

KATABI

Spirit of Lake
Tanganyika

KATABI: SPIRIT OF LAKE TANGANYIKA

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Katabi

Katabi (a legendary hunter) is a spirit in the popular belief of the Nyamwezi/Wanyamwezi people of Tanzania. Nyamwezi is of Swahili origin and means “people of the moon” or “people of the west”. They are one of the Bantu groups of southeast Africa. Their ancestral homeland is in parts of the Tabora, Singida, Shinyanga and Katavi Regions.

Katabi is a spirit of Lake Tanganyika. He’s believed to be the chief of the water spirits but also haunts barren lands and deserts.

Lake Tanganyika is one of the African Great Lakes and the second largest freshwater lake in the world by volume. It’s also the longest freshwater lake and the second deepest. Lake Tanganyika is divided among four countries.

1. Tanzania
2. Democratic Republic of the Congo
3. Burundi
4. Zambia

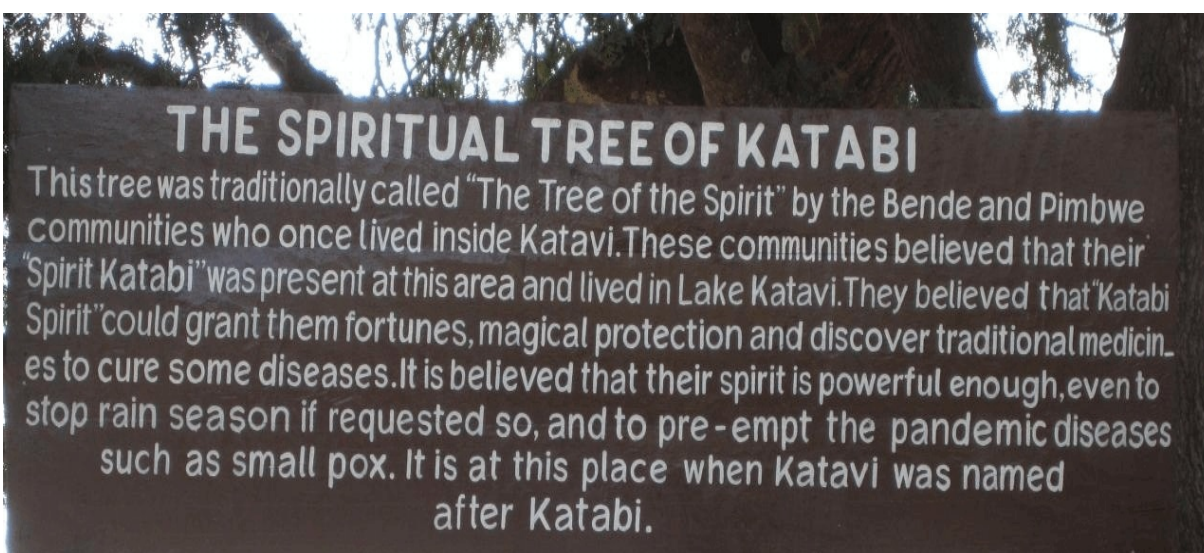
Katavi National Park is located in Tanzania (Katavi Region). It was created in 1974.

Katavi NP is named after a spirit of the Wabende known as Katabi who is married to the equally strong spirit called Wamweru. His spirit is known to exist near Lake Katavi in a twin pair of Tamarindus indica trees and his wife stays far from him on the other side of the lake in the hills called Wamweru. But Wamweru and Katabi can greet each other from the distance each morning.

Some members of the local communities still use the site for worshipping today. Leopards are sighted frequently close to Katabi’s tree. The Wabende tribe believes that Katabi appears as an unusual human being or a strange animal, like a bird with one leg, deformed animals or albinos. Actually there are Albinos giraffes and reedbuck in Katavi NP. - Katavi National Park

Katavi National Park takes its name from a semi-legendary ancestor of the Pimbwe, Fipa and Bende tribes, Katabi. A famed hunter in his time, his spirit is said to reside near Lake Katavi, in a small clearing around two tamarind trees. The site remains sacred, and locals still come here from outside the park to leave offerings, seeking Katabi's intercession with God in worldly matters like asking for rain. - Jens Finke

The Bende/Wabende people reside in the Rukwa Region of Tanzania. Traditionally, among the Bende and Pimbwe peoples, *Tamarindus indica* is known as “The Tree of the Spirit” for it’s believed Katabi inhabits it.



“Spirit Tree of Katabi”
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Tamarindus indica is the Tamarind tree - a leguminous tree indigenous to tropical Africa. It grows wild in Sudan, Nigeria, Cameroon and Tanzania.

Some African tribes venerate the Tamarind tree as sacred. To certain Burmese people, the tree represents the dwelling-place of the God of rain. In Malaya there is the belief that Tamarind makes one wise, so a little Tamarind with coconut milk is placed in the mouth of an infant at birth. - National Tropical Botanical Garden

Sources

Image

“Spiritual Tree of Katabi”, May 30, 2009. Copyright © 2009 [Peter A. Levey](#).

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