

# The Long Traditional House of Nyishi Tribe of Arunachal Pradesh: Socio Cultural and Structural Significance

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## Abstract:

Nyishi are one of the major tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. The term Nyi means “man,” while Shi denotes “a being,” together conveying the idea of a civilized human being. The Nyishi trace their ancestry to Abo Tani, the common progenitor in Tani oral traditions. Family kinship plays a significant role in the social dynamics of the Nyishi tribe. It serves as a socially recognized system through which relationships are maintained and transmitted across generations. Within this framework the house or household, in the Nyishi dialect, referred to as “NAM” or “NAMLO” functions as an important institution that sustains and reinforces these kinship ties. The traditional house of Nyishi represents more than mere physical shelter. It embody deeply rooted systems of social organisation, culture values and economic knowledge. Among these, the longest traditional Nyishi house stands as a remarkable example of indigenous architecture that reflects collective living practices. Construction using locally available materials and traditional building techniques, such houses illustrate the close relationship between the community and its natural environment. This study examines the socio-cultural and structure significance of traditionally long house of Nyishi tribe, highlighting its role as a living institution that sustains cultural continuity in the face of Changing lifestyle.

**Keywords:** Nam (house), Nyishi tribe, Arunachal Pradesh

## Introduction:

The Nyishi tribe are one of the major tribes of Arunachal Pradesh, with settlements primarily concentrated in the central part of the state. Their population is spread across eight districts: Kurung Kumey, Kra Daadi, Papum Pare, Lower Subansiri, Kamle, Keyi Panyor, Pakke-Kessang, and East Kameng. In addition, smaller Nyishi communities are also found in a few pockets of Sonitpur and Lakhimpur districts of Assam (Hina.2012). The term Nyi means “man,” while Shi denotes “a being,” together conveying the idea of a civilized human being. The Nyishi trace their ancestry to Abo Tani, the common progenitor in Tani oral traditions. Other tribes such as the Adi, Galo, Tagin, Apatani, and the Mishing of Assam also identify themselves as part of the broader Tani group of peoples (Deepika, 2019). Family kinship plays a significant role in the social dynamics of the Nyishi tribe. It serves as a socially recognized system through which relationships are maintained and transmitted across generations. Within this framework the house or household, in the Nyishi dialect, referred to as “NAM” or “NAMLO” functions as an important institution that sustains and reinforces these kinship ties. The traditional house of Nyishi represents more than mere physical shelter. It embody deeply rooted systems of social organisation, culture values and economic

knowledge. Finding in the blog of Shiva Tell, Among these, the longest traditional Nyishi house stands as a remarkable example of indigenous architecture that reflects collective living practices. Constructed using locally available materials and traditional building techniques, such houses illustrate the close relationship between the community and its natural environment. According to Sanctuary Nature Foundation, The Nyishi community traditionally uses bamboo as the primary material for house construction. These dwellings are fine examples of indigenous architecture that have evolved over time in response to the community's cultural practices, as well as the region's climate and topography. The tradition of bamboo house construction is not confined to the Nyishi community alone; it is widely practiced among all the Tani (Abo Tani) tribes as part of their shared cultural heritage. In Northeast India, bamboo is widely used for constructing walls and floors. Bamboo poles are set into the ground at regular intervals to form the structural framework, and bamboo beams are fastened to these vertical supports by tying or nailing them. Split bamboo strips are commonly used to create the wall framework, which is then plastered with a mixture of mud, cow dung, and straw. Roofs are typically made of thatch or corrugated galvanized iron sheets and are built with a slope to withstand the region's heavy monsoon rains (Das,2017) However, one distinct feature of Nyishi houses is their Long-elongated structure which makes their house apart from other Tani groups. Such houses are designed to accommodate multiple family members under one roof as Nyishi community traditionally follows a joint family system. Most of the Nyishi house have bamboo wall, bamboo floor, wooden or bamboo pillar, a balcony, roof made of dry leaves. In larger homes, the interior is divided into separate rooms for different family members. Some houses are further sectioned into multiple chambers, where married couples and young girls have their own individual rooms (Young Intach Explorer). This study examines the socio-cultural and structure significance of traditional long house of Nyishi tribe, highlighting its role as a living institution that sustains cultural continuity in the face of Changing lifestyle.

**Methodology:** The study adopts descriptive and qualitative methods. Information is based on both primary and secondary sources of data through interviews and data such as articles, research papers, and other sources.

**Socio-cultural and structural significance of traditional long-house of Nyishi tribe(objective) :** For the Nyishi community, the house is not merely a place of residence but a vital social and cultural institution. It serves as the center of domestic life, where everyday household activities are carried out. Beyond this, the house functions as a gathering space for family members and relatives, a venue for marriage ceremonies, and a meeting place where important community matters are discussed and decisions are made. Because of these multiple roles, the traditional Nyishi house is built as a long and spacious structure, designed to accommodate social, cultural, and familial needs conveniently. A study carried out by the kerala Forest Research Institute (KFRI) in kerala and Karnataka found the bamboo house are economically sustainable. The assessment highlighted key factors such as the easy availability of bamboo. People's cultural acceptance of the material, its adaptability to local climate conditions, and the relatively low cost of construction(Dhamodaran,2011). Importance of Bamboo also reflects in Nyishi culture. It is intrinsic part of all the tribal communities of Arunachal Pradesh used in every day life. Use of Bamboo as vegetable, local basket and building houses. In earlier times, the community built long houses as a collective living arrangement that provided protection during inter-clan conflicts. These extended structures were also practical during medical emergencies, as close proximity allowed family members to offer immediate care and support. Living together in this way strengthened bonds within the family and reinforced a sense of unity within the wider community. Over time, the long house came to

symbolize collective strength and solidarity. In contrast, individuals who lived separately from the extended family were more vulnerable and often faced social and political domination by stronger clans. During marriage ceremonies, members of both the bride's and the groom's families, along with their extended relatives, traditionally gather at the bride's house. To accommodate such large gatherings and the associated rituals, a long and spacious house becomes essential.

Another function of the house is its unique custom of house-warming celebration. It usually organized after the complete construction of new house. It is where along with the blessing of the home also become a platform shaped by oral tradition, spiritual integration and community engagement (Shiva tell,2024). Folklore is a fundamental element of Nyishi culture, and their social life is deeply shaped by it. It plays a vital role in transmitting the values, beliefs, and moral teachings of the community. Folklore also provides rich insight into cultural traditions and social practices. As a form of informal knowledge, it is passed down through observation, imitation, and repetition across generations(Deepika,2019). The house is constructed using materials entirely obtained from the surrounding natural environment, illustrating the community's ecological knowledge and their integrated relationship with the landscape. One of the universal features of tribal faiths in India is the belief that all beings are endowed with a living spirit. This also holds true for the indigenous faith of the Adi tribe of the Abo Tani clan. Animals, plants, and mountains are no exception to this belief (Riddi & Mize, 2020). The staple food of the Nyishi include rice and maize, along with a traditional rice or millet-based wine known as Apong. Their diet also consists of leafy green vegetables, fish and meat. Most of these staple food items are cultivated in their agricultural fields (Tok,2025). Such food would be served to guests during gatherings held in the house. According to Exploring Indian Heritage, As modernization intensifies, the cultural practices and values of these indigenous communities are gradually declining. The traditional knowledge systems that once sustained them within their specific ecological and geographical contexts are increasingly being neglected. As a result, the cultural essence that has long defined their identity now faces the risk of erosion. However due to the deep cultural significance attached to the traditional house, many elders continue to value and prefer this form of house rather than abandoning tradition entirely, they adapt it to contemporary needs by incorporating modern materials and facilities. This process has led to the emergence of hybrid houses that reflect both cultural continuity and social change.

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