



## Enculturation of Pepsi among the Nyishi Community of Arunachal Pradesh

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**Abstract:** Soft drinks play an important role in the society today. Although an American soft drink, yet Pepsi plays an important role in the social functions and as daily drinks among the Nyishi tribe of Arunachal Pradesh. Many people, after conversion to Christianity have started taking it instead of alcohol, while some people use it after boiling in socio religious festivals instead of alcohol. While conducting a survey on it, the author found that the youths of Arunachal Pradesh are solely into Pepsi, not even coca cola. While interviewed, they were of the view that they prefer the taste of Pepsi rather than coca cola. This paper shows a modest attempt of inclusion of a particular soft drink as part of enculturation.

**Keywords:** Pepsi, enculturation, conversion, Christianity, alcohol, syncretism

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### Introduction

The Nyishi community comprises of around 600,000 population in the state of Arunachal Pradesh. The tribe is the single largest community in the state. As the Nyishis are spread in almost 8 districts of the state, Papum Pare, Kurung Kumey, Kra Dadi, Pakke Kessang, East Kameng, Kamle, and various other states, their cultural traditions have shown some minor variations districtwise, but the basic Nyishi culture remains the same. The concept of pepsi has emerged among them in the recent times after the 2010s. to know the enculturation of pepsi, we need to describe their concept of beverages used in their socio religious functions and ceremonies. Originally, the Nyish is are the followers of the religion Donyi Polosim (Chaudhuri, 2013), a religion where the Moon is considered as male, while the Sun is considered as the female. In their socio religious functions, the use of home made alcohol is used and consumed by the people. This is a part of their culture. As part of the culture,

as the alcohol is already used, they are accustomed to alcohol from branded stores as well. At the same time, the Missionaries are also taking active part in religious conversion in the state, and in Christianity, alcohol is prohibited. So here starts the new issue of enculturation and syncretism. Every religion has some standardized norms in relation to the specific society and culture. Now, despite becoming Christian, some forms of cultural norms are very difficult to avoid in human life. The Nyishis have their socio religious festival performed as Nyokum, which is celebrated in February every year. In Nyokum, animal sacrifice is conducted along with the offering of alcohol to the deity. Festival is a part of identity of every community irrespective of their religions. Whenever it comes to Christianity, it is found that localization is usually observed among the Christians of the world. For example, African Christians have some local elements of African culture are associated with their Christianity, while among the Goanese Christians also, the use of Portuguese names and Hindu names used simultaneously in their names. So, when it comes to Arunachal Pradesh, similar practice is seen among the Nyishis too. In Nyokum, Christian Nyishis don't take part in animal sacrifice part, but on the same ground, in a different place, they offer prayer to the God as per their Christian customs in Nyishi attire, and the prayer is either in Hindi or in Nyishi language depending on the areas and the villages.

As the continuation of cultural practice is the norms in socio religious functions, food and beverages also take place in the festivals. Christians are non vegetarian in their diet, so taking the meat is not a problem, but the problem occurs with alcohol, as alcohol is prohibited in it. As a result, they were thinking about some alternative, which led to the concept inclusion of Pepsi in their culture. Some Christian Nyishis use the Pepsi after boiling it too, making it a symbolic alcohol. From health perspectives, if we see the negative effects of alcohol, then this custom may be considered as not bad.

## **Methodology**

The methodology used here was the participant observation method, interview method, and survey schedule method. The fieldwork is based on Palin circle. Various anthropological tools and techniques were use dot gather information. Both primary and secondary sources of data were collected with the help of interview method, a wide set of questions were asked and answers were recorded in standardized forms. Both structured and schedule methods were used during the interview. During the interviews, smart phones were used to record photo, videos and voice. Random sampling method was used as the

drinking of soft drink is not subjected to any gender or age. Snow ball sample were also used for wider coverage of views of people for interview. Being an insider, participatory research methods were given priority, and as a pepsi consumer myself, participant observation led to rapport building.

## **Objectives**

The objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To study the factors leading to high consumption of Pepsi among the Nyishi community of Kra- Daadi district
2. To understand how the cold drink has assimilated with the culture of the Nyishi community of the region and how is it valued.
3. To assess the knowledge of the community regarding health effects of increased consumption.

## **Data Source and Methodology**

The study is based on both primary and secondary source of data. The primary data were collected through

Over the past few decades, market based economic development has transformed the socio- economic condition in Kra- Daadi district of Arunachal Pradesh. The urbanization and economic development of the region has also brought about a dietary transition from traditional to the westernized diet, The diet of the people have become increasingly dependent on purchased foods wherein the quality and quantity of food have changed, this has been accompanied by an increase in consumption of heavily processed and highly caloric foods such as candy, bakery products and sweetened beverage, out of this products, soft drinks especially high consumption of Pepsi Cola have come to light. Pepsi an international icon of US culture is now a common element of the Nyishi diet. Upon entering any shop, display of Pepsi in cases are common in sight. Many home based Pepsi dealers have sprung up in the region.

## **Factors leading to high consumption**

### ***Religion***

Conversion of one's religion has significant impact on the culture, beliefs and practices of a community; likewise Christianity has brought great changes in the lives of the people of Kra-Daadi district. Today almost majority of the Nyishi population of Kra-Daadi district has converted into Christianity , in

such a short period of time a great change of socio-cultural life appear to develop in the community abandoning their age old cultural practices likewise the consumption of *Apong* (a locally made rice beer) has lost its cultural value due to teachings of Christian belief to refrain from any kind of alcoholic drinks and these teachings have impacted in such a way that village people gave up on *Apong* and any type of alcohol and started consuming tea or soft drinks in replacement or as an alternative for the local beer

A number of participants described why they preferred Pepsi as an alternative to *Apong* according to a respondent

“After converting into Christianity, I had to stop drinking alcohol; it was very difficult for me to leave my drinking habit. At first I tried drinking tea and juices as an alternative to alcohol but it didn’t work but I found Pepsi”

### ***Ways of Livelihood***

The Nyishi people of Kra- Daadi district are mostly agriculturist and practices jhum cultivation, apart from Palin the district head quarter where local people are engaged in small businesses and tertiary sector most of its adjoining village’s population are farmers, they have no other source of income and cannot think of producing anything commercially due to its rugged topography inaccessibility and lack of other infrastructure development and this has compelled them to continue shifting cultivation as a means of subsistence which is a very hard labouring task from clearing and burning forest. During an interview with one of the soft drink wholesaler in the region it was reported that during the cultivation season, the purchase of cold drink is the highest but among them Pepsi drink is the highest selling among these soft drinks. According to a respondent, a farmer “I alone consume 5 bottles of Pepsi per day”.

### ***Behavioural Pattern***

In the early days, people of KraDaadi lived a simple life, not caring much about money. Mithun and the cattle were considered as property. But at present, they are exposed to the modern world. For the Nyishis, “the bigger, the better”, whether it may be the house type, or the family pattern in early days, and at present, use of large cars. As a result, they do not think much about spending money on pepsi. So, the bigger, the better concept is leading to their concept of high consumption of pepsi at present. Another behavioural pattern observed among the Nyishis is that their children are much rougher than the other tribes, and their children eat and drink whatever their parents eat and drink, which is not always good for their health. If the parents drink *apong* (rice beer), children

also drink it and parents never stop them. As a result, same thing is happening to the consumption of pepsi at present, based on the behavioural pattern acquired through their culture. However, awareness and knowledge about the health impact of dangerous effect of caffeine and the ingredients contents of the drink can lead to change in the consumption factor. It was observed in the fieldwork that the educated people drink less pepsi as compared to illiterate and elderly people of the village. Educated people of the Nyishi tribe are found to drink more fruit juice, especially the natural organic one.

### *Assimilation of Pepsi with the culture*

Over the past few decades, KraDaadi district has now been well connected with other parts of Arunachal Pradesh and as a result, people are now dependent on purchasing foods and reflects greater consumption of commercialized processed foods. Moreover, due to satellite TV and the use of internet, youths are now very much attracted by the American culture (Davis, 2019) and South Korean K Pop culture (Marinescu, 2013). As a result, consumption of anything American is often considered as modern today in various parts of the developing countries of Asia. Among these commercialized processed foods, pepsi is a product of American company, and it has taken an important place in the food habits of the Nyishis of KraDaadi. Such kind of soft drinks are consumed on daily basis and it has become an essential part of their diet. Such soft drinks are served to the non alcoholic guests in functions and among the Christian Nyishis, where alcohol is never used, pepsi has taken the place of apong. The conversion to Christianity has taken a pivotal role here in the use of apong. Today, due to pepsi, the indigenous drink apong has lost its value, especially the social value. During the marriage function of Nyishi called Nyeda, there is a heavy amount of items exchanged like ornaments, food items, mithun, pig and local wine called apong (opo). Back in the early days, apong was an important and essential part of the material items that were exchanged during marriage, but today, it has been replaced by pepsi. Pepsi has taken the place for various reasons and these are provided below:

1. Compared to local wine, or any alcoholic drink, pepsi or any other soft drink is less costly.
2. Alcohol is not consumed by everyone, but pepsi can serve as a secular drink among all irrespective of any race, caste or religion. For example, if any Muslim research scholar visits a Nyishi festival during the time Nyokum or any marriage functions, then he can be served well with a glass of soft drink, as such soft drinks are never forbidden in any

religion. Same thing applied to the Christians as well, as alcohol is prohibited in Christianity too.

3. Like alcohol, soft drinks don't create any immediate issue like getting high, and as a result, there is less risk of arguments.

## Summary and Conclusion

The above discussion has shown that Pepsi has entered the life of the Nyishi tribe in a different manner, in the form of enculturation. So, from that perspectives, if we consider the negative health effects of alcohol, this concept of enculturation may be considered as good. On the other hand, from the perspective of culture, it may be considered as a post globalized scenario of American Imperialism, which has been adopted and accepted by a tribal group as a matter of change in the society. However, pepsi itself is not a health drink, and if taken in limitation, local made rice beer has some positive health effects (Fuloria, 2022), (Nyori, 2015). So depending on the issue of conversion, religion and syncretism, the concept of enculturation has been seem to be very strong among the Nyishis, through soft drink culture at present. May be, it is a kind of cocacolonization at present (*Cocacolonization* (alternatively *coca-colonization*) refers to the globalization of American culture (also referred to as Americanization) pushed through popular American products such as soft drink brand Coca-Cola. It is a portmanteau of the name of the multinational soft drink maker and "colonization") (Wagnleitner, 1994).

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