

## **Folklore and the Changing Pattern in Communication:**

### **A Study On Nyishi Tribe of Arunachal Pradesh**

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#### **Abstract:**

*Folklore gives us a spectacular glimpse of a particular culture and traditions. Many of the community express their culture and tradition through art, music, festival, paintings, and many more. It is important to study the folklore to know about the unknown and unfamiliar things about the different culture and people. North-East India have a convergence of people, popularly described as a tribal, living in a different stages of under-development and in most cases without a written history of their own. The region provides vast folklore material which if studied systematically and scientifically may help building up history of different social groups residing there. The Nyishi (daflas) are the largest ethnic group of Arunachal Pradesh in North-eastern India. Nyishi are proud of their language and culture. This study aimed at finding the pattern of everyday communication among the Nyishi people. It is necessary to understand the governing elements of the community which is responsible for the growth and development of it. There are elements like economy, education, health, gender, politics which are necessary to be addressed. In a broader term the culture and tradition of the community need to be addressed and examine critically. The primary theoretical and methodological framework will be folkloristic, other related theories and methods will be drawn from communication, cultural anthropology, and media anthropology. It will cover the day to day life of Nyishi people as well the influence of modernity, technology and education in their life. Interview is an important method to get the information about the past as well as present scenario. Participatory observation will make the researcher more familiar with the culture and tradition.*

**Key Words:** Folklore, Culture, Cultural Communication, Nyishi Tribe, Modernity

#### **Introduction:**

Social interaction and communication are essential for human beings to exist in society. An efficient mode of communication is necessary for a fruitful interaction as well as the growth and development of any culture or society. The changing nature of society and the penetration of modern technology into our life has changed the orientation of life and everyday communication. Modernity, globalization, and advancement of technology has changed many primitive societies in the aspects of culture, tradition and lifestyle. In this paper we can easily sense the changing lifestyle of Nyishi people and the changing orientation in the communication pattern. Modernity,

migration and education has changed the landscape of Nyishi tribe. A large chunk of people is assimilated into the modern lifestyle which we can see further in this paper. Modernity has brought a lot of changes in the life of Nyishi people, and people are in a way less attracted to the folklore. Or, there is a convergence in folklore and modernity in Nyishi tribe. It is true that traditional folklore had a different orientation away from modern communication and technology, but the world is changing; the 21st-century generation is digital-normal in a newly networked world. If we want to study the folk life of any society, or their culture and tradition in the present day than, we must consider the presence of modern technology and modernity where folklore is often practiced, created and circulated.

Folklore as a medium of communication can be regarded as reserve pool of folk resources and wisdom. It plays an important role in the life of primitive community. Also, the social relationship can be better understood through the messages delivered through folklore and culture. Folklore or the folkloric communication tell us about the important elements which shape or govern the community. There are many communities in the world which doesn't have a documented history. It is the folklore and cultural communication which carry forward the culture and tradition of these communities. Through folklore and cultural communication one can predict the nature of the community. The day to day conversation of people can give us many information about the gender relation, economic condition, identity and politics in the community. Folklore is very much important for understanding the community.

But, the changing lifestyle due to the force of modernity and technology are worth noticeable. A large number of people have been appropriating many different way of communication. And the most noticeable thing is the changing paradigm in the language. (see fig.1, table.1) Language is one of the major factor in folklore, through language one carry forward the essence of folklore. Without the indigenous language a large portion of folklore diluted into the different medium. At the same time the curiosity of learning other language by neglecting one's own is due to the aspiration which is difficult to achieve through one's own. (see fig.4, table.4) Also, the influence of modern technology, mass media has critically changed the way of communication in the Nyishi tribe. (See table 2, 3 and fig 2,3) So the main objective of this paper is to critically examine the force of modernity and technology in the lifestyle of Nyishi people and how it has affected the Nyishi folklore and communication process.

### **Nyishi from Arunachal Pradesh:**

Arunachal Pradesh is a land of rich culture and folk tradition. Folklore has shaped their society. Through songs, dances, dresses, rituals or merely the gestures, the people express and maintain their different living styles which make Arunachal Pradesh vivaciously vibrant in the realms of intangible cultural heritage. Around 31 indigenous communities are living in Arunachal Pradesh. They all have different languages, culture, and oral tradition. The major indigenous communities are Nyishi, Galos, Adis, Apatanis, Tagins, and Mishings and Nyishi Community is the principal inhabitants of Arunachal Pradesh. As per census 2011, the Nyishi community has about 2.5 lakhs

out of 10, 97,968 total population of the state, which is the one-third of the total Scheduled Community population. They live in six districts, i.e., Papumpare, Upper Subansiri, Lower Subansiri, Kurung Kumey, East Kameng and in some parts of West Kameng of Arunachal Pradesh including Sonitpur and North Lakhimpur districts of Assam.

Nyi refers to 'a man' and the word Shi denotes 'a being', which collectively means a civilized human being. Nyishi believes that they are the descendants of Abo Tani. That is why Nyishi, Adi, Gallo, Tagin, Apatani, and Mishings of Assam called themselves as Tani Group of People'. By nature, Nyishis, are conscientious, confident, sturdy, brave, courageous, industrious, simple and straightforward. Nyishis consider the women as the source of peace, progress, and prosperity. According to them, the importance status of women increases and binds through an established 'reciprocal marital exchange' system in the society. Men always consult all sensible matter or seek advice from their women counterpart before taking any important decision.

Folklore is the important element in the Nyishi culture. The society is shaped on the folklore. They have a vibrant and colorful culture. They celebrate many fascinating, gorgeous and significant festivals around the year. Festivals are Nyokum Yullo, Boori Yullo, and Longte Yullo. These festivals perpetuate worshipping of gods and goddesses to ensure that the entire humanity is well safeguarded against all evils – both natural and human-made thereby, create a balanced and congenial environment to provide sufficient materials of self-sustenance to the humankind including food grains and animal husbandry. The festival represents the cultural specialties giving sustenance to it, and ultimately promotes the continuance of custom, tradition, and culture. Also, legends like Adi abhangs and the Sherdukpen tales which is recited at various ceremonies gives plenty of information about the vibrant culture of Nyishi community. There are few tales which is avoided from public life and confine to shaman and kept as traditional wisdom or history (Elwin, 1958). There are few works available on proverbs, myths, and tales, songs, etc., and no works are noticeable on riddles, nursery rhymes, epic songs and poems, charms, prayers, chants and dramatic performances. These few works on myths, tales or proverbs are also limited to only two or three tribes, and there is total silence on the oral tradition of other groups. Even with the fact that the material life including oral traditions of the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh highlighted from the PreIndependence era through some then British residents and other foreign researchers works, perhaps, the first significant work on the oral tradition of Arunachal Pradesh is Verrier Elwin's *Myths of NEFI* (1958) and A new book on tribal fiction (1970). Nyishi Community has a vibrant culture and tradition.

Folklore is vital in transmitting the values, beliefs and moral teachings of any social group. It gives abundant information about the culture, tradition and social practice of society. It is the informal knowledge which can be learned through observation, imitation, repetition. It carries forward the traditional beliefs and customs by word of mouth, art, and performances. The social beliefs and traditions can be traced through the verbal folklore or material folklore or the customary folklore. It also gives a glimpse of the vibrant and dynamic culture of a society. Transmission of folklore through the generations keeps it alive. The most important thing about

folklore is the transmission, which keeps the culture and tradition alive. It is true that the folklore gets diluted or add on things in the process of transmission, but it always carries its essence and aesthetics.

**Folklore, Language and Communication:** According to Alan Dundes (1965: 3), folklore "includes myths, legends, folktales, jokes, proverbs, riddles, chants, charms, blessings, curses, oaths, insults, retorts, taunts, teases, toasts, tongue-twisters, and greet and leave-taking formulas. It also includes folk costume, folk dance, folk drama (and mime), folk art, folk belief (or superstition), folk medicine, folk music, folksongs, folk speech (e.g., slang). And, consciously or unconsciously we use the various form of folklore in our day to day life. The four functions of folklore also deal with the common situations from everyday life<sup>7</sup>. It's a medium of communication which often surface in our everyday life. As a communicative process, folklore deals with social interaction and societal values. Folklore is not "pretty much what one wants to make out of it"; it is a definite realistic, artistic, and communicative process. Proverbs and riddles have distinct syntactic and semantic structures that separate them from the regular daily speech into which they are interspersed. It has been evident that folklore has certain distinct features which make it unique. But, the traditional folklore is dissolved in the course of modernity and advancements in technologies and evolved in a new form. Now, it is to see how much the new form has transformed the society or still it is the same wine a different bottle.

Folklore can emerge anywhere where informal, everyday, face to face social interaction takes place. As Dell Hymes explained in his presidential address at the 1974 AFS meeting, "folklorists believe that the capacity for aesthetic experience, for [the] shaping of deeply felt values into meaningful, apposite form, is present in all communities, and will find some means of expression among all" (1975, 346). Also, the importance of language is worth notable in the survival process of folklore which carry it forward. If the indigenous language dies than one of the most important mode of folklore will vanish in front of us. Language is very much close to our heart. Sometime we called it our mother tongue. It has the affinity with our whole existence.

Language gives us an identity, and makes us different from others. Each society or community has their own language, and they feel proud about it. But, in case of Nyishi language, Nyishi folks are moving away from their own language, and embracing the foreign language. They think that the mainstream language will give them a better lifestyle and opportunity in life.

As per the research it was really shocking that out of 60 Nyishi Tribe, 32 tribe (53.3%) of using (Nyishi and Hindi) as a communication language, 17 tribes (28.3%) of using Nyishi language and 9 tribes (15.0%) of using hindi as a communication language and only 2 tribes (3.3%) using other language as a communication language. (fig 1)

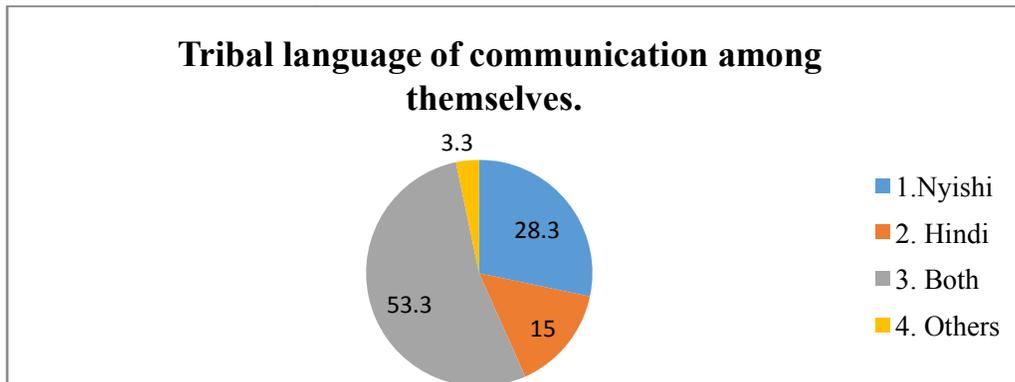


Fig.1

The researcher has observed that Nyishi folks are willing to learn different languages mainly those languages which will give them a better life, and create a better living standard. Many of them speak Hindi because they have to travel away from their homeland in search of job and education. Also the migration has influenced the language of Nyishi Community.

Other than the better living standard, technology and mass media has affected the language and communication mode of Nyishi Community. Widespread of television and mobile has a greater effect on the language and mode of communication. Mobile phone has eased them from the tiresome job of sending messages from one place to other by travelling to that place. Now, they can contact and call a meeting without investing the manpower and labor.

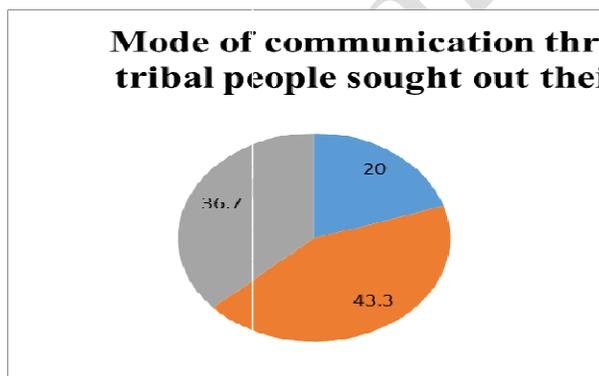


Figure.2

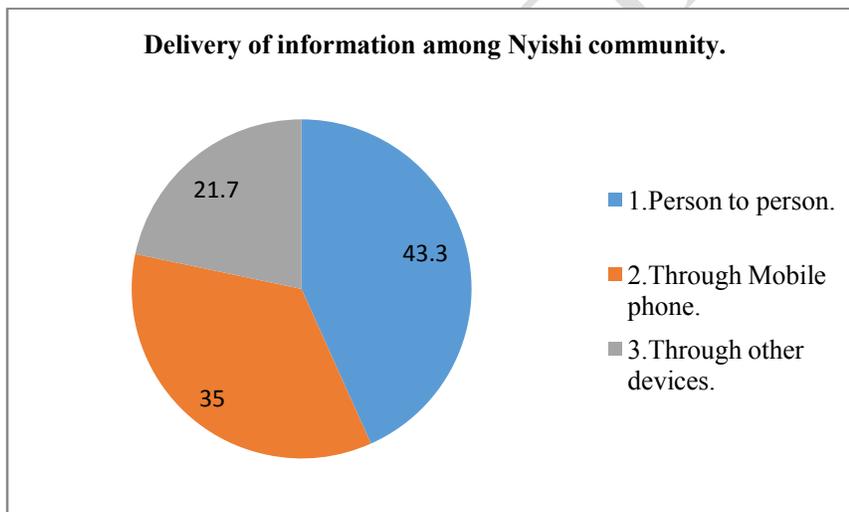
The mode of communication has changed from physical to virtual. Television has introduced them to a new world and Nyishi folks enjoy the different culture and language. The glamorous culture and illuminating life style of other culture has tempted them to learn other language. There is a drastic change in language, Nyishi language is in the verge of death due to the lack of interest by its people. The researcher has observed the paradigm shift of language and mode of communication in Nyishi Community. There are 62 Community Nyishi Community, and only 17 Community are using Nyishi as their only mode of communication. The reach of technology and

mass media has influenced their life. Nyishi folks are trying to follow the rest of the world which looks luminous to them.

As per the research it was found that 26 tribes (43.3%) of using group mode of communication for sought out their problems, 22 tribes (36.7%) of using mass communication and 12 tribes (20.0%) of using interpersonal mode of communication for sought out their problems. (see table 2 and fig.2)

**Mode of communication through which tribal people sought out their problems.**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
1. Interpersonal communication.	12	20.0	20.0
2. Group Communication.	26	43.3	43.3
3. Mass Communication.	22	36.7	36.7
Total	60	100.0	100.0



(Fig.3)

The researcher has asked few questions related to the language, communication and mass media. It is surprising that most of the participant blame mass media and development projects for the aberration of Nyishi language. Earlier there was no mobile phone, and people used to travel a long distance just to deliver a message. If there is any meeting needed to be conduct than one person from the community has to travel all across the villages and deliver the message which was tiresome. Early days it was a difficult time for the Nyishi folks to call for a meeting or gathering. But they never dropped the plan of gathering or meeting despite all these odds, and tiresome job of travelling from one place to another. Their language used to be their identity and people used to derive their pleasure from their language. It was the matter of pride and respect for them which is losing its ground currently.

### 3-Delivery of information among Nyishi community.

As per the research it was found that 26 tribes (43.3%) of using method of delivery of

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	1.Person to person.	26	43.3	43.3
	2.Through Mobile phone.	21	35.0	35.0
	3.Through other devices.	13	21.7	21.7
	Total	60	100.0	100.0

information via person to person, 21 tribes (35.0%) are delivering of information via mobile phone and 13 tribes (21.7%) are delivering the information via other devices.

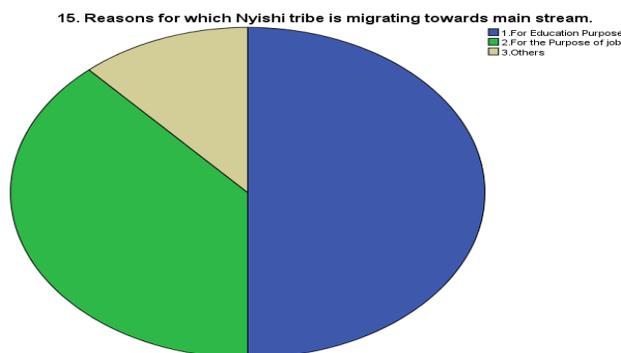
#### Education and Migration as a Catalyst:

Currently Nyishi Community are focusing on education. The researcher has observed that the craze of education is pretty much high among the Nyishi folks. They believed that only a good education can bring them a good fortune. And to get a quality education they are ready to go for any extent. It is difficult to get a quality education in their native so the Nyishi folks are traveling to distance places, travelling to other states. Parents are encouraging their children to pursue higher education because it will bring name and fame to the family. Education has completely changed the social dimension of Nyishi Community; people are getting closer to the modernity and mainstream society. They are no longer interested in their rigid social structure, and moving away from that. It gave them a new world view, and the current generation doesn't want to miss it. Because of the lack of infrastructure and the laziness of government has pushing these youngsters to migrate to other place for education. It is very difficult to get quality education because the teachers are not well educated. Even the elderly people in the society discourage for education especially when the teaching took place in a foreign language. They think that the foreign language will spoil their kid and culture and they must not allow happening that. But the youngsters are pretty much adamant about the changes, and they are ready for anything. They have a lot dreams in their eyes, and want to get it at any cost. Education is the only doorway for them to get closer to their dream. It has been observed that the well educated people have settled well in their life and the entire family get benefitted from that. The person as well as the family got a respectable position in their community, and people praise them very much. Education brought them the good fortune, respect and dignity.

#### Reasons for which Nyishi tribe is migrating towards main stream.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	1.For Education Purpose	30	50.0	50.0
	2.For the Purpose of job	23	38.3	38.3
	3.Others	7	11.7	11.7
	Total	60	100.0	100.0

Table.4



When the researcher asked about the role of education and how the migration is taking place in the Nyishi Community, the participants talk about the rigid social structure, backwardness, underdevelopment, and misconception. Earlier people used to keep themselves busy with their traditional work such as cultivating, rearing the animal, hunting and gathering. They didn't have any interest on education. They thought that the education is no use of, and it's better to focus on household chores, farming, and animal husbandry. They thought that the farming and animal husbandry will bring them fortune and respect that's why they didn't even allow their children to study. Even if anyone interested in education they hardly go to their local school which is pathetic in condition. Education was always discouraged in early days.

**Conclusion:** This paper is based on changing paradigm of communication, culture, language, folklore and lifestyle of Nyishi community. Forces of modernity and the aspiration for a new life has changed the landscape of the Nyishi community. There are significant changes observed in the Nyishi community in terms of communication, language and lifestyle. Education and widespread migration are mostly responsible for all these changes. At the same time the penetration of mass media and technology also influence the lifestyle of Nyishi community.

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