

Indigenous Hunting and Trapping Culture of Adi Tribe

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Abstract

Hunting and trapping constitute one of the oldest subsistence technologies in human history. Among the Adi tribe of Arunachal Pradesh, these practices are deeply embedded in their socio-economic, cultural, and ecological life. Though largely unwritten, the Adis have developed a wide range of indigenous tools, weapons, and techniques for hunting animals, trapping birds and mice, and fishing. These technologies are applied through careful planning, deep ecological knowledge, and strategic understanding of animal behaviour. Poisoned bows and arrows are mainly used for hunting animals, while noose traps, bow-shaped traps, smoke raids, and slab traps are extensively employed for trapping birds and mice. Fishing also involves indigenous tools and techniques such as poisoning, angling, and bamboo traps. This paper attempts to document these traditional hunting-trapping technologies, examine their operational strategies, and assess their ecological implications. The study reveals that despite technological changes in recent times, traditional hunting-trapping practices among the Adis were largely eco-friendly and guided by principles of sustainability and ecological balance.

Keywords: Adi tribe, indigenous technology, hunting, trapping, ecological balance, Arunachal Pradesh

Introduction

Hunting is one of the earliest technologies acquired by human beings, dating back approximately 2.5 million years. In the absence of written records, it is difficult to trace the precise origin of hunting practices among the Adi tribe. However, oral traditions and habitual practices suggest that hunting and trapping of animals, birds, mice, and fish have been carried out since time immemorial. These practices are conventionally deep-rooted in the Adi community and form an integral part of their traditional knowledge system.

Hunting and trapping not only supplemented the food requirements of the community but also served as a means of protection against wild animals. The intimate association of the Adis with forest ecology enabled them to develop sophisticated tools and techniques based on keen observation of animal behaviour, seasonal patterns, and landscape features. This indigenous knowledge made the researcher inquisitive to explore the tools, techniques, strategies, and continuing relevance of hunting-trapping practices among the Adis.

Objectives of the Study

The study has the following objectives:

1. To document the various indigenous technologies used by the Adi tribe for hunting and trapping.

2. To identify and describe different tools used for trapping animals, birds, and mice.
3. To assess the ecological impact of indigenous hunting-trapping techniques.

Methodology

The study is partly historical and predominantly empirical and analytical in nature. Data were collected through interviews, direct observation, and participant observation. Elderly informants, experienced hunters, and community members were consulted to document traditional practices and indigenous terminologies.

Study Area

The universe of the study comprises the Adi tribe of Arunachal Pradesh, with special reference to the Yamne Valley, named after the river Yamne, a tributary of the Siang River. The area is inhabited by the Padam, Pasi, Pangi, Dalbing, and Milang sub-groups of the Adi tribe. It falls under the Upper Siang District and shares similar geographical and ecological features.

Indigenous Knowledge of Hunting and Trapping

Evolution of Hunting Techniques

In the course of human evolution, hunting preceded agriculture as a primary occupation. Among the Adis, hunting emerged as a result of accumulated knowledge of forests, animal movements, feeding habits, and seasonal cycles. Trapping appears to be a later development as it involves weaving techniques and basic mechanical principles such as levers, tension, and gravity.

The Adis possessed an in-depth understanding of forest ecology, including air movement, fruiting seasons, water sources, and animal tracks. This knowledge determined the success of hunting expeditions. Their familiarity with animal behaviour enabled them to design specialized traps for different species, including terrestrial and aerial animals.

Tools and Techniques for Hunting Animals

Tools and techniques for hunting animals form an important aspect of human interaction with the natural environment. From simple implements to carefully planned methods, hunting practices evolved in response to local geography, available resources, and the behaviour of animals. An understanding of these tools and techniques helps explain how communities met their subsistence needs while adapting to their surroundings.

Bow (*Eyi*)

The Adi bow is made from a single piece of split bamboo, shaped and dried over fire. Two types of bows are used—one fitted with iron-tipped arrows and another without iron tips. The bow is convex on the outer side and flat on the inner side. Cane strips are used to make the string, with loops fixed to the horns at both ends of the stave.¹

Arrow (*Epuk*)

Arrows are made of bamboo shafts with bamboo or iron tips. The shaft is feathered with thin leaf strips to ensure stability during flight. Iron tips are fastened using cane strips, over which poison is smeared. Poison is prepared from aconite (*Mishimi teeta*), crushed into paste and applied to the arrowhead. This

poison significantly enhances the lethality of the weapon.²

Community Hunting (*Kiruk*)

Community hunting among the Adis is undertaken to fulfill social, economic, and ritual obligations. It is classified into different types such as *ampi kiruk*, *nokyin kiruk*, *simio-sipyang kiruk*, and *ginne kiruk*. Except for tiger and leopard hunting, the hunting grounds are fixed and located near the village.³

Hunting areas are divided into specific spots known as *sipo*, surrounded by slashed tracks. Participants position themselves strategically around the periphery, while beaters (*rukna*) drive animals toward the ambush party (*tona*). Ritual performances such as *pabat* are conducted before the expedition to ensure success.⁴

Tiger and leopard hunting is conducted only in response to attacks on mithun. Advanced strategies such as ambush platforms (*toding*), poisoning carcasses, and joint community hunts are adopted due to the high risk involved.⁵

Hunting at Fruit Trees and Drinking Sites

Animals frequently visit fruit-bearing trees and specific drinking sites (*soyit*). Hunters construct ambush platforms (*toding*) near these locations. Selection of ambush sites depends on wind direction to avoid detection by animals. Hunters often wait silently for extended periods, using bamboo tubes for urination to minimize movement.

Flute Hunting (*Dumpi Mutnam*)

Skilled hunters mimic the cry of a deer calf using a bamboo flute. The sound attracts mother deer, making it easier to hunt. However, this method is used cautiously as it may also attract predators.⁶

Use of Hounds

Dogs play a vital role in Adi hunting practices. They assist in tracking and chasing animals and are considered co-hunters. Dogs receive a share of the hunted meat, reflecting their importance in the hunting process.⁷

Tools and techniques Trapping Techniques for Animals

Various mechanical traps such as *komang* (automatic shooting bow), *sibat*, *egum* (weight-loading trap), and *songkit* (noose trap) are used. These devices rely on tension, gravity, and triggers, demonstrating indigenous mechanical knowledge.

Trapping of Mice and Birds

Bow-shaped traps (*etku*), smoke raids (*burung mutnam*), slab traps (*eda*), and hole blockades (*kerung tumi*) are widely used to control rodents and trap birds. These techniques are especially important during agricultural seasons to protect crops.⁸

Indigenous Fishing Techniques

Fishing methods include diversion of water channels, poisoning (*tamo runam*), angling, noose fishing, and bamboo traps such as *porang* and *edil*. These techniques are adapted to riverine ecology and seasonal water flow.

Conclusion

Indigenous hunting and trapping practices have played a crucial role in shaping the socio-economic and cultural life of the Adis. These practices are closely linked with festivals, rituals, and community cooperation. Knowledge transmission occurred informally through observation and participation, particularly in the *musup* (male dormitory).

Although modern weapons have reduced reliance on traditional tools, the underlying principles of planning, strategy, and ecological awareness remain unchanged. Traditional hunting-trapping methods were largely eco-friendly and based on subsistence needs rather than commercial exploitation. The study concludes that indigenous Adi hunting-trapping practices reflect a sustainable relationship with nature and contribute valuable insights into traditional ecological knowledge.

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