

Nomads of the Rain Forest – A Review

Human beings have evolved from a hunter-gatherer way of living to current day modern existence. A glimpse into the lives of the secluded Waorani tribe in the Amazon forests of South America in the video “Nomads of the Rain Forest” (1984), helps us understand how the tribe carefully balanced their lives in complete harmony with nature and how their nomadic life-style have helped them survive several threats both from natural sources and human beings.

The video opens with two men of the Waorani tribe moving as noiselessly as possible with their blowguns kept in ready position to strike the monkey that they were following. They often imitate the sounds made by birds and monkeys to lure them to come within striking range of their blowguns, which is used to blow out poisonous arrows to pierce the blood stream of the prey and thus killing it. The video captures their hunting habits, their stealthy movements and how they stalk their prey and bring home the kill to share it with all the their tribe people (The Nomads of the Rain Forest 1984).

While there is no information regarding the family and relationships as practised by the Waoranis in the documentary; however, it did point to an old grandmother singing as she tended to the needs of her grand-children. They carefully cleared the forest and planted banana, sweet potatoes, maize, beans, and manioc (Smiley & Smiley 2014, p. 7) and burnt the area before leaving a place; they left a place in search of newer ones when they felt food (gaming animals) was becoming scarce in the area (The Nomads of the Rain Forest 1984), which is why they are probably called the ‘nomads’.

Showing uncanny skills of adaptability, the Waoranis made hammocks for resting by weaving reeds and leaves and the skills were passed on from mother to daughter; similarly the art of making a blowgun was passed on from father to son. The video also brought out their expertise in identifying the roots and herbs precisely, which help in preparing poison for their arrows. Their keen observation skills, eyesight and team-working skills are all fostered by the all-cooperative and no-competition atmosphere, wherein there are no leaders and all share equality in status, including children.

As rightly mentioned in the text, the video (The Nomads of the Rain Forest 1984) shows the division of labour, with men hunting and women taking care of the children and preparing food (Smiley & Smiley 2014, p. 7). Women enjoyed equality of status with the men and shared labour. The only dark side of the tribe appeared that they were fierce and deadly warriors as evidenced from the number of people who lost their lives in their encounter with the Waoranis (The Nomads of the Rain Forest 1984).

What interested me particularly was the manner in which children were encouraged to rear their own pets, hunt, make their own blowguns, weave hammocks and string-bags by observation, and more importantly share whatever they get with all their family members (The Nomads of the Rain Forest 1984). These are essential life-skills that help them survive even in times of hardship and help them understand the value of cooperative co-existence early on. Without going to school or education they already are conserving the eco-system by re-planting trees and understanding animal behaviour.

Nearly at the end of the documentary (The Nomads of the Rain Forest 1984) the video does warn of the dwindling forest becoming a threat to their existence; however, in my opinion it could have been emphasized more on the threats and also suggested with the ways and means to tackle the problem of extinction. However, overall the documentary does provide solid information on the hunter-gatherer existence of the Waorani tribe.

References

Susan G. and Francis E. Smiley (2014). “Horticulturists, Cultivators & Farmers” in Introduction to Cultural Anthropology. pp. 1-7.

The Nomads of the Rain Forest (1984, November 6). Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hn8gk67s6YM>