, Maj, Tiisi, lacko, Ju etc are very important as the traditional medium of exchange and also as ceremonial payments during marriage and settlement of disputes.

8. INDIGENOUS INDUSTRIAL ACTIVITIES

Traditional unorganized industrial activities were carried on by the Nyishi to meet their daily uses. These industrial activities were very primitive and cannot be compared with the modern day industrial works. Such industries constituted an important segment of their economy because it not only led to the fulfillment of their socio- economy objectives but also offered excellent opportunities to make use of the natural resources which were abundantly found in their areas. Bamboo and cane was one such product which were abundantly gifted by nature and as such found in every Nyishi village. As a result cane and bamboo became common material to be used by them for construction of houses, bridges, furniture, household utensils, fences and other necessities of daily life. Not only socially but ceremonially also bamboo and cane were largely used by them.

They were expert in making various household products from bamboo, cane and wood. Examples of such household items were plates, spoons, tongs, containers, jugs, mugs, baskets, mats, winnowing fans for husking rice etc. Other popular indigenous crafts made by them were Bopa(cane head gear) in different shapes and sizes for man; and Uuk (cane brassieres), anklets and earrings for woman. Various bamboo pipes called Tiiche were made for smoking of locally made tobacco called Daa. Water from nearby stream or other sources were carried by them using bamboo pipes called Selek. In early days there were no flour grinding machine. So, they used Chipper and Edii made of wooden log for pounding and grinding Aam (rice) and Tem (millet), which were the staple food consumed by them. They were expert in making many agricultural implements of stones, irons, cane, bamboo and wood, such as Lolom, Miidi, Ukk, Hiigi, Agle, Aabar, Oobo(rain coat made of bamboo splits) etc. Orok (swords), Rikchik (knife), Hiigi (axe), Kar (spade), Lolom (dibbling stick) etc were fitted with beautifully handmade bamboo and cane handles. Similarly by using the same above mentioned materials various hunting and fishing tools were also made by them such as Irr - Upuk, Niibu, Roju, Nara, Shotam (shield) etc.

Cane and bamboo were also used for making strings, ropes and decoration items for marriage and religious rituals. Cane and bamboo baskets of various shapes and sizes were made according to their utility such as Agle, Aabar, Uddu etc. Opp made of either bamboo or cane was used for winnowing and sieving the agricultural products. Peche was other bamboo and cane items used for drying food grains and other edible items. Family members usually father, mother and children ate together in large bamboo plate which was called as Kuku/Cherap.

Weaving was the occupation of womenfolk throughout the Nyishi territory. Nothing can be said with certainty about when and how the art of weaving did was learnt by the Nyishi women. Nevertheless, weaving became a part of woman's day work. Weaving was both an economic activity as well an art of the Nyishi women. While weaving they were very particular about colours and had a great sense of colour combination. Their weaving products included Gale (wrap skirt), Tango (man's jacket), Muna (bag), (Hogom/Hogen) loin-cloth, waist bands etc.

Thus, the traditional unorganized industrial activities of the Nyishi found a vivid expression through their fine work in bamboo, cane and weaving which was of high and utilitarian value.

So, it has been found that the economic life of the Nyishi was depended to a great extent on the Mother Nature such as on the climatic conditions and geographical features. As a result their life revolved around cultivation, hunting, fishing, livestock and indigenous handicrafts. In addition to these, they remained isolated for a long period from the rest of the world, due to which they evolved their own economic institutions having certain unique characteristics.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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None.

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