

Dera Natung Government College Research Journal**CONTENTS**

Sl No	Articles	Author	Pages
1	Agricultural Rituals as the Ceremonial Cycle of the Nyishi Tribe	Tame Ramya	1
2	A Study on Attitude of Pre-Service Secondary Teachers toward Human Rights Education and Peace Education.	Sony Dupak TageAmpa	17
3	The Socio-economic life of the Nyishis' of Arunachal Pradesh	Bengia Tada	23
4	Some Scientific Customary Health Practices of Hindu Brahmins of Nalbari and Barpeta Districts of Assam, India.	Hiranmaya Sharma	33
5	Historical perspective of trade relation between the Nyishi and Tibetan	Yab Rajiv Camder Dr Philip Mody Tok Kumar	47
6	Role of Taklung Dzong among the Monpas of Kalaktang Area: A Preliminary Study	Dr Tage Habung	53
7	Implementation and Monitoring of Rural Development Schemes –A Study of Select Districts in Arunachal Pradesh	Millo Yasung	65
8	Mopin And Its Sacred Ritualistic Aspects	Eli Doye	75
9	The Buffer Zone: British Perception of the Khampti and Singpho in the early 19th Century.	Rubu Tani	81
10	Status of Women in India and in Arunachal Pradesh	Dr. Ram Krishna Mandal	90

Agricultural Rituals as the Ceremonial Cycle of the Nyishi Tribe

Tame Ramya

Assistant Professor

Department of Anthropology,

School of Human & Environmental Sciences

Saint Claret College, Ziro - 791120

Mobile: +91-9402034048; E-Mail: taramya@live.com

Abstract

The present paper intends to narrate some agricultural rites and rituals, specifically of jhum cultivation of the Nyishi tribe of Arunachal Pradesh, taking Kurung Kumey district as the case study. These rites form the part of ritual cycle and lingering as crucial in the community lives in relation to agriculture. Nyishis, the people belong to one of the major tribal groups of Arunachal Pradesh i.e. Nyishi are dependent on jhumming, wet-rice cultivation, and a cash economy for their subsistence needs. Indeed, for several households, the cash sector is crucial in enabling them to meet their subsistence needs in present day situation. Notwithstanding the extent to which Nyishis are dependent on an external economy, jhum agriculture is regarded as the dominant form of subsistence production within the community. This particular perception of jhumming is based on two factors: first, an understanding that jhum agriculture predates wet-rice agriculture and second, the continuing cultivation of jhum which has ensured the persistence of a religious and ritual life that remains organised around the jhum cycle.

Key Words: *Nyishi, Agriculture, Rite, Ritual Cycle, Jhum, Cultivation, Subsistence.*

Prologue

Nyishis, the people belong to one of the major tribal groups of Arunachal Pradesh i.e. Nyishi are dependent on jhumming, wet-rice cultivation, and a cash economy for their subsistence needs. Indeed, for several households, the cash sector is crucial in enabling them to meet their subsistence needs. Notwithstanding the extent to which Nyishis are dependent on an external economy, jhum agriculture is regarded as the dominant form of subsistence production within the community. This particular perception of jhumming is based on two factors: first, an understanding that jhum agriculture predates wet-rice agriculture and second, the continuing cultivation of jhum which has ensured the persistence of a religious and ritual life that remains organised around the jhum cycle.

In this paper, I present a description of some rites which form part of the cycle of ritual

activities in Kurung Kumey district, the study area in order to show its crucial importance in the community and in relation to jhum agriculture, despite the fact that Nyishi possess a mixed subsistence system. As these rites also form the basis of rites performed in wet-rice fields, but I shall not deal with wet-rice agricultural rituals.

In present days Kurung Kumey district of Arunachal Pradesh, land is possessed and cultivated by people of all sections. Agriculture, being the major occupation of the Nyishi people, a number of rituals is connected with its cultivation. The present day rituals have preserved interesting features and elements of the Nyishi traditional religion. In this paper, I wish to discuss only the agricultural rituals prevalent among the Nyishi people of Kurung Kumey district of Arunachal Pradesh. The age-old ritualistic practices continue to live today along with the syncretism of religious faith. For comprehending the religious significance of these rituals or religious practices, a preparatory explanation is needed because the ethical ideals of people, as expressed through these social institutions, relate, to a certain degree, to the realities of antique life, and the changes through the passage of time.

The mode of agricultural cultivation among the Nyishis of Kurung Kumey district is essentially two-fold. In some fields seeds are directly sown, and in others, seedlings prepared in nursery beds are transplanted. Nursery beds are prepared usually for settled cultivation whereas seeds are directly sown in jhum cultivation. Usually sowing of seeds begins in the month of lachar-yulu (April-May), and transplanting is done in the month of tiklu-sangu (June-July). But before sowing or transplanting is done, the field is tilled and prepared for cultivation. It may be noted here that all the rituals are performed according to the lunar-solar calendrical systems of the Nyishis. So the rites and beliefs connected with the agricultural cultivation are linked up with their calendar beginning with the rites of the plot selection (for jhum) and tiling (for settled) and ending in harvest rituals.

The Ceremonial Cycle: An Overview

The ceremonial cycle of the Nyishi consists of a large number of major and minor rites which are performed in jhum fields and in the village, in the homes of households which cultivate jhum. They are held at various times of the year according to various stages in the cycle of jhum cultivation beginning with the selection of jhum sites and culminating with the harvest celebration which marks the transition from one agricultural season to the next. These rites form a major part of a religious system which may well be regarded as a “totalizing” system, to borrow the use of the term from Levi-Strauss (1966: 250-62), in which the larger significance of the Head Rite (yullo), certain features of kinship and gangtem-yullo, for example, cannot be fully apprehended without reference to agricultural rituals and vice versa.

For convenience, these rites may be grouped into different categories which have been presented in the following table:

Table 1: The Rites of Jhum Cultivation among the Nyishis of Kurung Kumey District

The Rites in the Ceremonial Cycle	Where Performed
The Rites of Clearing and Planting	
Jhum Divination/Worship of the Earth (<i>Nyoing hingnam</i>)	Jhum and Village
The Rite of Clearing Jhum Fields (<i>Rungho panam</i>)	Jhum
The Rite of Planting/Transplanting Rites (<i>Aam dinam</i>)	Jhum
Drinking the Liquor of the Rice Seed (<i>Liyu-Upo tangnam</i>)	Village
The Rites of Protection	
The Rite Protecting Jhum (<i>Amchuk Chuknam</i>)	Jhum
The Rites of Harvesting (<i>Aam Gignam</i>)	Jhum
Eating of the “Head Rice” (<i>Amji danam</i>)	Village
The Rites of the New Year (<i>Nyiti-anyang</i>)	Jhum or Village

The chief concern of these rites readily apparent from their performances and accompanying rituals is the successful growth of the crops. This is affected primarily through the propitiation of various spirits, the most important of which is the Gangte-Atu (Lord of the Land). There are, however, other features embedded within these rites, and the overall structure of the ceremonial cycle, which are important. They are specifically: cultural definitions of a certain order which opposes settlement and forest, represented by relations with the Lord of the Land, within the domain; the complementary roles of male and female in reproduction symbolically applied to agricultural production; the importance of a “cool state” for the successful growth of rice; the identification of rice with humans; and a general aoristic and proleptic orientation which emphasises continuity through renewal.

As it will not be possible to examine here all the rites which make up the annual ceremonial cycle among the people in the study area, I shall therefore consider only what is sufficient to illustrate these features. The rites which I focus on are those which make up the rites of clearing and planting and the rites of protection as given in the above table.

In examining these agrarian rites among the Nyishis of Arunachal Pradesh, more particularly of Kurung Kumey district, I take the view implicit in my earlier discussions of rituals that religion consists of a system of ideas and concepts, and an expressive or performative aspect, namely, ritual behaviour. As a general proposition, I think it would not be untenable to say that whatever else religion and ritual behaviour may involve, nevertheless, there is at least one level where they entail conceptual relations which represent some underlying schemata of cognition or cognitive models. As such, these conceptual relations are integrated, that is, coherent or patterned, and meaningful.

Ritual: Performance and Language

The conjunction of non-verbal and verbal performances in ritual is a phenomenon now

well acknowledged in the anthropological literature. The prevalent view of these two aspects of ritual, it seems clear, is that they are both modes of symbolic expression analysable as communicative activity. In the Malinowski Memorial Lecture on “The Magical Power of Words”, for instance, Tambiah (1968) has argued that the important feature of this conjunction of word and deed is the manipulation of metaphor and metonym, following Jakobson’s discussion (1956) of these two linguistic forms. Specifically, he says that (Trobriand) ritual “actively exploits the expressive properties of language, the sensory qualities of objects, and the instrumental properties of action simultaneously in a number of ways” based on the principles of similarity and contiguity which underlie the construction of metaphors and metonyms (1968:189-90).

The idea of ritual as a performative, in Austin’s sense (1962), is further developed by Tambiah (1979) in his Radcliffe-Brown Lecture. Here, Tambiah distinguishes two aspects of ritual as performative: the “constitutive” and the “regulative”. The former “achieves the realization of the performative effect” while the latter “orientate(s) and regulate(s) a practical or technical activity” (1979:127-30). There are various implications of this view of ritual but we may note here that a key feature identified by Tambiah is the redundant social communication of meaning involving “interpersonal orchestration ... social integration and continuity” (1979:133).

Fox (1979) expresses a somewhat similar view in a description of the ceremonial system of Savu in Eastern Indonesia, drawing on a later study of Jakobson’s (1970) on auditory and visual signs as semiotic systems distinguished respectively by time and space as structuring principles, has suggested that both (“oration” and “ostension”) may be considered as different modalities in ritual. He then goes on to show that both modalities exhibit the features of complementarity, markedness and parallelism more commonly associated with the analysis of linguistic phenomena.

These two discussions of the relation between act and language in ritual are instructive and provide a convenient starting point for this examination of Nyishi agrarian rites. As we shall see, it will be necessary to re-examine the Head Rite and yullo in the context of the ceremonial cycle of the Nyishis of Kurung Kumey district.

Although there are certain features specific to agrarian rites, they nevertheless share two essential generic characteristics which also distinguish the Head Rite and yullo, namely, the recitation of formulaic entreaties, and that most quotidian of activities- eating and drinking- as the focus of most non-verbal ritual performances. As with these two rituals, the entreaties in agrarian rites are not impressive, public performances, nor are the ritual acts highly colourful and dramatic events. They are best seen as falling in-between Fox’s two modalities of ritual, “oration” and “ostension”.

There is, however, one important difference between agrarian rites and the Head Rite and yullo: agrarian rites are sequentially integrated following the cycle of jhum cultivation and they thus make up a cycle of ritual activities which are repeated annually. They are, therefore,

not simply agricultural rituals but also calendrical rites articulated with certain key phases or stages in the agricultural calendar. Furthermore, these agricultural rituals taken as a whole, that is, as an annual complex, are performed individually by households at certain times with the headman acting as ritual mediators between the people and the Lord of the Land. In other words, the ceremonial cycle brings together the two different themes of the Head Rite and yullo rituals- the interdependence of households as a ritual community in the former, and the separate identity and autonomy of domestic groups in the latter- within the overall structure of what is, substantially, a single corpus of annual ritual performances.

The Ritual Performer of Jhums

Agricultural rituals are performed by individual households wholly responsible for their own subsistence needs and a crucial aspect of this is the ritual performer of jhums as distinguished from general performer in which all members of the community are regarded as performers of their jhum. Every household with a jhum has a ritual performer who may be any member of the family, and an officiant who is always the eldest male in the household, that is a father, a son or son-in-law. The two, therefore, are not necessarily the same person although it has generally been the case that the ritual performer has also been the ritual officiant. The fact that the ritual officiant is always a male has to do, of course, with the domination of ritual life by men and their primary association with the cultivation of land. The ritual performer of jhums, however, is related to certain conceptions in the religion of Nyishi where the successful growth of the rice crop is identified with the health and well-being of the ritual performer who, in effect, represents the entire household.

There are two aspects of the ritual performer of jhums worth noting which are relevant to an understanding of the symbolic meanings contained in the rites which make up the ceremonial cycle of Nyishi tribe.

First, notwithstanding the fact that men are preeminent in managing the ritual activities of domestic groups, household members regardless of sex may become ritual performers of jhums. The substitutability of household members as candidates for the role of ritual performer points to the “homogenous” or solidary nature of domestic groups since one member is as good as another regardless of generation or sex which are criteria that are otherwise important in the organisation, formation and fissioning of domestic groups. The practice of having a ritual performer itself indicates the close association between households, represented by the ritual performer, and the rice crop that they cultivate.

Second, although ritual performers may be seen to symbolise households or domestic groups in this particular sense, the relationship between ritual performers and the rice cultivated by their households is not merely a simple identification of person and crop; it is a metonymical relationship based on an implicit similarity and contiguity between what is best described as “life processes” in humans and rice evident in the perception that the successful growth of rice depends on the “vitality” of the ritual performer. Indeed, rice is in fact likened to humans in the number of souls that it is thought to possess, as held in common belief and explicitly expressed

in certain agricultural rituals. It is not, however, attributed with “vitality” perhaps because it is not “animate” in the sense that humans (and animals) are.

The Rites of Clearing and Planting

Jhum Divination/Worship of the Earth (Nyoing hingnam)

The very first rite that is performed in association with jhum cultivation is the rite called nyoing hingnam, or the “divining of jhums” or the “Worship of the Earth”. This is the simplest of all the rites performed in the agricultural cycle and it is held after the head of the household has decided on a number of potential jhum locations. Divination is meant to establish the most favourable and, hence, the final choice of a jhum site. Alongside that, the Earth is also offered a domestic fowls in the field through prayers for the reproductive capacity of earth in a selected jhum site.

The pleas which are said when these offerings are made to the spirits which are believed to inhabit the locality. The following is an example of the entreaties said when the site is claimed for cultivation.

Ngu gangte palo tarine, rungho pate rine Atu pobu ha! Kaur bu atu, darakmabu atu	<i>I will clear the fallow jhum, clear a jhum Spirit Lords! Lords of that which is not good, that which is not pure</i>
Saba sa ish tokube angni la Ngu so rungho rite rine la Rinam si ale gupe Ngak nyik he nam kajak kapak ma Ngak nyurung he kajak kapak ma Alebu puruk ham tepe jiri ne Ngu rungho gangte ham makak tarine Ngu eme parte rine Atu pobu ha! Saba sa ish tokube angni la So donam si alema	<i>Go to where the waters bend I will work the fallow jhum here Doing all that is good My eyes have not noticed (you) with favour My ears have not noticed (you) with favour Placing down all the auspicious chickens I will make a clearing a space here I will bring fire down, ashes down Spirit Lords! Go to where the waters bend To stay here is not good</i>

The theme of this prayer as with other similar entreaties is dispossession and appropriation. The spirits that inhabit the locality are told to leave and the ritual performer claims the land for agricultural purposes. The expropriation of land from the spirits may be seen in the simple declarative sentences of intentionality which form part of the prayer.

The Rite of Clearing Jhums (Rungho panam)

The rite of clearing jhums consists of a short prayer that is said by the head of the household as he first slashes the vegetation of the jhum site. It is performed on the first day of clearing by the household with the assistance of other villagers but it is an individualised performance. The outstanding feature of the rite, however, is that the ritual act is in fact a technical act ac-

accompanied by a prayer. The prayer is addressed to the Gangte-Atu (Lord of the Land).

Ke.!, akoge gangte-atu	<i>O.!, descend Lord of the Land</i>
Ngu so rungho pate rine la	<i>I will clear a jhum here</i>
Ngu so aam lite rine la	<i>I will grow rice here</i>
Ale bu, darak bu jitu	<i>Bestow all that is good, that is pure</i>
Ngak aam ham dumpo lughe kole kyak jitu	<i>Bestow upon my rice at the head, at the bottom</i>
Jinam he anya ngala	<i>Beautiful are the offerings</i>
Kumnam he anya ngala	<i>Beautiful are our tributes</i>
Rungho ngam anya tu	<i>Beautiful within the jhum</i>
Apo ngam anya tu	<i>Beautiful every stem</i>

It is unmistakably clear that the rite is constituted by a perfect concordance of “performatives”, namely, the technical (“ostension”) and the verbal (“oration”) where the technical becomes ritual by virtue of the recitation of the prayer. But, there is also a dialectical relation between the two. In the prayer previously described, the clearing of the forest is seen to result in auspicious conditions. In the context of this rite, however, the creation of these conditions is dependent on the actual clearing of the forest; the technical act is thus, also the operative analogue of the verbal performance.

It will be noticed that in this rite, these conditions are derived from the Lord of the Land which is called “down” (that is, from “above”) to “bestow all that is good, that is pure” whereas in the previous prayer it is the clearing of the forest that is said to produce them. The phrase which expresses these meanings is the same in both prayers. Although an Agent is not specified in the phrase, the Agents in both cases are identifiable by context and confirmed by native exegesis. The occurrence of the phrase in both prayers and its recitation immediately after the head of the household states that he will clear the “fallow jhum”. The second prayer is, however, significant: it indicates contiguity between the process of clearing the forest and the descent of the Lord of the Land according to which auspicious conditions are affected.

The Rite of Planting/Transplanting Rites (Rungho linam or Aam dinam)

The planting of rice and other crops in jhum fields is accompanied by the first major agricultural ritual performances of the season for jhum-cultivating households consisting of three related, but separate rites. The first is the rite of planting jhums (rungho linam) which is held on the first day of planting in jhums. It is followed by the rite called “planting the (ritual) huch (basket) of the aal-inyi (yam)” (aal-inyi linam) which is also performed on the same day. The third is held several days later, in the house, and it is called “drinking the liquor of the rice seed” (liyu upo tangnam). Unlike the rites entailed in divination and the clearing of jhums, these three rites are not individualised performances. They are held in the presence of the labourers which are formed to assist the household.

Planting begins early in the morning where the head of the household or the ritual performer of the jhum plants the Aamli (Old Rice), preserved as seedlings. Its value is entirely

symbolic and it is, in fact, rice that symbolises itself. When a household first cultivate on its own, it has to acquire rice seed. This may be obtained from a parental household or purchased from some other household. The Old Rice is stored in the household granary suspended from the rafters of the roof of the granary or of the house. It serves several symbolic functions but the most important is the representation of the continuity of the rice crop or the annual succession of rice from its own seed cultivated in jhums.

The planting ritual takes place to offer and pray to the Lord of the Land and other tutelary spirits of domains in an invocation similar, or identical, to the invocation which characterises the prayers of the yullo (Head Rite).

An example of the prayer as recited by the nambung atu (head of the household) who is also the ritual performer of the jhum is given below.

Ke! Akoge Gangte-atu	<i>O!, descend Lord of the Land</i>
Nyodi-putung ge tachak-talo	<i>Lords of the mountain tops</i>
Nyodi-koro ge tachak-talo	<i>Lords of the mountain ridges</i>
Langcho-tarak ge tachak-talo	<i>Lord of the Shining Cliff</i>
Nak ge amji dagam ham dutu	<i>Eat your fill of the first rice</i>
Si kaduung du, kabab du	<i>Here raised up; look down</i>
Rokar du, roaar du	<i>Look after, watch over</i>
Sulu ge aru so	<i>In the morning of this day</i>
Ngul rungho ham dudine,	<i>We dibble the fallow jhum</i>
Ngak aam ham kapu moyatu	<i>Make my rice beautiful</i>
Rungho ragdum lokge, rungho ragkolo	<i>To the top of the jhum, the bottom of the jhum</i>
Nu detekele dutu	<i>Eat till you are full</i>
Diji kyagdu be dutu	<i>Eat till you are replete</i>

In this particular prayer, there are only a few direct references to the rice that is being planted in the jhum and the plea for a bountiful harvest is condensed in the lines in which the supplicant asks to be “the lord of jhum rice, the lord of rice granaries”. There are, for instance, requests to the tutelary spirits to prevent felled trees from sliding down the slopes of jhums and destroying the rice crop, or that a month’s work will bring rice for a year, and so on. The tutelary spirits may also be asked for a bountiful harvest in hyperbolic terms where the supplicant or ritual officiant requests that each stalk of rice be made as big as the trees. Requests for a successful harvest may also be expressed in terms of an invitation (or, more correctly, a declaration) where the spirits are said to “sit in the jhum” and “rise up in the granary”.

Drinking the Liquor of the Rice Seed (Liyu-Upo tangnam)

The rite known as “drinking the liquor of the rice seed” is performed in the village but it is not a village-wide ritual. It is performed on a household basis. The ritual consists of making offerings of rice liquor which, in theory, is made from the seed left over from planting. The left-over seed is often insufficient for making the liquor that is required and so it has to be

supplemented with rice from the granary. In some cases, there may in fact be no left-over rice seed and the liquor is therefore made entirely from rice drawn from the granary. Depending on when and how long it takes to make the liquor, the rite may be held any time between two to three days from planting. When the liquor is ready, a day is set for the ritual which is held after the household has had its evening meal. It is usual for the household to invite other household members to attend.

The symbolic meaning of the rite is essentially similar with other rituals, namely, the expression of the communality of the village. There is, however, one important difference: the rite also expresses at the same time the autonomy of the household as a domestic unit of production because it is primarily a household ritual performed for the benefit of the household and its crop of rice. This is a concern that is fully expressed in the prayers that are said in the rite.

I present below an example of the kinds of prayers offered during the ritual.

Ke!, Nyodi-putung ge tachak-talo,
nyodi-koro ge tachak-talo

Dene Sai, Dene Yari
Nyudo ge atu la ayu

*O!, Lords of the mountain tops,
Lords of the mountain ridges
Lady Sai, Lady Yari
Celestial Lords and Ladies*

Although the Lord of the Land and other tutelary spirits are not explicitly invoked in these opening lines, it is understood that they are being called upon in the first line of the prayer. The spirits or deities addressed in the following lines occur frequently in rituals but Nyishi are vague about the nature of these spirits or deities. While most of them are agreed on the fact that Sai-Yari is female and that she resides in the sky watching over the rice crop, some however say that Sai and Yari are two entities.

The Rite of Protection

The Rite Protecting Jhum (Amchuk Chuknam)

After the rites of planting, there are no further ritual activities until sangte-polu (August) when the rice crop begin to appear. When this happens, it is time to perform the rite that protects jhums. This is individually held by households and is performed by the head of the household.

The ritual has three purposes: (i) to make an offering to pests and crop diseases in order to send them away; (ii), to induce a cool state in the jhum crop and household members; and (iii) to make an offering to the rice itself so as to encourage its growth and maturation. In analytical terms, however, the overriding significance of the rite is the symbolism which it shares with the rite of planting the ritual basket of the yam and which it elaborates upon. The elaboration of this symbolism is based on logical extensions of the underlying processes reflected in the conceptual associations common to both rites. It is for these reasons that the analysis and interpretation of the meanings of the planting of the ritual basket of the yam and the protection of jhums require the two to be taken together.

The first of these objects or items is an “altar” or “shrine” called yugang. It is a very simple bamboo structure consisting of a small platform raised on four posts with a ladder leading up to the platform from the ground. People believe that the ladder is for the rice souls (yaj-yallu) to ascend to the platform to partake of the offerings that made to the rice. The second item which is also made for the first stage of the rite is the ritual basket (huch) to replace the weather-worn one which was made earlier in the year for the planting ritual. The third item consists of three articles which are collectively known as the udung (bamboo-tube). This consists of small bamboo-tubes (udung), a small stick “stirrer” placed inside the cup (sangkyo) which is also placed in the tube. The tube is filled with rice liquor if this is available; otherwise, some attang (rice powder).

The ritual commences with an offering of a chicken to the various elements which are believed to be a danger to the rice crop. The offering is made at the huch, the ritual basket into which these elements are collected and appeased. The prayer which accompanies the killing of the chicken begins with a line that, in fact, is addressed to rice.

Ke Aam!, ngu sam nak nase ham
namu dube megerine,

*O rice!, I do this so that you will receive that
which is for you*

Nam daktar modube megerine

That which protects you

Huch lo alemabu ham chumlak tu

The basket seeks that which is not good

Huch lo darakmabu ham chumlak tu

The basket seeks that which is not pure

Huch lo kauurbu nyarbu-patta ham chumlak tu

The basket seeks the ill-omened bird that laughs

Huch lo hamlingbu sudum ham chumlak tu

The basket seeks barking deer that calls out

Huch lo hallapbu aming ham chumlak tu

The basket seeks that which is slippery

At the end of the prayer, feathers are torn from the chicken and stuck on the blood smears on the huch (ritual basket).

This prayer consists of metaphors built around a simple theme which, in this case, is the containment of all that may endanger the rice crop. The most noteworthy feature of the prayer, however, is the recurrent references to “things that are slippery” (hallap bu). These references are based primarily on the idea that women who have just given birth, and new-born babies, are in a “slippery” condition. Slipperiness, however, is not merely descriptive of the physical condition of women and new-born babies; it also describes a general state that is believed to affect the whole community at childbirth. Nyishi have, for example, a prohibition on work outside the house on the day when a birth occurs. The reason for this prohibition, they say, is that if they do so, untoward consequences would result either for the mother and infant or for those who work outside the house. The belief and prohibition, quite evidently demonstrate that childbirth is a matter of concern to the community as a whole.

What is significant about the two beliefs and their associated prohibitions, it must be emphasised, is that both link cultural definitions of reproductive processes to the cultivation of

crops, as well as the relations between individuals involved in such processes and the entire community. In the context of the rite of protection, the association between childbirth and the state of the rice crop at this stage of the jhum cycle possesses a very specific significance.

However, it may be noted here that apart from the ill-omens which are mentioned, the image of the dangers that threaten the rice growing in jhums is also evoked through the primary meanings attaching to the idea of a slippery state that comes about at childbirth. These meanings are further extended to fructivorous animals such as rats, squirrels, birds and so on, and also to people.

The Rites of Harvesting

The rites of harvesting consist of a number of rites performed at different times as the season proceeds. It is not possible to deal with all the rites that are performed at this time and I shall, therefore, discuss only few of them. These are: “eating of the head rice” (amji-danam); and the final harvest celebration called the “rising of the New Year” (nyiti-anyang).

The Eating of the Head Rice (amji-danam)

Among the Nyishis in Kurung Kumey district, the rice that is first reaped is early ripening rice. For many households, the rice that is reaped in the early stages of the harvest season is brought back for immediate consumption because by this time their stocks of rice from the previous year have been exhausted. The rice that has been reaped for immediate consumption is treated as the “head rice” (amji) or “first rice”.

The eating of the head rice takes place in the evening of a day that is deemed convenient for all members of the household, for it is important that all should be present for the rite. The ritual is led by the oldest married, or widowed, woman in the family. There are many levels at which the ritual may be interpreted. It is concerned, for example, with the process of converting rice into its edible form through the use of fire. This is apparent from the inclusion of the hearth and hearth-stones in the ritual which includes their propitiation. It is also concerned with the propitiation of rice itself for being eaten. At yet another level, it is also concerned with ensuring that rice is not lost in the process of preparing it for consumption. However, what is most important is the essentially female nature of the rite which marks it as a domestic rite through the idiom of processing and cooking rice, quite regardless of the minimal sexual division of labour. It is the only agricultural rite of significance that demands a female officiant and it expresses the ideological categorisation of men and women and their complementarity, in agricultural production, through the mediation of a general opposition between the domestic and non-domestic domains.

As she does this, she says the following prayer:

Rungho ge aam

Rice of the jhum

Ngu nam asak ach-aming legebe moyola dudune

I eat you mixed with other things

Ngu nam amsak legebe dudune

I eat you shared together with unhusked rice

Nu yamadube, nu nyemadube

So that you do not rot, so that you do not spoil

Nu hahak madube

So that you do not take offence

Nu niimadube, nu ngemadube

So that you are not finished, so that you are not exhausted

The prayer continues in this vein at considerable length. As she chews and recites the prayer, the ritual officiant also spits out some of the contents of her mouth onto the hearth and around the fireplace.

There are some variations to the otherwise repetitive, indeed redundant, nature of the verses. For example, the rice is told that “people do so (that is, the ritual) for the future, people eat thus for the future” to bring about a “rising” of the “eating to fullness, the drinking to fullness”.

The Rites of the New Year (Nyiti-anyang)

The rites of the New Year, or the “rising of the New Year” (nyiti-anyang) as it is called in Kurung Kumey district, may be regarded in some senses as a harvest celebration but they are, in fact, rites which mark the passage from one agricultural cycle into the next and which are wholly oriented towards the new season. The New Year itself is also described by a complementary term: the “descent of the land” (nyokum). Both these expressions, as I showed in my discussion of the agricultural calendar of the people in Kurung Kumey district, describe the succession of agricultural seasons and their constituent features according to natural or “organic” rhythms.

An important condition on holding the rites of the New Year, however, is that all the households in the village must have performed their annual yullo first. Many of the agrarian rites that are conducted among the Nyishis, as we have seen, are the responsibility of individual households. This is what we might expect given the nature of domestic social organisation and the sociology of agricultural production among the people. The position of yullo in the annual cycle of ritual activities - that is, as a mandatory ritual precondition for the New Year rites - marks it, at least in this particular regard, as a proper calendrical ritual and, therefore, as an integral part of the cycle of agrarian rites among the Nyishis in Kurung Kumey district. This is significant because it is one more example of how not only ritual performances but also their structural positions in the sequence of annual rites periodically affirm the identification of households with the process of agricultural production.

When all the households have had their meal, the festivities begin with the people beating talu (gongs), clashing billang (cymbals) and singing in the open near the house. The size of Nyishi houses makes it impossible for any house to accommodate all the people in the village, that’s why, for the “libations at the descent of the land”, what usually happens is that all the male heads of households congregate in particular house while women and children stay outside. However, as with the Head Rite (the key features of which also distinguish this ritual), this is also a reflection of the fact that men dominate the ritual life of the community.

The organisation and structure of the “libations at the descent of the land” are identical

to that of the Head Rite. Although the prayers are essentially similar in that they propitiate the Lord of the Land and request his protection, they differ somewhat in their temporal orientations. Whereas the prayers of the Head Rite are concerned with maintaining the status quo with the spirit of the domain in the agricultural year that is in progress, the prayer in the New Year rite is markedly proleptic; it is emphatic about the approaching year and, indeed, a general future.

The following is a prayer made during this rite.

Ke! Gangte ge atu	<i>O! Descend Lord of the Land</i>
Kurung-Kumey ish ge ayu	<i>Lord of the headwaters of Kurung-Kumey</i>
Atarbu atu, kulu ge atu	<i>Lord of that which is great, Lord of that which is old</i>
Nyudo ge atu, sachang ge atu	<i>Lord in the heavens, Lord of the earth</i>
Ngul Donyi ham kapudube mangdune	<i>We desire the sun to be beautiful</i>
Polu ham kangamdube	<i>The moon to be beautiful</i>
So nyitidube mangdune	<i>Anew here</i>
Rungho padube, rungho mudube	<i>Cultivating fallow jhums, cultivating jhums</i>
Michagu ridube, kaigu nadube	<i>Doing little, obtaining much</i>
Kulu kyak nakidube	<i>In the future continuously</i>
Lukude aam ge atu, amsak ge atu	<i>Let us be again lords of rice, lords of unhusked rice</i>
Saktebe dumutube, saktebe tangmutube	<i>Bestow fullness in eating, fullness in drinking</i>
Malange nampamlo likingube saktedumutube	<i>Bestow fullness in eating together (in all) the vil- lages,</i>
Malange nambalo likingube saktedumutube	<i>Bestow fullness in eating together at all the house-steps</i>
Malangham kayatu, lungkyi ham kayatu	<i>Watch over all, watch over everything</i>

Later in the prayer, the tutelary spirit of the domain is specifically asked to protect the village and house-holders from all that may endanger them. The form in which this request is expressed makes it clear that the community and its well-being are conceived of in terms of a solidarity and corporateness which are defined by the physical boundaries of houses, the village, and the domain.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have described several rituals within the corpus of annual agricultural rites in Kurung Kumey district, in order to illustrate their principal features and the particular forms in which language and symbolic activity are employed, to demonstrate their major importance in the religious life of the community, and to show more generally their significance in terms of the cultural ideology of Nyishi. These rituals are organised around ideas, concepts and categories which are key elements in the way that Nyishi conceive of agricultural production, especially jhum cultivation, and of their viability as a community. In the religious life of Nyishi, it is evident that both agricultural production and the existence of the community are treated as interrelated, on-going processes. At the heart of this ideological relationship lies what may best

be regarded as a procreative model of society extended to agriculture.

Finally, I may say that a logical analysis of the different rites has not been made so far. Instead of arriving at any hypothesis, I have tried to present a picture of the living reality of customs. As the agricultural rituals in Kurung Kumey district of Arunachal Pradesh present incoherent layers of thought, it is rather difficult to bring together the various forms of customs, beliefs, superstitions and practices to a single hypothetical frame. The different observances have been mixed up to form agricultural rituals, the real meaning of which is lost today. Moreover the ritual practices are constantly changing their form and character. The customs, which are considered to have connection with agricultural cultivation, might have originated in some other religious rites. The agricultural rituals of Kurung Kumey district of Arunachal Pradesh present a bewildering complexity of popular beliefs and religious elements. Even today there is hardly any reduction in performing these customary rites. To quote Van Gennep, "All these ceremonies include both rites of passage and sympathetic rites- direct or indirect, positive or negative- for fertility, multiplication and growth" (Gennep, 1960).

References :-

1. Arens, R. 1957. *The Agricultural Ritual in the East Visayan Islands, Philippines*. Folklore Studies, Vol. XVI, p. 269.
2. Armstrong, E. A. 1943. *The Ritual of the Plough*. Folklore, Vol. LIV, p. 257. Ibid. p. 255.
3. Bharati, A. 1971. *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion: Ritual and Belief Systems*. Biennial Review of Anthropology. Vol. 7 (1971). 230-282. Stanford University Press. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2949230>. Accessed on 22/04/2010 14:46.
4. Bora, D.K. 2000. *Traditional Nishing Religion and the Change*. In M.C. Behera (Ed.) *Tribal Religion: Change and Continuity*. New Delhi: Commonwealth Publishers.
5. Bourdieu, P. 1977. *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (transl. R. Nice). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
6. Burling, R. 1970. *Man's Many Voices: Language in Its Cultural Context*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc.
7. Choudhury, S.D. 1981/2008. *Gazetteer of India: Arunachal Pradesh (Subansiri District)*. Itanagar: Govt. of Arunachal Pradesh/Himalayan Publishers.
8. Elwin, V. 1957/2006. *A Philosophy for NEFA*. Itanagar: Directorate of Research, Arunachal Pradesh.
9. Firth, R. 1973. *Food Symbolism in a Pre-Industrial Society*. In *Symbols: Public and Private*, R. Firth London: George Allen and Unwin.
10. Fox, J.J. 1971. *Semantic Parallelism in Rotinese Ritual Language*. *Bijdragen Tot de Taal-*

Landen Volkenkunde. 127(2):215–55.

11. Fox, J.J. 1979. The Ceremonial System of Savu. In *The Imagination of Reality*, ed. A.L. Becker and Aram Yengoyan. Norwood, New Jersey: Ablex Publishing Corporation.
12. Frake, C. 1969. Notes on Queries in Ethnography. In *Cognitive Anthropology*, ed. S. Tyler. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
13. Frazer, J. G. 1907. *Folklore*, Vol. xviii, pp. 332-334.
14. Frazer, J. G. 1922/2007. *The Golden Bough: A Study of Magic and Religion* (Abridged Edition). Ebooks@Adelaide. [Http://Ebooks.Adelaide.Edu.Au/](http://Ebooks.Adelaide.Edu.Au/).
15. Furer-Haimendorf, C. V. 1982. *The Highlanders of Arunachal Pradesh*. New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House.
16. Furer-Haimendorf, C.V. 1950. *Ethnographic Notes on the Tribes of the Subansiri Region*. Shillong: The Assam Government Press.
17. Furer-Haimendorf, C.V. 1962. *The Apa Tanis and their Neighbours: A Primitive Civilization of the Eastern Himalayas*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
18. Garson, J.G. & C.H. Read (eds.). 1892. *Notes and Queries on Anthropology* (2nd Edition), edited for Council of the Anthropological Institute, London.
19. Geertz, C. 1966. Religion as a Cultural System. In *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion*, ed. M.Banton. ASA Monographs 3. London: Tavistock Publications.
20. Genep, A. V. 1960. *The Rites of Passage*, p. 179. (Tr. by Monica B. Vizedom Cz G. Ecaffee).
21. Hanks, L.M. 1972. *Rice and Man*. Chicago: Aldine.
22. Jairth, M.S. 1991. *Tribal Economy and Society*. New Delhi: Mittal Publications.
23. Kahn, J.S. and J.R. Llobera (eds.). 1981. *The Anthropology of Pre-capitalist Societies*. London: The Macmillan Press.
24. Kapferer, B. 1979a. Introduction: Ritual Process and the Transformation of Context. In *The Power of Ritual: Transition, Transformation and Transcendence in Ritual Practice*, ed. B. Kapferer. *Social Analysis* (Special Inaugural Issue). 1(1):3–19.
25. Miri, S. (ed.) 1980. *Religion and Society of North-East India*. Delhi: Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd.
26. Rikam, N.T. 2004. *The Faith and Philosophy of the Nyishis*. In T. Mibang & S.K. Chaudhuri (eds.) *Understanding Tribal Religion*. New Delhi: Mittal Publications

27. Rikam, N.T. 2005. *Emerging Religious Identities of Arunachal Pradesh: A Study of Nyishi Tribe*. New Delhi: Mittal Publications.
28. Salamone, F.A. Ed. 2004. *Encyclopaedia of Religious Rites, Rituals, and Festivals*. New York/London: Routledge.
29. Showren, T. 2009. *The NYISHI of Arunachal Pradesh: An Ethnohistorical Study*. New Delhi: Regency Publications.
30. Spencer, J.E. 1966. *Shifting Cultivation in Southeastern Asia*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
31. Stonor, R. 1957. Notes on Religion and Ritual among the Dafla Tribes of the Assam Himalayas. Source: *Anthropos*, Bd. 52, H. 1./2. (1957), pp. 1-23. Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40453996>. Accessed: 03/03/2013 23:19.
32. Tambiah, S.J. 1968. The Magical Power of Words. *Man (NS)*. 3(2):175–208.
33. Tambiah, S.J. 1979. A Performative Approach to Ritual. *Proceedings of the British Academy*. 65:114–69. London: Oxford University Press.
34. Tara, T.T. 2008. *Nyishi World (2nd Edition)*. Banderdewa: D.B. Printers.
35. Vidyarthi, L.P. and B.K. Rai. 1985. *The Tribal Culture of India*. New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company
36. White, B.N.F. 1980. Rural Household Studies in Anthropological Perspective. In *Rural Household Studies in Asia*, ed. H.P. Binswanger et al. Singapore: Singapore University Press.
37. Willis, R. 1975. *The Interpretation of Symbolism*. London: Malaby Press.

* * * * *