

Huaorani of ecuador



The Huaorani Indians live in the Amazonian rainforest in Ecuador, and they are a semi-nomadic horticultural society. They hunt wild game, gather fruits, and berries, but they also grow their own plants. They live off the land and have to move from time to time usually every ten years or so in order to not over use the area. They are feared by many people in their region because of their violent reputation, they are temperamental, and unpredictable. The men and women have different chores, but are treated equal when making decisions.

They usually have only two or three children because there are not enough resources to support too many children. They live in an egalitarian social system. Many searches have been utilized in order to try to find the most reliable and credible information possible. Some of the areas used include Google Scholar search engine, Ashford online library to include ProQuest, yahoo search engine, however the ProQuest articles provide the best information. There have been many disappointments with finding non-credible sites.

The first time that the Huaorani peacefully had contact with outsiders was back in 1958, when evangelical missionaries from the Summer Institute of Linguistics convinced a Huaorani woman that was a slave to go back to the forest she lived in as a child and help them relocate her family to a settlement and convert them to Christianity (Baihua, 2009). Due to oil companies trying to take over as much of the land as possible in order to get more oil they continued trying to get the Huaorani people to move to settlements and convert to Christianity.

The missionaries told them that their culture was sinful and savage, and tried to pressure them into giving up their traditions and way of life. Since the missionaries tried to convert as many of the Huaorani as possible they have forced many deeper into the forest. They have retreated deeper in order to stay as pure to their tradition as possible. Many however did go with the missionaries and convert to Christianity which upset the rest that stayed true to the culture. The Huaorani tried their best to stay away from the outsiders, but the outsiders keep going after them and taking over more and more of their land.

The oil companies continue to take over more land in order to find more oil. The Huaorani face many issues because of the oil companies that have taken over a large portion of their land. The Huaorani faced new diseases that sickened, and killed many of them. Their homes were invaded and destroyed by the outsiders. The oil companies have built a road through the heart of the Huaorani territory. Since the oil companies have done this it has severely hurt the habitat in which the Huaorani hunt. The rainforest that they hunted and gathered from was depleting very quickly, which caused food shortages.

The oil companies have their own camps built within the Ecuadorian forest, which has exposed the locals to all of the material items that outside world has. Things like stereos, televisions, alcohol, and other luxuries. “ While some Huaorani have resisted the patrollers, others have become dependent on them, some even becoming oil company employees,” (Cuna, 2007, para. 8). “ The Huaorani believe that when someone dies, the soul starts a journey towards heaven. On the way, in the middle of the path, a big anaconda is obstructing the way.

Only brave souls can jump the boa and reach heaven. Whoever fails, returns to earth as a termite, and leads a miserable existence,” (Cuna, 2007, Para. 12). When it comes to death the Huaorani do not fear it, nor do they mourn for the one’s that pass. They do not have a big funeral like Americans do. They simply bury their dead and go on with life, there are no condolences offered. They have no sense of time when it comes to age and things like this. If you were to ask a man or woman how old they were they would not be able to tell you because they do not keep up with that.

The Huaorani of Ecuador hunt with blowguns and spears made out of chonta wood which is very heavy (Cuna, 2007). They also use a fruit carcass that is filled with cotton to make it hard, and darts that they are curare-dipped (Cuna, 2007). The curare is made by mixing various vines and plants together and boiling them, which creates the poison that paralyzes and kills the prey (Cuna, 2007). The Huaorani are primarily hunters and their diet consists of monkey, wild boar, and turtles, but they also eat bananas and other native fruits in the area. They have a connection with the forest that is unknown to many people.

Their connection with the rainforest is important to their survival in that without that connection they would not have the knowledge and abilities to gather and survive otherwise. The Huaorani acquired a few new methods for hunting from the outsiders. These items include shotguns and dynamite, which caused them problems because it made it too easy. By making it so easy they killed more than they needed to, which depleted the wildlife in the area. They hurt themselves by doing this because by killing all the animals they no longer had any to hunt.

With no animals to hunt they would have no food other than berries, which caused weight loss and forced them to move. Huaorani fear snakes because they believe that they are evil and that is why in death the warriors have to jump over a snake in order to go on to live forever. They honor the jaguar in a sense because they think that the jaguar allows them to communicate with the spirits. They also have respect and interest in the trees because of the medicine they get from them, and because they relate the growth of trees to their own growth.

How the leaves change with age and how the trees progress throughout the years. The trees are complex in the way they mature and grow just as the Huaorani do. They usually live in small settlements that they have planted vegetable gardens in and they grow manioc, maize, peanuts, sweet potatoes, and many types of fruits. That way they can have something besides just the meat that the men gather from the forest. By planting these gardens they have to move every ten years or so in order to keep from over exerting the land. Moving allows the land to heal itself so that it can be planted again years later.

Huaorani living quarters are made up of smaller sub settlements within the larger settlement which are positioned at distances of a couple days walk from one another. They do this in case of danger and resource depletion. This is a prerequisite to the egalitarian social system that they live by (Rival, 2005). Their houses can provide shelter for ten or so people all of the same family. There is almost always laughter and joking going on throughout the households because the Huaorani are very close. Men in the tribe wear a

cotton string like clothe around their waist that also holds their genital in the upright position.

Women wear a similar cotton string clothe, but theirs is thinner. Once children are able to walk on their own they can then wear the cotton string clothe, but not until then. Huaorani children are very self-sufficient and independent, and their relations with the adults are devoid of authority. Adults have no sense of hierarchical superiority, and they are not over-protective of the children. The Huaorani define independence as the ability to bring food back and share it with others. The next stage of maturity for both genders is when they are mature enough and decide they want to get married.

This is when they get their ears pierced and have a wedding ceremony. These ear piercings are not like ours, they have hard pieces of wood placed in the holes until they get to the right size. Gender relations consist of the men being the hunters, the women can hunt but usually do not instead they gather fruits, and berries, and take care of the children. The men and women are treated equally when it comes to family decisions, however there are different chores. The Huaorani women are strong and independent, and also know what plants to use as a natural birth control in order to limit themselves to two or three children.

The children learn from their elders by observing and trying to imitate them. At very young ages the children are able to be on their own, once they have learned to walk and share food. Huaorani do not really care about the children talking so much as they do singing, sharing, and hunting. The affect

that the horticulturist life style has on the gender relations is noticeable by the roles that each member of the family plays. As far as being gatherers of meat, berries, childcare, and marriage. There is informal education among the Huaorani when it comes to the children learning their place and responsibilities based on gender.

The children stay close to adults knowing that they will not be sent away. No one tells the child to do this, but they begin to imitate what they see their elders doing. Children do not get scolded or praised for their behavior by anyone in the household. The children have no bedtimes they just play until they fall asleep. This type of education may not be acceptable in our society, but this is what they know. This is their way of life and how they grow and mature throughout their life. Children finish the first stage of life maturity when they can walk and gather on their own and in return home and share what they got.

Kinship in the Huaorani society is very important in that family life is the most important thing to them. The kinship consists of mother, father, children, spouses, and grandchildren. This helps with the daily responsibilities that are required of the family. If something were to happen to a child such as becoming orphaned then other family members will automatically take the child in as their own. The horticulturist lifestyle affects the kinship of the Huaorani because they live in small groups based on their family unit in order to ensure that their families are provided for.

They take care of family first as far as food and other much needed supplies are concerned. Political organization, there really is not any except for when

there is a major conflict only then is there any type of leadership. No one gives orders to anyone, they all know what they have to do and they do it. There is no need for political organization unless there is a major issue that arises and that is usually not between kin or other Huaorani settlements, but outsiders. This is because they usually settle any disputes on their own by giving food to one another or by killing the offending party.

The beliefs that they have affect the lack of political organization needed. Their main idea is to be as self-sufficient and independent as possible that is the egalitarian society. When a member of the household becomes sick all the other members have to live with the same food restrictions to help the sick person recover (Rival, 1998). Relatives that live in a different house do not share the same food restrictions. Members usually share illnesses when living in the same house. There is natural medicine made from various plants to help with certain diseases and for birth control.

Illnesses have become worse since the Huaorani have made contact with the outsiders. The outsiders brought new diseases that they have never experienced before. These diseases have hurt and even killed many of them because they refuse help from the outsiders and they themselves do not have the cures for them. The Huaorani have had changes in their social life due to the outsiders taking much of their land. They have had to run deeper into the rainforest in order to remain free. By doing this their life changed because they had to give up some of the land that they once used for daily life.

However, they still laugh and joke among each other. They still enjoy the company of their kin and make the best of their life. The outsiders have brought out the worst in them by angering them, which led to deaths of outsiders in order for them to protect their own way of life. Beliefs and values that are shared and practiced by the Huaorani are very important. Their beliefs are directly affected by their horticulturalist life style, in that they are all about sharing and taking care of their kin. They have ceremonies for important maturity stages such as becoming an adult, preparing for marriage, and the wedding itself.

They value that they have are being true and taking care of their own. They do not value material items because they do not need them. Without their beliefs and values they would have nothing. Huaorani economy is all about sharing among the sub settlement members. They are all about sharing meat, berries, and other necessities. Adults share with each other and help one another when gathering food. Children go out with the adults and gather food also, and they bring it back to the house to share with everyone.

Everyone works together in the household to ensure that no one lacks what they need to survive.

They also defend their home together so that no harm comes to their family. Everyone in the household will have food to eat because the food collected by one member is shared with all. They do not however share with members of a different sub settlement because they have no reciprocity between them. This is just not a common thing for them. If they did give food and then got nothing in return it would cause a war between the two settlements.

The future of the Huaorani looks very gloomy in my opinion. They have been

through so much in the past thirty years, and who knows how much more they can endure.

If the oil companies continue to take over more and more of the rainforest then the Huaorani will soon have nowhere left to hunt. Without the government standing by their word and keeping a certain amount of land secure for them they will surely come to their demise. Their cultural safety is in harm due to the continued desires for the oil rich soil that they depend on for their livelihood. In conclusion the Huaorani people are a semi-nomadic horticulturalist society that has little need for political organization, and gender relations and kinship are affected by their egalitarian social system.

Their horticulturalist lifestyle affects every aspect of their daily life to include kinship, gender relations, and social organization. Everything in their daily life is affected in some way by their beliefs and cultural practices. Without their kinship there is no way that they would be able to survive as a people. Their lack of political organization may be a bad thing for them given their current state with the outsiders continually taking over more of their land.