

Nyethriidow: A Post-Harvest Festival

Dopu Doke

Ph.D. Scholar, Department of History, Rajiv Gandhi University

Abstract:

Nyethriidow is the annual festival celebrated by the Akas, typically following the harvest season, during which the community renews its bonds, offers thanks, and cleanses their environment and spirits. During festival villages are thoroughly cleaned and water sources are purified, symbolising the removal of evil influences. The community gathers to drive out evil spirits, invoke blessings for peace, health, good harvest, prosperity for children, crops, cattle and all members of the society. Traditional dances, music and cultural performances dominate the celebration, strengthening communal identity and passing on cultural memory.

Keyword: Nyetriidow, *Hrusso*, rituals, priest, sacrifices, deities, spirits.

Introduction

Arunachal Pradesh is the house of a large number of colourful tribes. Each has their own history and socio-cultural patterns of life. Settled in the northeastern tip of India, is a state known for its scenic beauty and diverse tribal cultures. It's a land where over 26 major tribes and numerous sub-tribes co-exist, each celebrating unique festivals that represent their deep-rooted traditions. Often called the "Land of the Rising Sun," is home to some of most vibrant and diverse indigenous communities. Its geographical isolation has allowed the state to preserve its distinct culture. Each tribe has its own festivals, beliefs, and traditions. These festivals are not just annual gatherings but a reflection of Arunachal Pradesh's spiritual, social, and agricultural ethos.

Festivals in Arunachal Pradesh revolve around nature, agriculture, and spirituality. They celebrate the change of seasons, the arrival of harvests, and the community's collective prayer for prosperity and protection from natural calamities. Each festival has its own significance and serves as an opportunity for social interaction, bonding, and celebration. Many festivals also feature traditional music, dance, and food, providing a unique window into the cultural life of the region.

Nyetriidow

Like other tribes of Arunachal Pradesh, the Hrusso (Aka) have rich, pristine culture and traditions, which are showcased during their annual festival celebration. The major festival of the Aka is known as Nyetriidow which is generally celebrated in the 2nd week of January every year. Nyethriidow is the post-harvest festival, celebrated annually by people of the Hrusso (Aka) tribe of Arunachal Pradesh. The festival that marks the end of the harvesting season and the beginning of the new year. The festival symbolizes a time of renewal, hope, and anticipation for the upcoming year. Nyethriidow festival is a time for the Hrusso community to express their profound gratitude to their gods and ancestors for a bountiful harvest, seeking continued blessings for the future. People make offerings of their freshly harvested grains and the villages buzz with preparations for the grand celebration. The Hrusso people believe that a good

harvest is a blessing from their deities, and the festival is a way of showing their appreciation and seeking continued blessings for the future.

According to Aka folklore, the first human pair, Busulu Aao and Nyegrzi Aanyi, were endowed with the power to converse with gods, deities, spirits and all living and non-living beings. They faced many hardships in their hostile surroundings, and through their trials they established the ritual practices that now form part of the Aka festival traditions.

During the festival, people of the Hrusso tribe come together, strengthen their bonds, and celebrate their rich cultural heritage. It is a time for feasting, dancing, and traditional performances, fostering a sense of unity and shared identity among the community members.

The term Nyetriidow is a combination of two terms *Nyetri* means village and *Dow* means do away/ drive away/ clean out. The mythology behind this post harvest festival is that, the space between *Nyezi* (Sky) and *No* (Earth) is the abode of all spirits and all the deities (malevolent or benevolent) dwell between these two places. According to their belief, evil spirits and deities very often moved around in the village and create trouble for them in the form of diseases and calamities. For their propitiations, they felt some kind of sacrifices of animals are necessary. So, to keep away from all kinds of suffering such as pain, diseases, and misfortune, the festival was started by the ancestors.

They believed in the existence of evil spirits and the sufferings of the people are caused by the arrival of such spirits in the localities. Therefore, Nyetriidow is conducted which involve a ritual of sacrificing a mithun to drive away such evil spirits from the village.

Traditionally, the term is used more as a ritual than a festival because there were no merry making, dances, songs and competition on games and sports during the old days.

The festival is celebrated to clean the village from the influence of evil spirits, for prosperity, surplus crop production and general betterment of the village community. In this festival god (*Nyezino*) is appeased through the communion of the priest (*mugow*) to maintain good health of the villagers.

Method of Festival Celebration

The village elders, after harvest, select a senior priest to perform the ritual on an auspicious day around one month ahead of the festival. At the end of ritual, all the heads of the families are invited to hear from the senior priest and other priest also present in the gathering to know the fortunes of villagers in the coming year. In the meeting the priest decide what performances are to be done to please the God so that no harm is cast to the villagers. The various sub-committees, like priest committee, social service committee, collection committee, hunting and fishing committee and altar preparation committee etc. are formed in that meeting.

The leading priest of the festival is selected by examining the indications reflected in the liver of the chick. The selected priest has to chant for several days. The priest is responsible for finalizing the numbers of mithuns, cows, goats, hens, pigs, chicks, and eggs to be sacrificed in the festival. The main priest is rewarded with gifts for performing the puja.

The responsibility of the social service committee is to cleaning the village, repairing of roads, and cleaning of drinking water sources. The duty of contribution committee is managing and distributing the food and drinks during the whole celebration. The decoration committee is closely associated with the priest committee. They collect the medicinal plant (roots and leaves) and tie them in bundles for every household in the village. They are also responsible for the collection of herbs, leaves, trunks etc. for the preparation of puja altars separately for mithuns, cows, pigs, goats, hens, chicks, etc.

Duration of Celebration

The festival took its present form of organized celebration in the year 1972, when almost all the Aka villagers participated at Buragaon village of West Kameng district with great zeal and vigour. The festival is celebrated once in a year in the month of January. Traditionally the chanting of hymns by the priest starts one month before the commencement of the festival and the final celebration last for five days. The period of celebration and the number of days for chanting hymns has reduced. This decline in the period of celebration could be the outcome of the more involvement of people in modern life where there is paucity of man power and time. It appears that, to reduce money and time people might have reduced the number of days of celebration. Further, the method of celebration adopted by the neighbouring tribes had also influenced them.

Conclusion

Earlier, the festival was traditionally celebrated village-wise but nowadays it is celebrated in a particular village or location and the members from other villages are invited to participate in it. But, still village-wise celebration may take place in case of a sudden outbreak of dreadful diseases and untoward incidents in the villages. Village wise celebration has taken the shape of optional to organized celebration. The emerging expenses or costs, decline in the number of animals, modernization, technological advancement etc. are responsible for the present form of the festival. Nyethriidow plays a crucial role in preserving and transmitting the Hrusso tribe's cultural traditions and practices to the younger generations. The festival's rituals, dances, and songs serve as a living testament to their unique cultural heritage. The festival is steeped in tradition and ritual symbolizing a profound expression of the Hrusso tribe's cultural identity and deep connection to their ancestral land.

References:

1. Sinha R., *The Akas*, (1962). Directorate of Research, Govt. Of Arunachal Pradesh, 1962
2. Vivekananda Kendra Institute of Culture (2005). *Traditional Systems of Aka Community: Change and Continuity*, Guwahati.
3. Gibji Nimachow, *The Akas Land and People*, Common Wealth Publishers Pvt Ltd, New Delhi, 2011, p.17
4. Sambyo, Duso, 'The Akas of Arunachal Pradesh, A Historical Study Till 1947' unpublished PhD thesis
5. Personal interview with Duba Dusosow, village elder, a permanent resident of Buragaon village under Jamiri circle, West Kameng district, scheduled interview on 19th November, 2023
6. <https://amazingarunachal.com/nyethrii-dow>