

Relationship Between Nyishi Culture and Nature

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In Arunachal Pradesh, India, there are several unique tribes, one such tribe being the Nyishi people. The Nyishi tribe is a patriarchal society that uses local resources to be self-sustaining and has therefore become close to nature. This is the tribe which has been selected for examination because its people have simple, efficient methods of using nature that are now much less common than they once were and are—as a result—interesting to investigate. The specific question this annotated bibliography will seek answer is to what extent the culture of the Nyishi people and the natural world around them shape one another.

Annotated Section

Aiyadurai, A., Milner-Gulland, E., & Singh, N. (2010). Wildlife hunting by indigenous tribes:

A case study from Arunachal Pradesh, north-east India. *Oryx*, 44(4), 564-572.

The purpose of this article is to examine the extent and impact of hunting done by the Nyishi tribe and other tribes around it. In the article, Aiyadurai, Singh, and Milner-Gulland (2010) describe several key findings. They state that many tribes in Arunachal Pradesh—including the Nyishi—seem to like focusing on hunting, despite having crops to farm and domestic cattle, as their people tend to prefer the meat of wildlife. Aiyadurai et al. (2010) also found that the Nyishi and one other tribe often hunt for rituals: in the Nyishi tribe, it is traditional for the men to wear the beaks of rare hornbill ducks on their heads. Moreover, Aiyadurai et al. (2010) assert that when the Nyishi tribe and others sometimes use guns, more mammals tend to be killed, that populations of mammals have been becoming more difficult for the tribes to find, and that a risky number of endangered animals are killed.

Aiyadurai et al. (2010) are—in this article—focused heavily on the biological impact of cultures like that of the Nyishi on nature. Therefore, the article’s information helps to describe the overall relationship between Nyishi culture and nature: it illustrates an image of how Nyishi culture encourages considerable amounts of hunting and shows how this hunting could be linked to an ongoing decline of animal populations—some of these being endangered ones—in Arunachal Pradesh (Aiyadurai et al., 2010).

Aran, Litin, Namsa, & Tangjang. (2011). An Ethnobotanical Survey of Medicinal Plants in the Eastern Himalayan Zone of Arunachal Pradesh, India. *Journal of Ethnopharmacology* 134.1: 18-25.

This is an article that Aran, Litin, Namsa, and Tangjang (2011) use to report how a study of theirs reveals how the Nyishi tribe and two others (the Nocte and the Adi) utilize plants for medicine. Among these tribes—Aran et al. (2011) state—a total of at least seventy-four different plant types are used for medicine, thirteen of these species being used by the Nyishi tribe specifically. Aran et al. (2011) explain that the plants are used by these tribes to treat a variety of illnesses ranging from malaria to jaundice. It is also apparent “that the men, elder people and illiterate ones [have] better knowledge on medicinal plants” (Aran et al., 2011).

The data collected by this study shows that nature plays a role in the biological health of the Nyishi, as certain local plants help the tribe with illnesses (Aran et al., 2011). If it

were not for medicinal plants, the Nyishi culture would have had to evolve to overcome illnesses differently. However, the fact that the people in these cultures who are younger or more literate do not know as much about medicinal plants (Aran et al., 2011) could potentially mean that Nyishi culture is becoming less dependent on having plants as a form of treatment.

Arunachalam, A., Das, A. K., & Deb, Sourabh. (2009). Indigenous Knowledge of Nyishi Tribes on Traditional Agroforestry Systems. *Indian Journal Of Traditional Knowledge* 8.1: 41-46. CSIR.

Arunachalam, Das, and Deb (2009) use this article to inform readers of what they have found out about the Nyishi tribe's use of farming of local plants. Through a study, Arunachalam et al. (2009) explain, they have learned that there are at least eighty types of local plants being grown and collected by the Nyishi tribe. Arunachalam et al. (2009) state that although these plants are most commonly used for food, many are useful for other purposes, such as medicine.

The article is focused primarily on nature's impact on the Nyishi tribe biologically—as the tribe is using farmed, local plants from nature to meet biological needs (Arunachalam et al., 2009)—but having food and medicine readily available thanks to these crops also likely helps the tribe feel more comfortable (and less worried about resources running out), which is a psychological benefit. Therefore, this article is demonstrating how local

plants from nature are—in several ways—creating a more positive cultural environment for the Nyishi tribe (Arunachalam et al., 2009).

Chakravorty, Jharna, Ghosh, Sampat, & Meyer-Rochow, Victor Benno. (2011). Practices of entomophagy and entomotherapy by members of the Nyishi and Galo tribes, two ethnic groups of the state of Arunachal Pradesh (North-East India). (Research) (Brief article). *Journal of Ethnobiology and Ethnomedicine*, 7, 5.

In this article, Chakravorty, Ghosh, and Meyer-Rochow (2011) describe what they learned in a study about the use of insects by the Nyishi and Galo tribes. They state that both tribes use many insects as treatment and as food. Also, Chakravorty et al. (2011) explain that it is the Nyishi tribe eating the most insects—these food insects coming from a total of eighty-one local species—and the other tribe (the Galo) using the most insects for treatments. The tribes—as found by Chakravorty et al. (2011)—like to have the insects they consume roasted, fried, and boiled due to their beliefs and simply due to the insects' flavors. However, Chakravorty et al. (2011) suggest that population growth and an ongoing depletion of natural resources are putting the continuation of the insect-utilization aspect of Nyishi (and Galo) culture at risk.

This article demonstrates how nature—in the form of insects—is impacting Nyishi culture biologically (by providing nourishment options and treatments for ailments) and psychologically (by giving the people a variety of enjoyable flavors for their meals). The authors' assertion that decreasing access to nature could be decreasing the use of this

traditional Nyishi culture further strengthens the idea that the insects in nature have become a part of Nyishi culture (Chakravorty et al., 2011).

Chakravorty, Jharna, Ghosh, Sampat, & Meyer-Rochow, V Benno. (2011). Vertebrates Used for Medicinal Purposes by Members of the Nyishi and Galo Tribes in Arunachal Pradesh (North-East India). *Journal of Ethnobiology and Ethnomedicine* 7: 13.

Chakravorty, Ghosh, and Meyer-Rochow (2011) explain in this article what they have discovered about how the Nyishi tribe and one other (the Galo) use vertebrate animals for medicine. The tribes—as Chakravorty et al. (2011) have found—have healers who use up to thirty-six different types of vertebrates (mostly wild ones) to help treat diseases and other ailments. Chakravorty et al. (2011) stress that some of the wild animals hunted for these treatments are supposed to be protected or are even endangered.

This article shows both Nyishi culture and nature impacting one another. The Nyishi can perform healing rituals that result in biological benefit and psychological relief as a result of nature having vertebrate animals to make into treatments, but at the same time, the Nyishi people hunting these vertebrate animals as a part of their culture could be having the biological impact of putting some rare species in danger (Chakravorty et al., 2011).

Interpretation

The Nyishi tribe's culture has come to count on nature providing food, medicine, and other items through a combination of insects, plants, and animals. This has led to the tribe developing an intimate relationship with the natural world. Its people are proud of their self-

sustaining nature, as their culture has made it to a point where it celebrates self-sustainability. However, with the population of the Nyishi tribe growing and its younger members becoming increasingly-influenced by the rest of the world, natural resources seem to have become both scarcer and less desired. Not only does the tribe seem to be impacting nature by perpetuating the endangerment of certain species of animals, but the component of Nyishi culture that constitutes attachment to nature could be fading.

Depending heavily on nature has, for a long time, been the baseline that everyone in the Nyishi culture grows up with and expects. However, as time passes, it is becoming increasingly difficult for everyone to have the same high level of access to nature. There are now endangered animals to worry about and many more people to feed. Furthermore, the progression of technology such as efficient, pharmaceutical medicine can only be pressuring the Nyishi people to move even further from their nature-bound roots. It might not be long before the baseline of the Nyishi tribe begins to shift and the culture starts to become less self-sustaining and nature-dependent, moving instead in the direction of a globalized baseline more detached from the natural world. If this change does occur, an early effect it might have on nature could be endangered animal populations beginning to grow again. However, the Nyishi people becoming less dependent on the natural world could also make it easier for the tribe to disregard the health of the natural world when choosing their actions, which could impact nature negatively.