

A SOCIO-CULTURAL STUDY OF MEYOR TRIBE IN ARUNACHAL PRADESH: AN OVERVIEW

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ABSTRACT:

The Meyors are the indigenous people inhabiting the Walong and Kibithoo circle of Anjaw district of Arunachal Pradesh. The Meyors are the one who at one point of time was actively engaged in the modern type of agriculture with primitive technique. The meyor are famous for business, traveling and bead work. The social life is governed by the traditional system assisted by the council of elders. The paper is based on both primary and secondary data. Primary data were collected using observation methods, interviews etc. and secondary data were collected from books, articles etc. The main aim of this study is to understand the socio-cultural aspect of the Meyors as they are one lesser known tribe in Arunachal Pradesh.

Keywords: *Meyor, Walong, Kibithoo, Anjaw, Myanmar, Migration, Bead work, Taboo.*

Introduction

The study of social background is an important aspect of human geography. It reflects the differences of society within a region and also precisely describes their population parameters. Population study also covers necessary aspects like, sex ratio, population growth, literacy rate, occupation structure, population growth, literacy rate, occupation structure, and migration pattern. Social and cultural study of a particular area or a region reflects the tradition, custom, caste, belief systems and practices of rituals of every community that inhabit the region. It also plays a vital role in the formation of political constituents of the state. The economic aspect or the economic activities undertaken by a particular tribe and community depend on the social structure of the people residing in the particular society. Hence, the level of development of a particular area mainly depends on the social and demographic structure of the population.

The climatic condition of the region has a direct bearing on the socio-economic condition of the people of any region in most of the traditional society. In the context of Anjaw district of Arunachal Pradesh due to harsh and difficult terrain; population is sparse where the Meyors communities have traditionally fitted on it. The population of the region largely depends on primary activities such as farming, hunting,

gathering, fishing, and laborers work. In addition, the region is gradually witnessing development of horticulture and tourism sectors. These unique and environmentally adapted sectors of Meyors remain a major source of income for all the households of the community.

With improvement in health facilities in the State and in particular to the district the life expectancy of the community has increased to be about 70-75 years on average. The maternal and infant mortality rate is low in the region. But the major concern for the population of the Meyors is the high rate of migration towards Tezu (Lohit) side.

In context of distribution of pattern of cropping in the Anjaw district; the major crops produced are paddy followed by maize, millet, barley etc. besides, potato, tomato, cauliflower, beans, carrot, chillies, and other green vegetables are also produced in the area. Horticulture items like banana, grapes, mango, kiwi and pineapple are also grown in the region. Predominance of shifting cultivation is still prevalent in the district at a large scale.

1.1 METHODOLOGY

The study is based on experiences and information collected from different primary and secondary sources. Various books were consulted for obtaining secondary data.

1.2 STUDY AREA

The location of the district is between 95° 45' east to 97° 24' east longitude to 27° 33' north latitude. The district is bounded in north and east by China, and part of upper Dibang valley district, Myanmar in the south, Lohit district in the west. According to the 2011 census, Anjaw had a population of 21,167 of which male and female were 11,507 and 9,660 respectively. The district has a population density of 3 persons per km². Its population growth rate during 2001–2011 was 13.77%. Anjaw has a sex ratio of 805 females for every 1000 males, and a literacy rate of 59.4%. The area is inhabited by Mishmi and Meyor tribes. Despite the entire geo-physical hurdle the district has many significant achievements in the field of education, agriculture, horticulture and other infrastructure development like hydro power projects. The district has immense potential in tourism, organic farming and hydro power. The area is full of large and small beautiful perennial rivers like Lohit (called Telu by local Mishmi) Lam, *Tidding*, *Dalai*, *Krowti*, *Dichu*, *Lati*, *Klung*, *Dav*, *Telua*, *Ampani*, *Sarti*, etc.

Locational map of study area

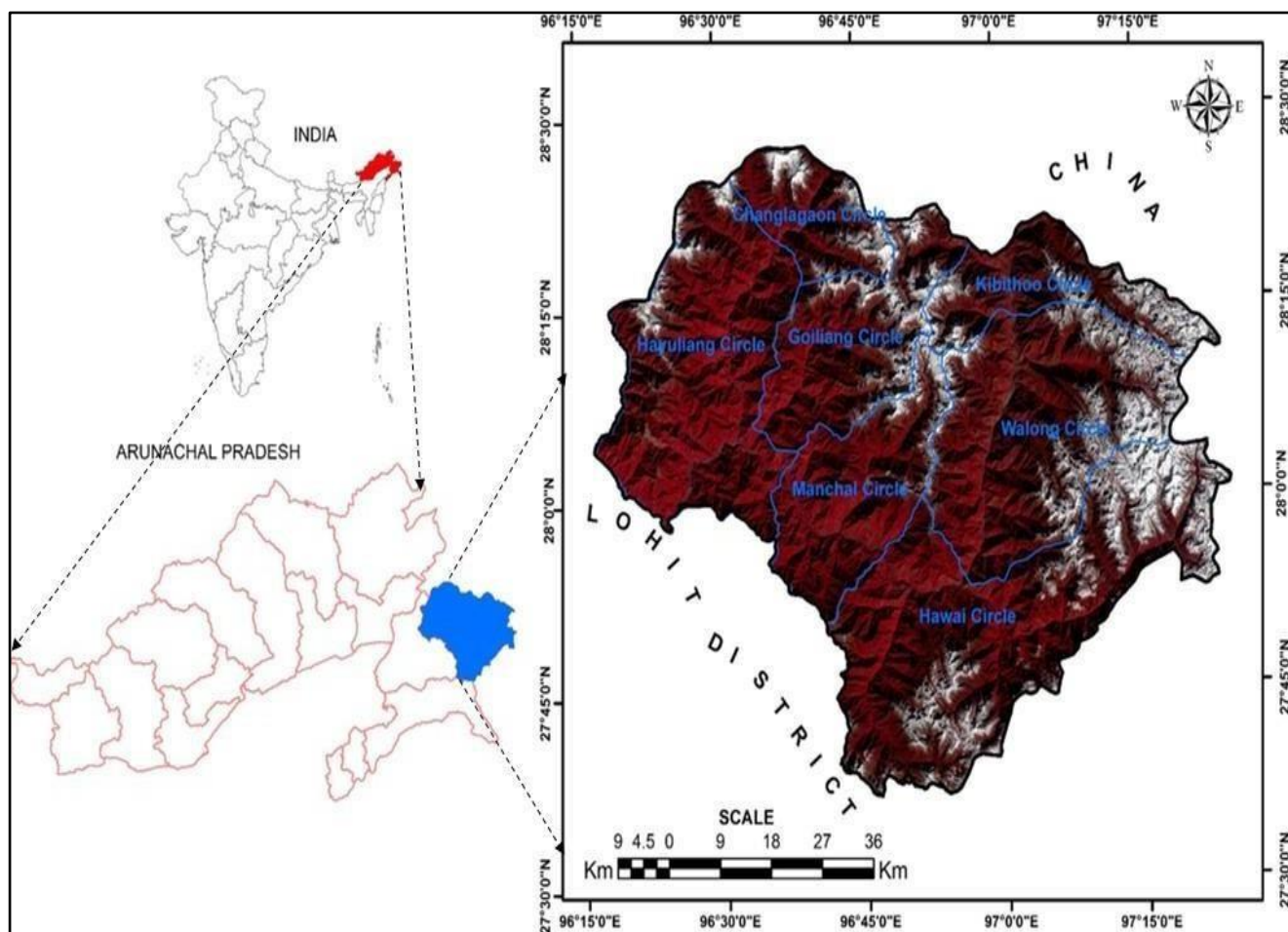


Figure: 1.1

1.3 RESULT AND DISCUSSION

From the gathered data the following important finding and result were drawn:-

1.3.1 Origin and Migration of Meyor Tribe

There is no widely accepted statement in regards to the origin of Meyors. Hence, a home of the Meyors at this part of history is still in doubt. However, the Meyors considered themselves to have migrated from a place called 'Mei' which they said existed somewhere in the far eastern part. Most probably in the upper Myanmar or Irrawaddy range.

According to their legends, the Meyor believe that long ago, a great flood engulfed the earth, wiping out all living organisms. Only a brother, a sister, and a dog survived by clinging to a mound above the water. Realizing they were the last living beings, they cried for help, feeling the weight of their loss—family, friends, and all of life swept away. After a few days, a great snake appeared before them, and they pleaded for assistance. To their surprise, the snake agreed to help and created a path for the water to recede to the south. As the waters slowly lowered, the siblings, consumed by sorrow and loneliness, decided to live as husband and wife to ensure the continuation of the human race, thus becoming the ancestors of today's people.

The Meyors, one of the ethnic tribes of Arunachal Pradesh, had its origin and migration from upper Myanmar in Kachin state. The route from which they migrated into India was river Irrawaddy (Myanmar).

They followed the direction of the Kullung River (east of Hawaii circle) which is situated in Arunachal Pradesh. After many days and nights of wandering they reached the confluence of Lohit and Kullung rivers. In that small place they lived for a short period of time, but they were driven away by the Mishmis, who were the original inhabitant and tribe of that place due to which they went further to the northern side and ultimately settled in a place called Dong.

According to Jean Kingdon-Ward, the Meyor are neither Tibetan nor Mishmi, despite speaking a language understood by Tibetans, wearing similar clothing, and practicing the Mahayana form of Buddhism. He observed that while they have adopted aspects of Tibetan culture, religion, and language, they do not resemble Tibetans in appearance, possessing coarser features and a darker complexion. D.S. Negi categorized the Meyor as belonging to the Mongoloid race and noted their presence across the international boundary, where they share similar cultures, religions, dialects, and matrimonial alliances. He pointed out that they are often referred to as "Lama" by the Mishmis and are loyal citizens of India.

In absence of their myths and tradition of migration, it is presumed that the original homes of Meyors can only be traced through language and dialect. If the language is to be taken as a guiding factor, then probably they dwelt in some remote part of upper Myanmar bordering with the Kachin groups of tribes. The Meyor has some language affinity with Kachin groups. Col (ret'd) D.S Grewal (1997), in his work had classified the dialect of Meyor tribe as sub Kachin group of Tibeto-Burman family language.

In continuation of the above presumption on the original migration route of meyor; late Shri Tezi Meyor, provided significant information about their ancestor's migration route. According to him, Meyor had come from the direction Khamti-Jang in the northern Myanmar entering through Krongjang pass following the river course of Kullung and settled in the area around the confluence of the lohit and Kullung for some considered period of time. Further they went up to the northern side of the district. In fact they were harassed and pushed by the Mishmis, particularly by Lamet clan who recognized themselves as the owner of the Kullung River and route.

The main reason of their migration to this hilly terrain is not known till today, perhaps they might have fled from their original homeland to get away from the oppression of Myanmar authority or been ousted by another stronger group of tribe. The first village that meyor established was Dong (Don) which literally means "this is the right place". Then slowly and gradually other villages like Tinai, Musai, and Kaho were established with the coming of more batches of immigration. The migration probably took place in the last 18th century.

At the time of migration into the lohit; Meyor had to face ambivalent attitudes from Mishmis. The Mishmis raided and forced most of them to retreat from Walong area to Zayul province of Tibet region. Despite of repeated attack and raid the villagers of Dong, Tinai, Musai and Kaho withstood the Mishmis. This inter tribe feud continued for centuries. Eventually in last part of 19th century some intellectual like Dzumsha pul and Daggerso kri from the Wala villages of Hawaii (Hq.) initiated the peace talk and successfully managed to bring peace into this region by sacrificing a cat at "YAPAK" and made agreement not to attack each other in near future. In this agreement, it was decided that "Sethi Nallah" should be

formed the boundary between two tribes and demarcated it with stone erected. A.D.N Sing Negi (1996) description gives more vivid account of Mishmis territory. He observed in his book “A Tryst with the Mishmis hills” that there was no Mishmi settlement till the beginning of the 20th century beyond. Tullung village near Sarti stream on the right and Waithi villages on the left bank of the Lohit River.

After this historic agreement the relationship has become cordial and Mishmis used to provide bullock to Meyors for ploughing and agriculture purposes. In return for the bullock , Meyors paid annual tribute to the Mishmis such as rice, chillies, tea leaves, tomatoes and silver.

Earlier, there were two tribes living in Walong and Kibitho, the Meyors and the Zakhings. According to the Meyors, when the first census was conducted, the surveyor visited only nearby roads, where Zakhing tribes lived in two or three houses. They did not go to the interior areas where the Meyor tribe lived. This made the meyor tribe out of their knowledge and all the tribes as a whole were called Zakhing, but today Meyors are striving towards making their identity known to the world.

Religion

The religious practices of meyor are curious bled of local belief and Buddhism of Mahayana section. The venerate Buddhism spiritual leaders and worship in Gompa which have the images of lord Buddha, Dalai Lama, and his disciples. Apart from worshipping in Gompa, the every meyor household has a little prayer room where his holiness Dalai Lama’s portrait is placed. The room is decorated with golden fine silk cloths. In front of the portrait, they keep series of steel cups filled with fresh water which are emptied is carefully sprinkled over the roof of the house and new fresh water fills in the morning. The butter lamp is being kept burning all the time that symbolized the presence of god. There are two small Buddhist temples at Walong and Kaho which was constructed in early sixties and one more newly constructed temples witnessed in Musai village. The religious activities in and around this region was organized by Buddhist priest of Kaho villages who was popularly known amongst the local tribes as *TILOPA*. He crossed over to India just before the Chinese aggression and since then he has been staying in Kibitho and Walong area among the meyor and spreading the good news of Buddhism. He bears the responsibility of performing all the social religious ceremonies of the region.

According to the people of the region, Buddhism spread in their region only with the coming of lama priest *TILOPA*. However it is observed that after the departure of *TILOPA* in the nineties from Walong Dharamsala, Buddhism seems to be on the verge of extinction due to lack of monks. The Meyors also have a good deal of faith in their local deities and spirit. Who help them invariably invoke in the time of distress and suffering. Every village has its own priest to perform prayers and rituals. The spirits evoked are both benevolent and malevolent in nature. The benevolent spirits are *SUNGMA*, *GASSING*, *YAWDAK*, *CHISING* while malevolent spirit are *LAMKHO*, *YARGE*, *CHAN*, *KOPRIKONI* AND *CEARI*.

The Meyors have a local priest known or called as *KAHU*, who is capable of evoking the spirits and can have confabulations. All the rites and rituals to appease the spirit whether malevolent and benevolent of the villages are performed by *KAHU*. He is also divine as a magic man, he divines the cause of illness, disease and other calamities by reading chicken liver, egg, rice and measuring a hand. When he successfully

diagnoses the cause of illness, he recites charms and offers appropriate sacrifices to the spirit that is responsible for the same and for early recovery. They sacrifice animals like cows, pigs, fowls to propitiate the deities. Sometimes the offering that has been promised to spirits and deities can be deferred or kept in hold, according to circumstances and time. However, the same sacrifices can be offered to them later; when the victims and individual situations allow them. This practice is amiable and suitable for poor villagers.

1.3.2 FESTIVALS

The Meyors celebrate and observe various religious ceremonies and festivals such as **Lha-Chuth, Sung-ghu and Losar.**

Lha-chuth: Out of three festivals namely, lha-chuth, sung-ghu and losar of the meyor tribe of Anjaw district of Arunachal Pradesh, Lha-chuth festival is considered as their main festival. The general lha-chuth festival is celebrated every year on the 3rd January at Tinai Village. However each meyor village performs their own lha-chuth ritual as per the village community's convenience.

The word Lha-chuth in meyor means "offerings to god" where in "Lha" means "God" and "chuth" means "to offer". The ritual is performed on "chepo-chenga" (fifteen phase of the moon) which is the eve of the full moon night. This particular day is regarded as a sacred eve to perform the lha-chuth ritual. The ritual is usually performed in the month of January or February. Lha-chuth is a pre-agricultural ritual to propitiate the guardian spirit of land, mountain and forest. Lhu is guardian of the land; *Yabdak* is the mountain spirit and *Yikri* the guardian of the forest and wild animals. Ritual sacrifice of a cock and a hen is offered to propitiate the spirits which ensures overall well-being of the village community.

Two shamans indigenously known as lamchut perform the ritual. An assistant who helps in burning the *songtong* (bonfire) sits just opposite to the lamchut facing towards them. He is also assigned to look after the *Teng* (conchs) which are placed beside the fire. At regular intervals the conch has to be blown in order to invoke the spirits. The village unanimously selects one male and female to help supervise and manage the whole ritual. They are called *Dingpun*. Their role is to look after the management of lachuth rituals. Besides the supervision of the ritual, the *Dingpun* are obliged to donate the sacrificial fowl; a cock and a hen and to host the *Lamchuts*. The *Dingpun* collects rice, vegetables, maize etc from each household as their share of contribution for organizing a feast on the day of the ritual.

The women folk make rice beer (*Rungku, bommak*) out of the rice donated by the village community. The *Dingpuns* prepared a list of the invitees from neighboring villages and sent them invitations. The *Dingpuns* are also responsible for the persuasion of the Lamchuts as the latter has the sole responsibility to conduct a *Lha-chauth* ritual.

Wild meats and fish are mandatory for the *Lha-chuth* ritual. A month before the ritual, the men folk of the village go out for a hunting expedition. After a successful hunting expedition, they involve themselves in fishing activities. Since fresh red meats are prohibited during the ritual, all the hunted meats and fish have to be properly parched or smoked. The Meyors believed that any type of blood lures the evil spirits to harm the people present during the ritual. Any type of glittering objects such as utensils, clothes red in color etc

are also prohibited. Another interesting fact about the ritual is silence maintained by people throughout the ritual.

A day before the *Lha-chuth* ritual, the village community cleans the area around the Yonyi (altar). Yonyi is a structure erected by accumulating flat oval shaped stones which are piled straight up. Each household cleans their house and decorate their walls by painting the images of livestock, fowls, paddy, the sun, maize, Yindung (*swastika*) etc. with rice paste. They believe what they seek from the spirits has to be drawn. The men folk gather firewood and the necessary items that have to be put into the *Songtong* (bonfire). The bonfire has to be kept ablaze until the ritual is over. The bonfire is made out of *Chosa* (pine leaves) and plants that are indigenously known as *Shingkar*, *Shindan* and *Lumishing*. At regular intervals rice mixed with water and butter is sprinkled into the *Songtong*.

a) SUNG-GHU

The Sung-ghu is also an important festival celebrated in the months of September and October and it is associated with harvesting of new food grains. This festival is celebrated not in community or together but individually in their own respective houses. The celebration begins a week before actual harvesting starts. They harvest a certain portion of paddy field and the paddy obtained is prepared into rice which is used during the celebration.

A day before celebration, the family members clean the house, compound and arrange cooking place, separately for rice and meat at outside the house, because on that very day no cooking activities are taking place inside the house. The hearth of the house is for burning of sacred leaves such as coco, chin dan, sikarand, ulu miring that produce a good smell. They believe that the smokes produced purify the atmosphere of the house and its surrounding. On the day of celebration the family members decorate the house by painting and draw zigzags pattern or the design they like to draw with rice powder. Goddess earth *Yawdak* and Goddess of wealth *Memmekuru* are offered fresh boiled fish which they caught from the stream along with new paddy rice. These offering items are kept in the altar which is made just above the hearth on the wall, known as *THAPDUNG*. The preparation of local beer, food items and meats are initiated at suitable time, so that feast should be ready before the arrival of guest and invites.

1.3.3 MARRIAGE SYSTEM

Marriage (*Moone harmai*) is the accepted as a union between a man and woman in Meyor society. There are various ways and methods of arranging marriage alliances, but the most common one is by negotiation between the parents through the consent wishes of their children which plays a significant role in deciding the alliance.

The Meyor society prefers cross cousin marriage, both marriage with fathers sister's daughter and mother brother daughter. The parallel cousin marriage with one father's brother, son and daughter is strictly prohibited. The levirate form of marriage is also practice by the Meyors in the event of death of husband; in such cases of marriage there is no elaborate and sacred ceremonies performed nor is any bride pride to be

paid. Both junior and senior levirate exists. So widow marriage is permitted after the husband's death for a couple of years. Sororate type of marriage i.e a marriage with wife sister after wife death is also uncommon. Monogamy is the rule and mostly practiced. Polygamy and polyandry are never encouraged under any circumstances.

In the negotiation of the marriage *DREPUN (DIPEN)* and his assistant *DREYOK* play the most important role. Success and failure of the proposal depends upon their intelligence and tactics. Meyor societies generally do not accept the proposal on the first visit of negotiation. Proposals and talks continue for three to four times due to suspicion among people and to find out the negative and positive side of the bride and groom. The Meyor marriage is simple and lasts for only one day. The bride will go and be brought to the groom's house on a fixed day by the groom's relatives and friends. Bride parents will accompany her up to the groom's house. In the special occasion or in marriage, the ring is compulsory and two parts have to be done namely *MANCHAK AND SISI*. The *Manchak* consists of two alive and one slaughtered on the other hand *SISI* is of one alive pig and one slaughtered. *MANCHAK* is performed by the groom's parents and *SISI* is from the bride's family. This is the minimum price required to perform marriage in the Meyor society. "One of the most important and interesting fact about marriage ceremony of meyor society during my field visit experienced was that the priest of Musai village told me that, Groom have to give compulsory one healthy cow to bride family, because they belief that cow give milk and one day the woman will give birth child, on that time they will breastfed the baby child".

At the wedding ceremony, firstly the entire groom's parent places a sacred scarf around the neck of the bride and bridegroom. Then they present valuable gifts like gold, ornaments, money etc. next relatives, friends and invitees will give their gifts. After completion of presentation event, everyone in the gathering blesses the new couple and prays to god *YILA YAPDAK* for prosperous and bright happy marriage. Blessing to the new couple is called *MALAMJAMPMAI*. After the wedding ceremony, a feast is given to the guest and co villages. A day after the marriage the newly married couple is allowed to sleep together.

Divorce among the Meyor is permitted but it is not common. But the spouse has the right to seek a divorce. If a woman divorce her husband, she has to give compensation amounting to the bride price to the husband. After divorce the sons become father liability while daughters stay with their mother.

1.3.4 DIVORCE

Divorce is the legal process that dissolves a marriage or civil partnership, effectively cancelling or rearranging the legal obligations and responsibilities associated with matrimony. In Meyor society, divorce is permitted but relatively uncommon. Both spouses have the right to initiate a divorce, which can be sought on various grounds, including disobedience, misconduct, adultery, bad temper, domestic violence, barrenness of the wife, or impotency of the husband. Serious offenses like adultery and incest carry significant repercussions.

The process begins with the party seeking the divorce engaging a mediator. Efforts are first made to resolve the matter within the family and among relatives. If those efforts fail, the case is escalated to

community leaders, such as the Chungdi member and the Goan Bura, who convene a council meeting to discuss the situation. After thorough deliberation, a decision is reached, often accompanied by a strict fine. In most instances, divorce is settled amicably within the family.

When a divorce is initiated by the wife, she is required to return the Ring-chu (bride price) to her husband, either in cash or kind. Conversely, if the husband seeks the divorce, he retains the Ring-chu, which is not returned. Other family properties do not transfer to the wife regardless of who initiates the divorce; she is only entitled to the return of the bride price. Should the divorced woman remarry, her new husband is not obligated to repay the Ring-chu to her former husband but is expected to send a small token, such as meat and local beer, to her parents.

After a divorce, the responsibility for any children typically falls to the father, although infant daughters may remain with their mothers. Importantly, the surnames of the children remain unchanged; they continue to bear their father's title, regardless of their living arrangements. In Meyor society, there is no social stigma associated with divorce, allowing both men and women the freedom to remarry and pursue their lives independently.

Divorce can have profound physical and emotional effects on all involved, particularly the children. Parents grappling with marital issues or navigating a divorce often experience significant stress, which can lead to emotional challenges and difficulties in managing their feelings. Children, too, bear the brunt of these changes, frequently manifesting their distress through academic struggles, mood regulation issues, and a tendency to seek solace in harmful behaviors such as substance abuse or violence.

1.3.5 INHERITANCE

In Meyor society, the inheritance of property is governed by male lineage, reflecting a patriarchal and patrilineal structure similar to other families in the region. In this system, immovable properties, such as land, houses, and jungles, are passed down from parents to their sons. All movable and immovable assets, including livestock and household belongings, are inherited by the sons, while daughters have no legal claim to these properties, regardless of the circumstances. Even in the absence of a male heir, daughters are unable to inherit their parents' immovable assets, which automatically transfer to the father's brothers.

The concept of individual land ownership is legally recognized within the Meyor community, granting each individual a share of village land designated for habitation and cultivation. Ownership rights can only be acquired through inheritance or the establishment of a new plot. It is uncommon for families to transfer or sell ancestral land. Instead, daughters receive only personal ornaments passed down as heirlooms from mother to daughter at the time of marriage.

In cases of a widow, she is entitled to a share of her deceased husband's movable and immovable properties, but only if she has a minor son to care for and is willing to marry one of her late husband's brothers. If she chooses not to remarry but remains in the family, she does not directly inherit property; rather, her husband's brothers or family members manage the assets while providing for her.

When it comes to property distribution, the presence of family members, relatives, and respected elders is customary to witness the proceedings. The head of the family typically divides the property among

the sons, with the youngest son often receiving a slightly larger share, as he is expected to succeed to the parental property and care for his mother after his father's death. Daughters, meanwhile, receive the family heirlooms reserved for them, usually at the time of their marriage. Even in families without sons, daughters remain without any legal claim or rights to the family's immovable property, emphasizing the enduring male-centric nature of inheritance within the Meyor community.

1.3.6 TRADITIONAL ATTIRE AND ORNAMENTS OF MEYOR TRIBE

The socio-cultural life of Meyor is very unique and it is reflected in their beautiful attires and ornaments. The attractive dresses and ornaments give a curiosity to know about their cultural life. Dresses and ornaments are one of the integral parts of an ethnic group, the study of dresses of an ethnic group gives an idea about the climate of the area and also dyeing and weaving techniques. In the Meyor community, there are different kinds of ornaments. Ornaments and jeweleries are made of gold (*sien*), silver (*ngih*) and other metals and also of different types of stones and pearls. They also wear earrings, rings and bangles. Mostly, Meyor ornaments are adopted from Tibetan culture. In the earlier period, they bought ornaments from Tibet. However in recent times due to the availability of beads and metal ornaments in markets the Meyor people make necklaces on their own.

TRADITIONAL MEYOR DRESS:

Zaiki or Mije (long cloak-like garment): *Zaiki* was the original dress of the Meyor tribe of Arunachal Pradesh. It is a long, cloak-like garment. However, now-a-days the *Zaiki* is not used (worn) anymore. It requires lots of time and effort to make one *Zaiki*. The *Zaiki* is usually made of two types of threads, i.e. one is made out of sheep wool and the other is made of a kind of vine, which was very itchy in its raw form. First, they peel the bark from the vine and then leave it to dry in the sun for a few days. After drying for a few days, the barks are boiled with the ashes of the peeled vine to soften the bark and then it is taken to a nearby river and thrashed until the thread separates. After this whole procedure, they make balls of thread to weave. In the past, the Meyors used a kind of tree called *Shiram* to extract color (i.e. green) for dyeing the thread. Now-a-days this tree is not available easily. The *Zaiki* was used by both male and female and it was passed on to the next generation i.e. to their children. Male population of the Meyor tribe used to wear hats (in Meyor language it is called *Yogar*) with the *Zaiki*, the hats were brought from Tibet. Now-a-days the Meyors stopped weaving *Zaiki* because of its long and tiring procedure and also because of the unavailability of the vine used for making the thread. Hence, adoption of Tibetan attire could be seen today among the Meyor tribe.

Though Meyors have *Zaiki* as the traditional dress, they have adopted Tibetan dresses.

The female dresses are *Brei* (blouse), *Khise* (long gown), *Pode* (aporn) and male dresses are *Khenjao* (shirt), *Kat* (long piece of cloth), *Longkhrab* (cloak like garment) and *Yogar* (hat). The dress which the males wear is called *Longkhrab* and those which are worn by the females are called *Khrablo*. Given below are the dresses worn by Meyor people in the present day:

Female

Brei (Blouse): Brei is a dress worn by the female population of the Meyor tribe. Brei is a loose blouse with long sleeves and it is made of silk. The beautiful designs on the Brei are called Muto. The Meyor does not weave the Brei by themselves, they buy it from the market. A Brei cost about 500-600 rupees in the market.

Khise (long gown): Khise is a sleeveless loose long gown. In the waist area of the Khise, two belts are attached for the fitting of the gown. There is a button (Doka) in the upper part of the gown; the button is used for decorating the gown. Whole gown is covered by beautiful patterns; these patterns are called Ghumok. Very good quality silk material is used for the Khise. In the market one Khise costs around 1500 ₹ or even more.

Pode (aporn): Pode is a piece of cloth and it has two belts, the belts are used to tighten at the waist area. Pode is worn by married women of the community and it is made up of multi striped woolen or silk cloth.

Male:

Khenjao (shirt): Khenjao is a dress worn by male. Khenjao is a loose shirt and it has two buttons on the right side of the neck and these two buttons help to tighten the shirt. Khenjao is worn under the Longkhrab (long cloak like garment) and Khenjao is made of thick silky fabric.

Kat (long piece of cloth): Kat is a part of male Meyor dress. It is a long piece of cloth and it is wrapped in the waist area. For weaving a Kat, they use different types of bright colorful threads. These threads are mainly cotton threads. Because of the colorful threads the Kat looks elegant.

Longkhrab (cloak like garment): Longkhrab is a loose and long cloak like garment with belts on its right side. In the past, Longkhrab was used as a regular dress. It is very comfortable male Meyor dress.

Longkhrab is also available and bought from the market. Yogar (hat, Fig: 8): Yogar is a part of male Meyor dress. In the past, Yogar was bought from Tibet. But now-a-days it is available in the local market. It is usually made of leather and worn with Longkhrab and Zaiki.

Ornaments of Meyor community

The Meyor communities also have lots of ornaments which add beauty to the dressing. Some of the ornaments include necklaces, earrings, bangles, and rings etc which are made of silver, gold and brass metals. They also use ornaments made of stones and pearls.

Kuh: Kuh is one of the very beautiful necklaces of the Meyor community, which is made of silver. The Pendent is square shaped with four tiny red beads in the corners. The borders are beautifully carved with beautiful design and in the centre is a hollowed bead slightly larger than the beads in the corner. In total nine beads are used (in the photo: one bead is missing) in the pendant, out of nine beads four beads are placed in the outer four corners and five beads are placed in the middle part of the pendant. Red colour beads are called Kurn and the chain is called Chutha.

Jithuk: Jithuk is a necklace usually made of yellow beads. It has three ends tied together where the beads are slightly larger than the others. It is worn by Meyor women. Jithuk is generally worn by women during festivals.

Necklace: It is not a traditional Meyor necklace but is a creation of some creative womenfolk in recent times. It is worn as a regular necklace. Pearl-like beads are called Mitik.

Pema lugah (Ring): Pema lugah is a ring which is worn by Meyor women. It is made of silver and beautiful designs are carved on it. A red stone is embedded in the center of the ring. It is worn during the festive occasion.

Suruh : Suruh is a necklace made of black beads with three blue stones in three places between the black beads. Suruh is also worn only by Meyor women during the festival time.

Lungkur suni: It is a locket made of brass metal beautifully carved with 12 animal symbols (viz. monkey, snake, pig, rat, ox, tiger, rabbit, dragon, horse, sheep, rooster, and dog). These symbols are counted clockwise by the priest to identify the zodiac sign of the new born baby. The medallion is usually put on to a new born child to protect him/her from all evils. It has been borrowed from Tibetan culture.

The Meyor community has unique and significant dressing. Their traditional dress and jewellery reflect their rich heritage and traditions. They don't wear their traditional attire everyday but on special occasions like marriage ceremonies, festivals and other cultural ceremonies.

1.3.7 FOOD HABITS AND DRINKS

Rice is the staple food of the Meyors, along with rice maize, millet and barley are also part of food habits. The cultivable seasonal vegetables like potato, pumpkin, chilly, cucumber, tomato, beans and ginger etc in the kitchen garden. A large variety of wild leafy vegetables, roots, tuber and mushroom are part of the major diets.

They consume a high quantity of meat of cow, mithun, goat, pig, bear, deer, fish, squirrel and fowl etc. they eat the meat either by boiling, roasting, drying and mixing jungle leaves, spices and salt.

Local beer *ANDEK* or *BUMAK* is a common drink of the meyor. Both men and women consume high quantities of local beer on working days. They brew the beer from rice and millet. It is an important beverage of the Meyor tribe. Besides local beer, the meyor also take tea mixed with butter and salt (*THONGCHO*). The men and women consume an average of six cups full of tea a day. In olden days, tea was imported from across the border in the shape of brick.

House pattern

A suitable site selection is must, prior to building a house. Generally flat areas are preferred for construction of houses. In case of less availability of plain areas, the earth is cut and made into plain. The main reason being houses are generally constructed with wooden planks and wooden beams of self locking system; the main pillars which support the weight of houses are placed over the stone slaps (*YIPPY*) because they are erected from the ground or earth.

1.3.8 HOUSE PATTERN

The main items required for the construction of a house are wooden planks and wooden beams. The room, floor, side walls, window and door are made up of wooden material. They do not use any nails, leaves for construction of houses. The meyor house has a following characteristic:

FRONT PORTION:

House is almost square in structure raised on a plate form about 4-6 feet above the ground and has a front veranda.

ENTRANCE OF THE HOUSE:

The entrance should almost be faced towards the direction that the valley extended. The entrance to the meyor house is usually by a wooden ladder and then through a small wooden door on the left side of the front wall. Generally there is only one door in the house that is supported by a wooden frame or self locking system. The door is so small that one has to be banned while entering inside the house.

1.3.9 DIVISION OF THE HOUSE:

The house is divided generally into three nomenclatures. The first hall of the side is known as *Tsak*. This compartment is mainly or used by guest. The second compartment is known as *CHEWA*. This is the main hall of the house where the hearth is located. This room is divided into three parts *CHORA*, *CHAMPK* and *THAMUK*. Unlike other traditional house of Arunachal tribes. The fireplace of the meyor house situated at right side of the wall. The front portion of the hearth is called *CHORA*, and is mean for guest and relatives on visit. The left side of hearth particularly near the racks of the wall is kept for keeping water and utensils. The rear portion of the hearth where head of the family sleeps is called *CHIIMPAK*. In this place the outsider are not allowed to sit except with due permission from the head of the family. Next to *CHIIMPAK* is *KHOJAP* where children sleep, except breast feeding child. This portion is also served as store room where readymade rice for immediate use and rice beer may keep. The meyor houses have no rear door.

1.3.10 GRANARY

The meyor have a separate granary store house. A small granary is built little bit distance from the house, for the safety of granary item during untoward incident like fires. It is square in size and pattern like box. The entrance of the granary was so small like window, which is opened at the center of front wall. It is so small that a person should crawl during entering inside. In the granary food stuffs, costly ornaments and metals are kept.

1.3.11 DEATH AND DISPOSAL

In Meyor society, the concepts of mortality, rebirth, and karma form the foundation of their understanding of life and death. They believe that every individual is mortal, destined to die eventually. The actions taken during one's life determine the nature of their afterlife: virtuous individuals ascend to heavenly realms or are reborn as humans, while those who commit sins may face torment in hell or be reincarnated as animals. This belief system fosters a moral compass within the community, emphasizing the importance of good deeds and ethical living.

Historically, the Meyors practiced different burial methods based on social status. Common individuals were typically buried, while the remains of priests, wealthy men, and notable figures were exposed on high platforms, allowing nature to take its course. However, with the introduction of Buddhism, a significant shift occurred in funerary practices. Cremation became the standard method for all deaths, with the notable exception of newborns, whose premature deaths—referred to as "Thingi"—are approached with specific cultural sensitivities.

When a newborn dies prematurely, the family believes that malevolent spirits may be responsible. In such cases, communal involvement in the disposal of the body is avoided. Instead, the father personally takes the responsibility, often placing the body in a river to ensure a respectful farewell and to avoid any potential curses associated with public disposal.

The typical cremation process begins with the deceased being kept in the family home for a day or up to three days, allowing relatives and friends to pay their last respects. During this period, the body is covered with a khada, a clean white cloth symbolizing purity and respect. A butter lamp, or chekuny, is placed beside the body, burning continuously until the cremation occurs. This practice reflects the belief that the light of the lamp guides the spirit in its journey to the afterlife.

To protect the body from animals, a group known as Kenai stands watch during the night. Their presence is vital, as it is believed that domestic animals, particularly cats and dogs, may disrupt the peace of the deceased. During this time, the women of the household are traditionally prohibited from cooking or engaging in kitchen work, allowing male family members to take on these responsibilities, further emphasizing the communal support during periods of grief.

As the time for cremation approaches, family members gather firewood, an essential component of the funeral pyre. On the afternoon before cremation, the body is wrapped in fresh cloth, and silver coins are placed in the deceased's mouth and hands. This custom symbolizes the transition to the afterlife, with the tinkling coins believed to herald the opening of the gateway to the next world.

Once prepared, the body is laid on a bamboo stretcher, and mourners accompany the pallbearers to the cremation site. A poignant ritual takes place as a male relative strikes the walls and pillars of the home with a plough, an act designed to ward off any lingering evil spirits that might follow the deceased. This act serves as a protective measure, emphasizing the community's belief in the power of ritual to influence the spiritual realm.

At the cremation site, the pyre is carefully constructed, often consisting of multiple layers of wood secured with wooden stakes. The eldest son typically ignites the flames for parental figures, while a brother or uncle assumes this responsibility if no son is present. This practice underscores the importance of familial duty and respect for elders within the Meyor community.

After the body has been cremated, the ashes are collected the following day and returned to the family home. There, they are mixed with clay to form Checha—symbolic conical shapes that are preserved in a small hut at the village's entrance. This practice signifies the connection between the deceased and the community, allowing the family to maintain a physical representation of their loved one.

On the fifth day after the death, a gathering occurs at the deceased's home, where family, friends, and neighbors come together to honor the memory of the departed. They bring offerings such as tarchok (a traditional rice dish), bumak (rice beer), sambro (a local dish), and two flags. These flags are raised along the path to the cremation ground, serving as a visual representation of the community's collective mourning.

Upon returning from the cremation site, the family conducts a purifying ceremony known as Trapsir in the courtyard of the deceased's home. This ceremony involves ritualistic cleansing and the recitation of prayers, symbolizing the release of any negative energies associated with death and ensuring that the household can begin to heal.

Importantly, the Meyor community places little emphasis on grave gifts or material possessions for the deceased. This reflects a deeper philosophical belief that the journey beyond this life is not defined by physical wealth, but rather by the legacy of one's actions and the love shared during their lifetime. The intricate rituals surrounding death in Meyor society encapsulate their reverence for life, the importance of community support during mourning, and the profound respect for the spiritual journey that follows death. This holistic approach to life and death fosters a strong sense of identity and continuity within the community, honoring both the individual and their connection to the larger spiritual world.

1.3. 12 ZINE (TABOO)

In the Meyor society, taboos are more than mere restrictions; they are integral to the fabric of communal life, representing a complex interplay of beliefs, rituals, and cultural identity. These prohibitions are deeply rooted in the community's understanding of the spiritual world, serving as protective measures against misfortune, illness, and the potential wrath of malevolent spirits. The Meyor people believe that adhering to these taboos not only safeguards individuals but also shields their families from adverse circumstances, thereby reinforcing the collective well-being of the community. The socio-cultural significance of taboos is profound, as they help maintain social order and ensure conformity to communal norms. A breach of these taboos can lead to calamities, not just for the individual but potentially for the entire family, highlighting their communal importance.

Meyor taboos are generally classified into two main categories: conventional or customary taboos and taboos pronounced by the Kambring, who serve as spiritual leaders and ritual officiants within the society.

Conventional Taboos are often based on longstanding cultural beliefs that guide everyday behavior. For instance, during menstruation, women are restricted from offering food to priests, stemming from the belief that such actions could diminish the priest's spiritual potency. This reflects a broader cultural ethos that associates purity with certain social practices. Pregnant women are subjected to additional dietary restrictions, particularly against consuming the meat of wild animals such as bears and monkeys. This belief is rooted in the idea that eating bear meat might align the duration of their pregnancy with that of bears, leading to unforeseen complications, while monkey meat could result in children exhibiting monkey-like characteristics. Such beliefs illustrate the community's deep respect for the natural order and its influence on human life.

Pregnant women are also prohibited from sitting on animal skins and visiting cremation grounds, emphasizing the need to maintain spiritual cleanliness. These taboos extend to postpartum practices as well; after childbirth, a mother is required to abstain from all household duties for five days. During this period, she is expected to remain at home and is provided with food by her husband and family, who use separate utensils for her meals to signify her special status. The husband must also observe specific restrictions, refraining from activities like felling trees or hunting, further demonstrating the community's supportive framework surrounding childbirth.

Fathers face additional cultural expectations during the early stages of parenthood. For instance, they are prohibited from sharpening knives or Dao for the first month, as it is believed that this could instill undesirable traits, such as egoism, in their newborn. As children grow, significant rites mark their development. At around one year of age, an uncle typically shaves the child's hair and drills holes in their ears—two for girls and one for boys—symbolizing their integration into the community and the unfolding of their individual identities.

The treatment of death within the Meyor culture also reflects a nuanced understanding of taboos. Women and children are generally barred from participating in the disposal of dead bodies, particularly in cases of unnatural death. Male participants in these funerals are required to undergo a ritual cleansing ceremony lasting from two to five days upon their return home, rooted in the belief that failing to observe these practices could result in misfortune befalling their families and the community.

Kambring Pronounced Taboos represent a more formalized set of restrictions, issued by the Kambring during rituals and sacrifices. These taboos carry significant weight and require strict adherence. After any ritual solemnization, the Kambring imposes specific restrictions on the solemnizer and all involved parties, dictating their actions, movements, and even dietary choices. This underscores the sacred nature of the rituals and the belief that actions taken in the context of these ceremonies can have lasting implications for both the individuals involved and the wider community.

For a specified duration, individuals may be confined to their homes and prohibited from activities such as cutting trees or harvesting crops, reflecting a deep respect for the spiritual significance of the rituals. Patients undergoing treatment are often required to abstain from consuming particular foods, such as ginger, chilies, onions, pumpkins, cucumbers, and certain fruits and vegetables, further emphasizing the connection between diet, health, and spiritual purity.

The Kambring themselves lead lives marked by even stricter observance of taboos. They refrain from consuming the meat of animals or fowl that they have personally sacrificed, embodying the principles of self-discipline and respect for the life taken during rituals. Furthermore, they are expected not to share meals with the family of the deceased for at least a month, underscoring the notion that certain communal bonds must be preserved even in times of grief.

In essence, the taboos of the Meyor society encapsulate a rich tapestry of beliefs, rituals, and social norms that govern individual behavior while reinforcing community cohesion. They represent a profound respect for the interconnectedness of life and death, the physical and spiritual realms, and the individual and

the community. Through these taboos, the Meyor people navigate their existence, maintaining a delicate balance between their cultural identity and the ever-present forces of nature and spirituality that shape their world.

Conclusion

The socio-cultural identity of the Meyor people is a rich tapestry woven from their deep-rooted traditions, values, and way of life. Despite being a small and vulnerable community, the Meyors have managed to preserve their unique cultural identity in the face of modernization and external influences. Their marriage systems, traditional dress, food habits, and housing patterns reflect a deep connection to their natural surroundings and a lifestyle attuned to the rhythm of their environment. While they continue to uphold their customs, the Meyor community is also adapting to changes in the broader socio-political landscape. However, the challenge remains to balance modernity with the preservation of their distinct cultural heritage. It is crucial that ongoing efforts are made to protect and promote the Meyor way of life, ensuring that future generations can continue to cherish and celebrate their cultural legacy.

Photos



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