



# NOCTE AND ITS CHANGING CULTURE

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## Abstract

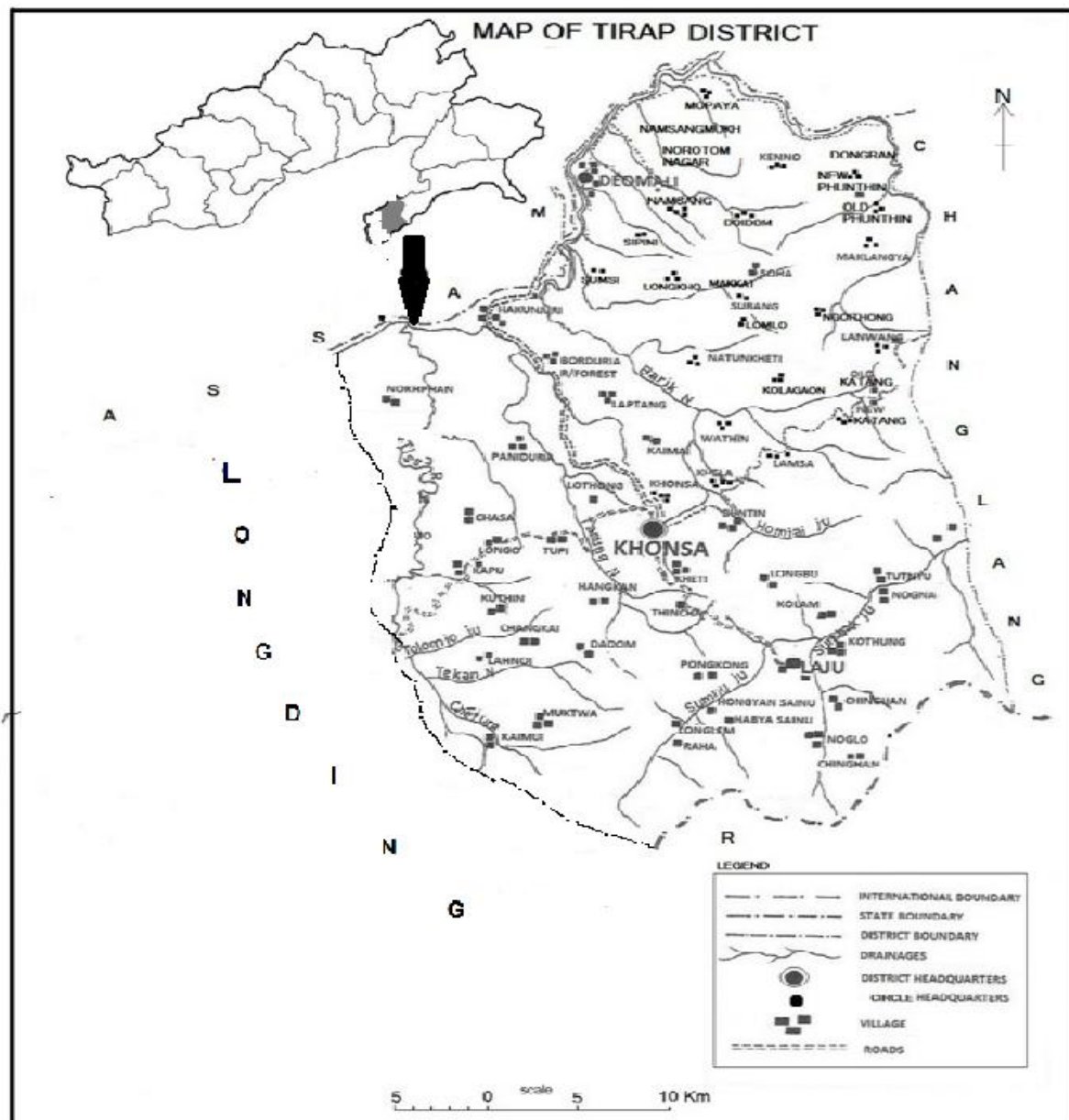
Like the changing nature of the earth everything on the earth surface change with time. In every human society we find some changes with the changes in time. In the *Nocte* society also changes reflect in their dressing pattern, food habits, religious beliefs, marriage system, housing pattern, life style etc. Nocte is one of the major tribe of Arunachal Pradesh of North- East India and still very backward in the field of education, transport and communication, industrial development etc. In this paper the author attempt to find out the recent changes taking place in the society and the reasons behind the changes especially focusing on the changes in their religious belief, festivals celebration and marriage system. The study is based on field observation and personal inquiries.

**Keywords:** Nocte, tribe, changing culture, religious belief, festivals, marriage system.

## INTRODUCTION

Tirap district of Arunachal Pradesh is situated on the North eastern part of India between the latitude of 26.38° N to 27.47° N and longitude of 95.40 °E to 96.16° E. The district is inhabited by Nocte, Tutsa and Olo tribes.

Change is the common phenomena which is taking place in every sphere of the earth surface. In this paper the author is trying to highlight few changes occurring in the Nocte society with reference to celebration of festivals, religion and marriage system.



## Origin and Migration

There is no written record about the origin and settlement of the people of the district, therefore the oral and the secondary sources are the important sources to know about the origin and settlement of the people. 'Arunachal through the Ages' p.p -34, Chandhury had described that the tribes of the district of Eastern Nagas, Patkai Nagas and Sibsagar Nagas. The Nocte people generally trace their descent from a remote ancestor named Khumbao, a chief who has two sons Khunlung and Khunlai. There is no written history of the moving of the Noctes with the present area but there are various traditions prevalent in various Nocte villages regarding their own settlement into the present location. Their migration journey from Myanmar beyond Patkai hills to their present settlement has been described by Parul Dutta in his book 'The Nocte', p-11.

There are different sources about their settlement into the present location of the Nocte villages. For example people of Laptnam village are believed to have moved from Burma to Wakka in Wancho area and then to their

present location. The people of Khonsa village came from Tsangnu in Nagaland to Kheti village, there moved to Khela village then to the present site.

The Tutsa people originally belonged to South East Asia region from there migrated to the present area of Tutnu village located in Lazu circle of Tirap district.

The Ollo tribe also known as Lazu resides in 12 villages under Lazu circle. They are migrated from Nagaland and Myanmar.

### Social set up

Nocte, Tutsa and Ollo like other society have their own well organized cultural, social and political system. They are divided into two groups on the basis of location 'hawa' the people of the plain land, 'Konte' the hill people.

On the basis of their original place of migration and close affinity they are divided into seven belts:-

1. Dadam- Chinkoi, Laho, Bera, Moktai, Kapu Hunken etc.
2. Khela- Khonsa, Khela, Lapnam, Bhutia, Wathin
3. Laju- Saliam, Laju, Pongkong, Noglo etc.
4. Borduria- Kamai, Laptang, Sipini etc.
5. Namsang- Doidam, Turit, Soha etc.
6. Khepah- Noksa, Tupi, Pulling.
7. Tutsa- Lamsa, Lianwang, Kolam, Kothung, Khantang etc.

They speak in different dialects which can be categorized into the following ten groups:-

Dialect group		Name of the village
1	Hawajap	<i>Borduria, kaimai, Laptang, Paniduria, Sumsipathar, Namsang, Wasathang</i> (Khonsa circle only Namsang is from Namsang circle)
2	<i>Phongsungjap</i>	<i>Soha, Makat, Dongron, Mopoya, Kenoin, Turit, Subang</i> (Namsang circle)
3	Lajujap	<i>Laju, Pongkong, Longkhong, Saliam, Longbo, Raho, Longliang, Chinha, Noglo</i> (Laju circle)
4	Khapajap	<i>Tunjang</i> (Laju circle)
5	<i>Tangjap</i>	<i>Tupi, Noksa, Pollung</i> (Khonsa circle)
6	<i>Tutjap</i>	<i>Longo, Lapnam, Lothong Lamlo, Tutnya, Kolam, Buting, Lamsa, Nokna, Kothung, Lianwang, Khantang, Ngoithong</i> (Khonsa circle & Laju circle)
7	<i>Hakhunjap</i>	<i>Ngoithong</i> (Khonsa circle)
8	Dadamjap	<i>Thinsa, Kheti, Khela, Sipinipathar, Khonsa Dadam, Moktoa, Laho, Hukan, Chinkoi</i> , (Khonsa circle)
9	Chanyakjap	<i>Kolagoan, Wathin</i> (Khonsa circle)
10	<i>Damlakjap</i>	<i>Doidam</i> (Namsang)

Source: Wangsa, C. (2002) RESARUN, Journal of Director of Research government of Arunachal Pradesh, p-90.

In some Nocte villages like Lapnam and Longo they speak mix dialect. Originally they are Wancho but after having settlement among the Nocte, they have adopted the Nocte dialect of neighboring villages along with their own dialect.

In spite of a dialectical variation among the Nocte, they express their happiness, joys, love, sorrow, description of their origin in a single dialect called '*Khepah*' which is like Sanskrit for others. But today, very few people know about *Khepah* as this dialect is dying from the society which needs an immediate documentation.

### **Festivals celebration:-**

Like other tribes of the Arunachal Pradesh Nocte people celebrate many festivals every month in the olden days. All the festivals and ceremonies are part of their socio-cultural life and are performed in connection with various stages of agricultural work. . Main purpose of the celebration of festivals was to organize the youth to develop unity and personality among them. All these major festivals are agriculture oriented where the strong hands of youths are required. These festivals are celebrated at least for three to four days. First day is called '*phomlam*, in Nocte. On that day animals are sacrificed and festival dresses are sorted out and kept ready to be worn in the festival.

For celebration of any festival in the village a date is fixed observing the phase of moon, especially a new moon day. Accordingly the '*Ramwa*' public interpreter would inform the people for preparation of rice beer for the festival. All these festivals involve huge amount of expenditure and celebrated without any discrimination of rich and poor, old and young, male and female. All the chanting of rituals is performed by the priest. He performs rituals by offering food and drinks near the altar for the well being of the community, good harvest, peace and harmony in the society.

The commonly celebrated festival in the district has been fixed in the annual calendar and specific day is declared as restricted local holiday in the district.' Chalo Loku' of Nocte is fixed on 25<sup>th</sup> November and Pongtu of Tutsa on 11<sup>th</sup> April. It helps to unite the people especially the town dwellers living in the district headquarters, circle headquarters and even by the people living in other parts of the state.

The date for celebration of festival varies from village to village. On the basis of location villages are divided into two 'Upper Nocte 'and 'Lower Nocte' Almost all the upper Nocte celebrate in the same time e.g.in the month of May to August 'Hoju' and 'Ronhuan' festival is celebrated whereas in Lower Nocte in the month of November 'Loku' festival is celebrated. Other festivals celebrated are *Chaliwan* ,*Kopkhut*, *Towee* etc.

At present many changes are taking place in the celebration of festivals for instance, in olden days there were many festivals almost every month they used to celebrate but now the people are aware about the huge expenditure, time scarcity, and other modern facilities have lessen the number of festivals celebration in the area. Now date is fixed for the celebration of festivals in some upper and lower Nocte villages' in other to enable all the service people to come to the village during the festivals time. In upper Nocte area Hoju festival is fixed in the

month of May by the villages like Muktwa, Dadom Laho, Hunkan etc and in Lower Nocte area 'Loku festival' by Borduria, Kamai, Laptung etc in the month of November.

Another change one can find in the celebration of festivals is by converted Christian villages especially Baptist people i.e. preparation of local rice beer '*kham*' has stopped in place of that now they are serving cold drinks, fruits juice and foreign liquor. Besides this they do not follow the old traditional way of performing rituals ceremonies, sacrifices in the altar by the priest and many taboos of the festivals are no more observed by them.

### Religion:-

Other changes taking place in the Nocte society is due to adaptation of new religion i.e. Christianity. Like in other part of Arunachal Pradesh almost more than half of the population of the district has converted in Christian religion which can be depicted from the sample collected by the author

Table shows Christian and other religion population in the surveyed area.

### Population of different religious groups

Circle	Christian population	%	Animism population	%	Total
Khonsa	518	65.74	270	34.28	788
Laju	129	80.12	32	19.88	161
Namsang	45	36.00	80	64.00	125

Source: Field survey (2009)

There have been tremendous changes in religious belief and practices in the Nocte villages. All these changes are due to multifarious factors such as development in the field of education, socio-political forces and conversion into other religion especially 'Christianity' and many other development in the field of infrastructural facilities. Almost all the people in Nocte villages have been converted into Christian forcefully by the insurgence and few due to Christian missionaries; except few villages in Khonsa circle like Khonsa, Lapnam and Old khantang villages where still one can find traditional way of celebrating festivals performing rituals. Lot of changes has come in the life style of the converted Christian; for instance, every Sunday, they go to church and do not go to work in their field. Some have left the traditional way of preparing local beer and many of them do not take part in any traditional rituals etc.

Thus it can be concluded that the days are not far having a single religion unless there is some strong force to stop the conversion of the native people and there would not be any more people to perform or know the traditional rituals of the ancestors, traditional knowledge system of preparing rice beer etc.

### Marriage system:-

Another recent change found in the Nocte society is in regards to marriage system. Like other tribal, people follow the rule of tribal endogamy and clan exogamy. Cross-cousin marriage is most preferred among the people. Inter caste and inter tribe marriage are also found. Many of the educated youth are marrying the non-tribal people.



Monogamy is the most prevalent system of marriage among the commoners of the Nocte and Tutsa. Polygamy was mostly practiced by the chief and was very rarely found among the commoners. Child marriage was not practiced since the early days and widow remarriage was prevalent in the society since early days.

Love marriage is mostly preferred and in very few cases arranged marriage is also found.

The ritual during marriage starts with the negotiation between the parents of the boy and girl, known as '*kakhat*' or '*janchochian*'. The boy's parents offer betel nut, leaf, *kham*, *Sali* (wild stem eaten with betel leaf) to the girl's parents. If the latter accept these items it is understood that the proposal is accepted and the engagement of boy and the girl is consented. After the engagement, it is the wish of the girl when to go to her in law's house. Marriage party is usually fixed according to the convenience of both the families. The differences are found between Upper and Lower Nocte villages, for example in upper Nocte villages like Khonsa, Khela, Kheti, Dadom, Laho and other villages bride price is more or less same i.e. bridegroom's family has to give one buffalo or a cow or a mithun, two pigs, local rice beer, brass bangles, '*chakri*' (shawl made of muga thread . . . Bride price is not uniform in all villages; it varies from village to village or tribe to tribe.

The day of the marriage is known as '*Thapak or Diphak*' in Nocte and Tutsa. On that day feast is arranged in both bride and bridegroom's houses. But in Lower Nocte Village like Borduria, kamai, Laptang villages there is no bride price to be given to the groom parents they do not have '*thapak or Diphak*'.

There is no special prescribed dress for the bride to wear on that day and after the marriage party is over the bride becomes the member of her in law's house.

Now with change in time changes are also occurring in the marriage system of the people. Like along with the traditional marriage system with the influence of outsiders and modern facilities available most of the Nocte especially educated and economically sound family organized in a modern way by printing invitation card, making pandels, video recording and playing of modern music etc. and many of the converted Christian arrange marriage in church too.

Other changes are occurring in the Nocte society can be seen in child birth, disposal of dead body, food habit, house construction etc.

Change is a law of nature but changes should not be harmful or affect the development or progress of the people as a whole. It should bring changes in a beneficial way for the people, environment and should sustain for longtime.

The changes occurring in the Nocte society has both positive and negative impact which can be understood from the following:-

Reduction of number of festivals celebration has good impact in the society because it save money, time and energy and in modern time all are busy may be farmers, serviceman and students ;over that people are enjoying and getting entertainment from various modern facilities just sitting at home like watching T.V, mobile phone etc.

Fixation of festival dates make people easy especially those who are working in other places can come to village and join in the celebration but earlier they used to miss or unable to come.

Some of the negative impacts seen in the festivals celebrations which are causing disunity among the villages due to adaptation of Christian religion are used of cold drinks, fruits juice and foreign liquor in place of local rice beer which are more costly and harmful for health.

Traditional way of performing rituals by the priest and rituals performs by the individual at home and jhum fields are no more practiced by the converted Christian villages. So it is need of hour that the indigenous rituals perform by the priest and elder people of the society have to be documented otherwise there will be no identity for the people and will not known by the next generation

Thus one can conclude that changes should take place in the society but changes should not modify or bring end to the tribal indigenous traditional culture, custom and traditional knowledge system. Instead it should be in proper way to enrich the existing traditional knowledge system, culture; custom etc. which will sustain for future generation without hampering the originality.

All these can be possible with the help of education and use of science and technology. Therefore there is need of spread of education in the Nocte society; awareness should be given to the villages about the importance of traditional knowledge system, rituals and indigenous culture as their identity etc. there is need of research to study the changes occurring in the society and educated youth can play importance role in imparting awareness to the villagers in preserving the traditional culture, rituals etc and at the same time documentation for the younger generation.

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