



Exploring The Dynamics Of Clans and Kinship Networks Of the Nocte Tribe of Arunachal Pradesh

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ABSTRACT

The research paper attempts to study the aged-old clans system and its significance roles in shaping a social institution of the Nocte tribe of Tirap district, Arunachal Pradesh. The Noctes are one of the major tribe of the state, inhabits in the eastern most part of India. In social organization of the tribe, chief is the head of village administration. Every village has an independent chief who is hereditary in nature. However, they are not enjoying an absolute power in the village administration. The village council and common people also share their view in every decision taken related to village affairs. The object of this study is to examine the various clans and their social status in the society and also discussed on the kinship-relationship through empirical study and method. The study is on historical analysis. A valuable data is gathered through field studies and interaction with the people of the community. Secondary sources are also referred to further authenticate the research work. This study is confined to the Nocte tribe of Tirap district, Arunachal Pradesh.

Keywords: *Clan; Chief; Hereditary; Kinship; Empirical; Institution; Historical; Aged-old*

Social organization “as a state of being, a condition in which the various institutions in a society are functioning in accordance with their recognized or implied purposes” as describes by Elliot & Merill.¹ Nocte is a well-organized society so, they have been abode by the custom and maintain a cordial relationship among them .Village is one major organization, which has further subdivided into hierarchy. The social relationship of village people has traced through their descendants of ancestor and accordingly forms different groups of household, which it known as “KU”.²

Elwin describes that “the clan system still further unites the members of the various exogamous groups and extends the co-operative spirit over a field wider than the village community, to some extent counteracting the separateness, caused by the great distances and the memories of war and feud.”³

In the tribal society, it finds that there are numbers of kin groups namely phratry, clan and moiety. These groups have live in harmony and cooperation. However, a marriage cannot take place within the same clans or phratry. A clan is a kin group composed of two or three lineage, all of which believe to be descended from a common ancestor. Carol & Melvin define it as “clan is a set of kin whose members believe them to be descended from a common ancestor, but the links back to that ancestor are not specified. In fact, the common ancestor may not even be known.”⁴ Another group, called phratry that is also claimed themselves having same ancestors. It consist of two or more clans that they trace their descent from common ancestor but need not actually demonstrate their ability to do so .Some Anthropologists define it as a phratry is a unilateral descent group composed of supposedly related clan or sibs .As with clan, the descent links in the phratry are unspecified.”⁵

Clans and its division:

In Nocte village, there are multi-clans most of them are similar in name but some are varied from one village to another. In the past, the villages which are presently settled by the Nocte were occupied by various groups of people migrated from different places at different points of times. In the society the number of clan varies from one village to another, depends upon the household population of particular village. For instance, in case of Kaimai village there are nineteen clans. According to the Nocte customs, marriage does not takes place within the same clan. If it happens accidentally or deliberately then a person committed is to ex-communicate from the village. In addition to this, certain celebration like “*kapkhut*”⁶, only the household that falls within the same clan alone go together to the field for sowing a new seeds. According to custom, a household do not joint with other clan groups even if they have no field. *Tesia* states that within the same clan, there is one man, who acts as the head of the clan. Any clan cases that arise are taken in his disposal and solve unanimously with the consultation of other clan’s members. He acts as a chief whose decision is always the final. During the festival or any other celebrations, the other clan’s families used to give a half bottle of rice beer to him. In return, the head man also bears the responsibility to look after all activities within the clan. In village, the chief sometime call the clan’s heads for general discussion regarding the village developmental activities. There, he (clan’s head) represents his own clan and speak on behalf of the clan.⁷

Clans of the Nocte are further sub-divide into few larger groups consisting of mix clans together for convenient of work distribution in the village. It is termed as “*sum*”⁸ (phratry) in Nocte dialect. The number of sums varies from one village to another that depends upon the number of clans. For instance, in *Kaimai*

village there are four *sums*, two *sums* in *Lapnan*, four *sums* in *Borduria*, and four *sums* in *Khiti* village. Village security was maintained since time immemorial in the early Nocte society when the headhunting culture was prevalent. The duty of village security is performed alternately within the groups of clans. Here, the absentees have to pay fine of rupees ten which is deposited to *sum*'s fund. This fund is used for welfare of a clan. However, village security is persisted in the present society of the Nocte in modified form. Today weapons are not kept as it was in the early society. They just watch fire in the village who may unknowing left out in the hearth while going out for usual work. The relationship within the same *Sum* is cordial. Therefore, on every occasion of celebrations though it is of birthday party, marriage ceremony or house construction, they invite to each other.

In the Nocte society, every male member excluding minor child does participate in community work in the village. Women are not participated in certain community work like clearing of jungle, collection of bamboos and plunks for construction of house. In some community works, they distributed between the two groups consisting of two *SUMS*. For instance, in Kaimai village there are two groups namely *LOWANG-TINGTAAN SUM* and *NGOITJOAN-HACHAK SUM* comprising of mix clans. Hence, these two groups construct their house separately. These groups believe to be descended from the same ancestor at some point of time.

Kinship and its relationship:

The Nocte trace their relationship through the male line so the society is patriarchal. The kinship terminology system which it is found among the Nocte is called classificatory one. They use certain terms for the lineal relations, which are also used for some of the collateral relatives. Moreover, the same term that applied to both lineal and collateral relatives is used to designate the people not directly related but falling within the generation on age group of one's grand- parents, parents, brother and sister. For example, in "*Hawa*"⁹ group dialectical group, '*awi*' is used to grandmother and same term is used to address all women of grandmother's generation.

The Nocte kinship terminology system also group under bifurcate collateral terminology type because they use separate terms for each of the six kin type of the parental generation on first ascending generation. For example, the figure is drawn from "*Lajujap*"¹⁰ a dialectical group. When the terms are- *apa*, *anyu*, *apakhedong*, *anyingdong*, *aho*, and *anyunyadong*, are applied to father, mother, father's brother, father's sister, mother's brother, mother's sister respectively. This system is similar to all other dialectical group of the Nocte.

Another notable characteristic in the Nocte kinship terminology is that the generation and age plays an important factor in deciding the kinship terms of addressee. *Chowang* mentions that the relatives who are in the descending generation and younger in age are generally addressed by personal name. For instance, one addresses, one's son, daughter, younger sister, younger brother, grandchildren and any relative who are

younger and of descending generation and elder are addressed by kinship terms¹¹. In addition, ego is addressed his/ her relative of same generation by kinship terms if he or she is elder in age and call by name, if s/he is younger. These are the general characteristics of the Nocte kinship terminology system.

The *Tutsa* is one of the Nocte sub-groups who speak “*Tutjap* or *jopjap*.”¹² So, in their kinship terminology, the first ascending generation or parental generation has distinct denotation terms for each of the six kilns type. Like father, mother, father’s sister, father’s brother, mother’s sister, mother’s brother. Father and mother are the primary kin and are addressed by distinct denotative kinship term, which are hence applied to any relatives. The same term is used to address father’s sister and mother’s brother’s wife; father’s brother and mother’s sister’s husband; mother’s sister and father’s brother’s wife; mother’s brother and father’s and sister’s husband. In the second ascending generation, the male relatives are addressed by same term *Ute* and the female relatives by the term *Uwi*. This system of addressing is further extended to ascending generation of third, fourth, fifth and so on.

Chowang explains that in *Egos* generation, a distinct denotation term is used for parallel cousin and cross – cousins. In parallel cousin, father’s brother’s son and mother’s sister’s son are designated by the same term and father’s brother’s daughter and mother’s sister’s daughter are designated by other set of term. Moreover, all the cross cousin like father sister’s son, father sister’s daughter, and mother brother’s son, mother brother’s daughter are designate by the same term. In first descending generation, *Siso* and daughter are addressed by single term, *Egos*. Son and daughter are also designated by the same term that also uses to address brother’s son and daughters. The relative of second generation and so on are addressed by single term *Su*.¹³

Another Nocte sub-tribe Lazu, who speak Lazu *Jap* is settled in Lazu circle of Tirap district. In their first ascending generation in kinship terminology if this group is addressed by separate set of term for all six kilns, like father (Fa), father’s brother (FaBr), father’s sister (FaSi), mother’s sister (MoSi) and mother’s brother (MoBr). Similarly, the term use to designate FaBr is applied to mother’s sister’s husband (MoSiHu), father’s sister (FaSi) and mother’s brother’s wife (MoBrWi), are designated by same term again mother’s sister (MoSi) and father’s brother’s wife (FaBrWi) are addressed by the same term. However, mother’s brother (MoBr) and father’s sister husband (FaSiHu) are not addressed by the same, instead the term use to address MoBr is also used to address mother’s brother’s son (MoBrSo). Uniqueness in kinship terminology system of Lazu is that the term use to designate mother is also designated to mother’s brother’s daughter (MoBrDa). However, the term *Apa* is used to designate the real father only. The relative of second and above ascending generation are designated by two terms i.e. *Ute* if relative is male and *Uwi* if relative is female.

In the Ego’s generation, there is distinction kinship term for parallel cousin and cross cousin. Beside maternal cross cousin and paternal cross cousin are addressed by different terms. Both the female parallel cousins and male parallel cousin address by the same term. In first descending generation, sister’s son, daughter, and son are addressed by the same terms. The term *Akhiak* is applied to sister’s son (SiSo) and sister’s daughter

(SiDa) and the term *Achha* to brother's son (BrSo) and brother's daughter (BrDa) respectively. This term is also applied to Ego's sons and daughter. *Achhu* is designated to the relative of second descending generation and so on.

The kinship terminology in the *Hawa Jap* dialect group is that the first ascending generation had separate kinship term for each six kins, e.f. father (Fa), mother (Mo), father's sister (FaSi), father's brother (FaBr), mother's sister (MoSi) and mother's brother (MoBr) are addressed by different terms. The term for both father's brother (FaBr) and mother's sister's husband (MoSiHu) is the same. Similarly, father's sister (FaSi) and mother's brother's wife (MoBrWi) are designated by the same term. Further, mother's sister (MoSi) and father's brother's wife (FaBrWi) has the same term and also mother's brother (Mobr) and father's sister's husband (FaSiHu) are addressed by a single term.

In second ascending generation and above generation, in terms of address all the male relatives are addressed by the term *Ate* and all female by the term *Awi*. However, the term of reference for great grandfather and great grandmother are *Tedian* and *Widian* respectively. The relatives of Ego's generation have no distinction in addressing parallel cousin and cross cousin. The female cousin if elder is addressed by the term *Khakho* and younger by personal name. Similarly, male cousin are addressed by the term *Phopho*, if he is elder than Ego and by personal name, if he is younger to Ego. This group kinship terminology has a distinct kinship term for first, middle and sometimes even for the third son and daughter of same parents. The relatives of first descending are addressed by *Acha* however, sister's son and sister's daughter are addressed by distinct term i.e. *Hiak*.

In second descending generation, all the relatives are addressed by the term *Chhu*. This system of addressing is extended to third, fourth and so on. Men usually address their wife by using either technonymy like *Te-ka* (old man) and most often by using name of the eldest child as a prefix before the term for father in dialect such as *Rianwe Wa* (Rianwe father). The kinship terminology system of *Hawa Jap* dialect group is also prevalent in the kinship terminology system of other dialect sub groups like *Dadom Jap*, *Khapa Jap*, *Hakhun Jap*, *Chanyak Jap* and *Tang Jap*. The variation in kinship terminology system among these sub groups is only the kinship terms they used to address their relatives due to prevalence of dialectal variation.

It is notable to discuss the changes that have taken place in the kinship terminology of the Nocte primarily with the influence of modern culture. It is worthy to note that with the introduction of various educational institutions in the areas, the people have changed in many aspects of life. Today, the parents pay more attention towards their children's education, which has impact a rapid growth of education in the society. So, the educated people are more accustomed with modern culture than that of their own traditional culture. The reason being, the educated persons who are obliged to stay in distance places for different work are unable to attach with their culture and its practices. Moreover, the children who studies in the school are influenced by the social contact with various tribes and people belonging to different places and cultures. It results interchange or assimilation of cultures among the new generation. In addition, the medium of communication within the friend circles is Hindi and English languages respectively. Since the Nocte had close relations with

the plain tribes of Assam since time immemorial, they have been adopted Assamese as a medium of communication among the different sub-groups of the Nocte. In addition, Assamese was the medium of instruction in the school prior to the introduction of English in Arunachal Pradesh. Apart from these, the movies, television, and books are also played a vital role in changing socio-cultural life of the Nocte.

All the above-mentioned facts have consequently brought changes in the kinship terminology of the Nocte. The new generations who are born and brought up in the urban centre are more or less influenced by the modern cultures. Now a day, they speak Hindi and English in their conversation or discussion in the school or public places. Even at home, they converse with parents in either Hindi or English. It is imbibed a habits in their life. Mention may be made that some English terms are used to address their parents and other relatives. For instance, now a day the children used to address their parents like Papa and Mammy in place of *Wa* and *Nyong*. They also address to their paternal uncle and maternal uncle as uncle and mama respectively in place of *wapho* and *hokappho*. Today, even the parents are also much inclined towards modern language particularly Hindi and English language in order to develop their children's habit in the school because the languages, which are used in teaching, are Hindi and English languages. So, intentionally the parents discuss with their children either of these language at home.

This change leads to pendulum of communication within the family in particular and in the society in general. Today, the grandparents are unable to talk to their grandchildren due to unpopularity of Nocte dialect among the new generation. The grandparents speak Nocte dialect, which is not understood to their grandchildren and vice versa. The latter who are staying in urban centre since birth with their parents could not speak own dialect. Today the children address to their grandparent as *Nana* or *Nanimaa* in place of *Ate* or *Awi* respectively. Therefore, it reveals the rapid changes in the native dialect. So, there is apprehension of extinction of the kingship terminology of the Nocte after some years later. Even the educated youth of the present society speak either Hindi or English language in talking or discussion. Moreover, Nocte dialect has no script, which is also one of the main factors to steer towards the declination of dialect. According to the Nocte customs, a person does not address *Hokappho* to paternal uncle or *Wapho* to maternal uncle. However, now-a day, the young generation do not trace the relationship and it sometime confuse to address to some men or women in the village. Therefore, it is very important that own dialect script must be introduced so that it helps the particular community in years to come.

Research Through Innovation

Notes and References:

1. Elliot & Merrill quoted in Murkute, *Socio-cultural of Scheduled Tribes* (New Delhi: Mittal, 1990). P. 53.
2. *The term 'Ku' is a Nocte word, which signifies the clan. A family, which traced their origin from a same ancestor, becomes a member of that clan. Within the same clan, they maintain many restrictions, like marriage and cannot sell off any property without consultation to clan members.*
3. Verrier Elwin, (re-edition), *Philosophy for NEFA* (Itanagar: Directorate of Research, 1999).
4. Ember Carol, R., et al., *Anthropology* (Delhi: Pearson, 2002). P.372
5. *Ibid, p. 372.*
6. *It is one of the festivals among the Nocte, which is celebrated for sowing a new seed in the field during the months between March and April annually.*
7. *Interviewed, N. Tesia from Hakhun village in Tirap District, 15.04.2004.*
8. *The term 'Sum' signifies a group which is constituted by different clans for convenient of work distribution in the village.*
9. *The term 'Hawa' implies to a group of the Nocte, which traced their origin and migration from the same ancestor or place. However, it does not mean that they are quite different from other groups of the Nocte.*
10. *This term is derived from two different words, Laju and Jab. The former signify the name of a Nocte sub-tribe and the latter is dialect. Therefore, a literal meaning of this word is Laju dialect.*
11. Chowang Wangsa, *Kinship Terminology (a comparative study of Nocte sub-groups)* unpublished M.A. Dissertation, (2003), p. 37.
12. *This term is dialectal group; speak by a group of the Tutsa Nocte.*
13. *Chowang Wangsa, Ibid, p.39.*
14. Chatur Bhuj Sahu, *Tribes of North East India* (New Delhi: Sarup & Sons, 2002)
15. R.S. Mann & K. Mann, *Tribal cultures and change* (New Delhi: Mittal, 1989)
16. Dutta, P. C., *The Noctes*, (Shillong: DIPR, Govt. of Arunachal Pradesh, 1978).