



## Kinship Terms of the Nocte

### KEYWORDS

Kinship terms, Nocte, Khonhan, Dibrugarh

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#### ABSTRACT

The present paper reports the kinship terminologies of the Nocte tribe. The qualitative data was collected from Dehing Kinar Nocte Village located along the Assam-Arunachal Pradesh border in Dibrugarh district. The kinship terms are arranged according to consanguineous (lineal and collateral) and affinal relations. The Nocte kinship system till today maintains its original characteristics to a large extent. In the study village this is quite evident from the kinship relations that they maintain and the terms they use. Distinct kinship terms are used in some relations to differentiate the age as in the case of brothers, sisters, fathers' brothers, fathers' sisters, mothers' brothers and mothers' sisters.

#### Introduction

Kinship is one of the most complex systems of culture. In a homogeneous society it forms the basis of social relationship which is actually or putatively traced through parent child/sibling relations. In all human societies kinship happens to be the core principle in the regulation of behaviour between persons and in the formation of social grouping, members of which are bound to one another by intricate inter-locking and ramifying ties. All human societies have a kinship terminology, a catalogue of terms of address and reference used to designate the relatives of various types. Kinship terms are category words by means of which an individual is taught to recognize the significant groupings in the social structure into which he is born (Leach, 1958). Without exception, all kinship term systems use factors like sex, age, generation, blood and marriage in their society. Each culture has defined their own set of kinship terms and the roles they serve in society. To be called the kinship term *uncle* in one culture may hold a distinctively different set of expectations than that of *uncle* in another culture. These expectations may be influenced by the culture's power orientation, philosophical/religious assumptions, environment, or any number of factors.

Earlier, significant studies on kinship terminology among tribes of India have been conducted by Das, 1972; Nagaraja, 1996; and Bouchery and Gangmei, 2008. In the present study, an attempt has been made to document the indigenous Nocte kinship terms. The Nocte, formerly a head hunting tribe mainly inhabits the Tirap district of Arunachal Pradesh. However, a small population also resides in the adjoining districts of Tinsukia, Dibrugarh and Sivasagar in Upper Assam. They are well built and are of medium stature, mongoloid appearance and light to medium brown skin colour. Their village society is under their powerful chief (*Lowang*) who presides over the council of elders. They practice wet rice cultivation as well as shifting cultivation. The tribe consists of 4 different regional groups viz. *Zut*, *Laju/Barat*, *Hawa* and *Hakun*.

#### Methodology

The qualitative data was collected from *Dehing Kinar Nocte Village* in Joypur, Dibrugarh district, on the bank of river Budhi Dehing in the eastern most corner of the Assam-Arunachal Pradesh border. The people of the study village belong to the *Hakun* Nocte group. Extensive in-depth personal interviews and concrete case studies were taken to generate the desired mass of data. The kinship terms are arranged according to consanguineous relations (lineal and collateral) and affinal relations.

#### Results and Discussion

Among the Noctes Kinship is reckoned through the male

line. They use the term *Khonhan* meaning kinship in their native dialect. The parents teach their children at an early age to learn and use appropriate kinship terms as words of relationship and respect to address their consanguine relatives in their clan and affinal kin's from other different clans, including friends of their parents, elderly strangers, neighbors and acquaintances. On analysis of the kinship terms it is revealed that there are some terms which are used extensively both to address and reference. The terms for father—*Wa*, mother—*Niyong*, grandfather—*Tey* and grandmother—*Wee* are used both for address and reference. The term used to address and refer the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> elder brother is *Fho Fho*, *Meyidaam* and *Tati* respectively. While younger brother, younger sister, son, daughter, grand children are addressed more commonly by their personal names. In referring younger brother(s) and sister(s) the term used is *Ena*. The term of reference for husband and wife is *Hometewa* and *Hometenyu* respectively, whereas the husband is addressed by some technonym and the wife by her name. The term of reference of own children is *Echa*. The gender can be known if the speaker will say whether the younger one is *Delacha* (young boy) or *Dehacha* (young girl) and *Pamyey* (adult boy) or *Jancho* (adult girl). In the first descending generation son's wife and daughter's husband are referred by the same distinct term *Naampuangwa*. They are addressed by their personal names; however, now-a-days some Assamese kinship terms like *Buwari* (daughter-in-law), *Juwai* (son-in-law), etc. are used to address them. This is due to their living in close proximity with the Assamese communities of the area.

In the Nocte Kinship system, it is seen that full recognition to sex, affinity and age are given. It is noted that distinct kinship terms are used in some relations to differentiate the age as in the case of brothers, sisters, fathers' brothers, fathers' sisters, mothers' brothers and mothers' sisters. It is also observed that there are some terms which are used to refer certain relationships irrespective of sex. The term *Ena* is used to refer both the younger brothers and sisters. To refer one's son and daughter the same term *Cha* is used. The grand children of both the sexes are referred by the term *Chu*. Whereas, the term *E-fho-cha* is used to refer both the sexes of brothers' children and the term *Ehiyak* is used to refer both the male and female children of the sisters. Some kinship terms are found to be used for more than one relationship. The term *Neenhey* is used to refer and address son's wife's father and daughter's husband's father and also to refer husband's elder brother. The term *Nenheywa* is used to refer and address both sister's husband and wife's brother. The Noctes use the term *Wafho* to refer and address father's elder brother and mother's elder sister husband. To refer and address mother's younger sister's husband and father's younger brother the same term *Wadi* is used. To refer and address mothers'

younger sister and fathers' younger brothers' wife the same classificatory term *Didi* is used. The mothers' elder sister and fathers' elder brothers' wife are addressed and referred by the same classificatory term *Kho Kho*. *Nyeenadee* is the common term to refer and address father's younger sister and mother's brother's wife. The term of address and the term of reference for husband's father and wife's father is *Hopawa*. Similarly, the term *Nyeepaniyu* is used to refer and address husband's mother and wife's mother. The term *Neecha Hoosa* is used to refer father's sister's son or daughter, mothers sisters son or daughter and also to mothers brothers son or daughter.

When the child addresses his/her consanguine relative and affinal kin with the appropriate kinship terms, it indicates that the child not only understands his/her kinship position, relationship, code of behavior and mutual responsibility to those specific relatives, but also to their kinship positions, relationships, codes of behavior and their mutual responsibilities to him or her. However, when a child applies these kinship terms to strangers of older ages, it simply conveys a cultural sign of respect and politeness. In the Nocte society the maternal uncle plays a crucial role. In the name giving ceremony (*Namin*) of a child the maternal uncle must be anyhow present and he has the obligation to bless the child first. On the first day of their traditional new year the nephew and niece goes to their maternal uncle's place and gifts him *Zumin* (rice beer) and seeks his blessings. The maternal uncle blesses them by presenting a piece of ginger tied to a cotton string which is to be worn around the neck. In marriage ceremonies, the bride needs to seek his blessings where she is presented the ritual ginger necklace. Besides, it is mandatory for the maternal uncle to gift his niece a wedding dress. In the event of a persons death it is the obligation of the maternal uncle to buy the piece of burial land from mother earth by performing a ritual. He stands by the head of the dead body and throws a coin to the other end of the ground i.e. towards the feet. The Nocte kinship system also is the basic social structure that organizes the Nocte society into 21 major clans and provides life-time memberships and ongoing support (both material and spiritual) to their consanguine members from birth to death. As a patrilineal, patri-local tradition all the 21 clans trace their unilineal descents from 21 common male ancestors through oral tradition. The rule of tribal endogamy and clan exogamy operates among the Noctes.

**Conclusion**

Most Nocte elders agree that the Nocte kinship system is the most important basic education for all Nocte children. This knowledge is an essential part of the Nocte culture as to gain a sense of who they are as Noctes, and their relationships to their family members and relatives (both consanguine and affinal). Kinship is the Nocte heritage of relationships, respect, solidarity and mutual obligation in the family, clan and society.

**Table 1: Nocte Kinship Terms - Lineal Relations**

Relatives Classed	Terms of Address	Terms of Reference	English Terms
Father's Father	Tey	Tey Tey	Grandfather
Mother's Father			
Father's Mother	Wee	Wee	Grandmother
Mother's Mother			
Father	Wa	Wa	Father
Mother	Niyong	Niyong	Mother
1 <sup>st</sup> elder Brother	Fho Fho	Fho Fho	Brother
2 <sup>nd</sup> elder Brother	Meyidaam	Meyidaam	
3 <sup>rd</sup> elder Brother	Tati	Tati	

Younger Brother/s	By name	Ena	Brother
1 <sup>st</sup> elder Sister	Cacho	Cacho	Sister
2 <sup>nd</sup> elder Sister	Nyadaam	Nyadaam	
3 <sup>rd</sup> elder Sister	Nyadee	Nyadee	
Younger Sister/s	By name	Ena	Sister
Son/Daughter	By name	Echa	Son/Daughter
Son's Son	By name	Chu	Grandson
Daughter's Son			
Son's Daughter	By name	Chu	Granddaughter
Daughter's Daughter			

**Table 2: Nocte Kinship Terms - Collateral Relations**

Relatives Classed	Terms of Address	Terms of Reference	English Terms
Father's elder Brother	Wafho	Wafho	Uncle
Father's younger Brother	Wadi	Wadi	
Mother's 1 <sup>st</sup> elder Brother	Hokhafho	Hokhafho	
Mother's 2 <sup>nd</sup> elder Brother	Homedaam	Homedaam	
Mother's 3 <sup>rd</sup> elder Brother	Honadi	Honadi	
Mother's younger Brother	Ho	Ho	
Father's elder Sister	Nyeekho	Nyeekho	Aunt
Father's younger Sister	Nyeenadee	Nyeenadee	
Mother's elder Sister	Kho Kho	Kho Kho	
Mother's younger Sister	Didi	Didi	
Father's elder Brother's Son	Fho Fho	Fho Fho	Cousin Brother
Father's younger Brother's Son	By name	Ena	
Mother's elder Sister's Son	Tati	Neecha Hoosa	
Mother's younger Sister's Son	By name		
Brother's Son	By name	E-fho-cha	Nephew
Sister's Son		Ehiyak	
Brother's Daughter	By name	Ehiyak	Niece
Sister's Daughter			

**Table 3: Nocte Kinship Terms - Affinal Relations**

Relatives Classed	Terms of Address	Terms of Reference	English Terms
Wife's/Husband's Father	Hopawa	Hopawa	Father-in-law
Wife's/Husband's Mother	Nyeepaniyu	Nyeepaniyu	Mother-in-law
Father's elder Sister's Husband	Hokhafho	Hokhafho	Uncle
Father's younger Sister's Husband	Homedaam	Homedaam	
Mother's elder Sister's Husband	Wafho	Wafho	
Mother's younger Sister's Husband	Wadi	Wadi	

Father's elder Brother's Wife	Kho Kho	Kho Kho	Aunt
Father's younger Brother's Wife	Didi	Didi	
Mother's Brother's Wife's	Nyeenadee	Nyeenadee	
Wife	By name	Homet-eniyu	Wife
Husband	Technonym	Hometewa	Husband
Elder Sister's Husband	Nenheywa	Nenheywa	Brother-in-law
Younger Sister's Husband			
Husband's elder Brother	Neenhey	Neenhey	
Husband's younger Brother	By name	Memaatwa	
Wife's Brother (elder/younger)	Nenheywa	Nenheywa	
Elder Brother's Wife	Nya Kho	Nya Kho	Sister-in-law
Younger Brother's Wife	Memaatnyu	Memaatnyu	
Son's Wife	By name	Naamp-uangwa	Daughter-in-law
Daughter's Husband	By name	Naamp-uangwa	Son-in-law

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