

**AN ETHNO-HISTORICAL STUDY ON TRADITIONAL SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS OF THE NAHS: FAMILY, CLAN, SLAVERY, SOCIAL STRATIFICATION**

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**ABSTRACT**

*In Nah family, father is regarded as the head of the family. The family is based on patriarchal system. They prefer nuclear family system. However, in the olden times, they preferred joint family system. But gradually, joint family system is disappearing as of now. Also, the Nah society is divided into four clans so called- Chader, Hapi, Hari and Tissi respectively. Again these clans are divided into various sub-clans. In addition, it is revealed from the present study that slavery system was prevailing in earlier days. Due to the slavery system, the society of the Nahs was divided into two social groups namely- Nahs (the master) and Solung (the slave). However, in recent times, the slavery system and social stratification have totally vanished in Nah society due to governmental interferences. It is interesting to note that the Nahs of Taksing circle are very similar to other tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. Especially, they share lot of commonalities with Nyishi, Tagin and Monpa tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. With this background, the present study makes an attempt to provide an ethno-historical account on family system and clans of Nahs. Further, it endeavours to give an ethno-historical account on social stratification and slavery in Nah community.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Arunachal Pradesh; Clan; Family; Nah; Slavery and; Social Stratification*

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**INTRODUCTION**

Family, clan, social stratification and slavery are some imperative features of human society. These societal components are seen as the important aspects on which a social institution of a particular community is built on. The family is not a mere association but also an institutional complex or system of institutions. The family, especially the nuclear or individual family, is the most basic social group and of primary importance in the socialization of the young. It consists ordinarily of a man and woman permanently united with children. Sometimes the parents of husband or wife also live together. In some societies even some servants were admitted as

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members of the household. Etymologically, the word Clan has been derived from the Latin word *Planta* which mean a sprout, a plant, a family or a descendant. In literal sense, group of families with a common surname and a common ancestor, acknowledging the same leader or group of people united by common characteristics, aims, or interests may be understood as clan. Also, social stratification is the ranking of social groups in a hierarchy. Some forms of social stratification are castes, classes, and estates etc. Also, slavery is an extreme form of inequality in which some individuals are owned by others as their property. The slave owner has full control including using violence over the slave. A slave is a man who is regarded as the property of a person by the law and custom. In extreme cases he is wholly without rights. The slaves have no political rights he does not choose his government, he does not attend the public councils. Socially he is despised. He is compelled to work. The slavery system has existed sporadically at many times and places but there are two major examples of slavery. Firstly, the slavery societies of the ancient world in Greek and Roman. Secondly, the slavery era in southern states of United State of America in the 18th and 19th centuries.

The term, 'social institution' is somewhat unclear both in ordinary language and in the philosophical literature. However, contemporary sociology is somewhat more consistent in its use of the term. Typically, contemporary sociologists use the term to refer to complex social forms that reproduce themselves such as governments, the family, human languages, universities, hospitals, business corporations, and legal systems. A typical definition is that proffered by Jonathan Turner, "a complex of positions, roles, norms and values lodged in particular types of social structures and organizing relatively stable patterns of human activity with respect to fundamental problems in producing life-sustaining resources, in reproducing individuals, and in sustaining viable societal structures within a given environment". Again, Anthony Giddens says "Institutions by definition are the more enduring features of social life." He goes on to list as institutional orders, modes of discourse, political institutions, economic institutions and legal institutions. The contemporary philosopher of social science, Rom Harre follows the theoretical sociologists in offering this kind of definition "An institution was defined as an interlocking double-structure of persons-as-role-holders or office-bearers and the like, and of social practices involving both expressive and practical aims and outcomes<sup>1</sup>.

Social institutions also need to be distinguished from more complex and more complete social entities, such as societies or cultures, of which any given institution is typically a constitutive element. A society, for example, is more complete than an institution since a society at least as traditionally understood is more or less self-sufficient in terms of human resources, whereas an institution is not. Thus, arguably, for an entity to be a society it must sexually reproduce its membership, have its own language and educational system, provide for itself economically and at least in principle be politically independents<sup>2</sup>.

## OBJECTIVES

This study makes an attempt to-

1. Provide an ethno-historical account on family system and clans of *Nahs*.
2. Provide an ethno-historical account on social stratification and slavery in *Nah* community.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study is purely ethno-historical in nature. Historical data have been collected with help of different tools and techniques. During field survey, the data have been collected from both primary and secondary sources. To collect primary data, different archives have been surveyed. To corroborate the archival data, extensive field work were conducted at various *Nah* inhabited area. Research techniques like interview and participatory observation method have been employed. Modern research tools and gadgets like still camera and video camera have been used in documentation of field data. Altogether, 140 sample respondents comprising of priest, Gaon Buras, village leader, Panchayat leaders and educated people of the *Nah* community have been selected for interview keeping in view of different age groups and sections of the society. The scholar has adopted both structured and unstructured method to collect indebt information from the respondents. During the field study, researcher has adopted anthropological approach by participation and close observation of the rituals and other ceremonies of the community. For secondary data, various magazines, newspapers, journals, thesis, dissertations and other unpublished information etc have been referred to. Besides, internet has been extensively used while collecting secondary information.

## DISCUSSION

The people of Arunachal Pradesh are most close to nature. Their living, economy, society, culture music, art traditions religious etc. are all depending upon the nature. Their social system is framed on the simple norms, to the extent the human sense can think in terms of their nature habits and habitats. The fact is that the tribal culture is established by the direct imitation of the nature, the custom and tradition are directly related to the natural habitat and environment. The norms related to these aspects are not very complex but art defined in terms of circumstance prevailing around. The social norms make them follow the realistic way of life. Their social customs and traditions are based on the consideration of realistic values. In dealing with such aspects, the norms will never go beyond which these can't be justified by the natural requirement of materials and circumstantial factors. Some of the important factors, which have determined structural pattern of the village, the formation of regional and other bigger units and inter relations of the village with those units, are follows;

1. Natural conditions like relief, configuration soil, water and others ;
2. The stage of agrarian economy,
3. The nature of social conditions such as needs of defense forms of property and others.

This distinction is vital from the point of view of the study of the entire social life of the community. The members of a community who dwell in village have generally stronger social urges, exhibit a stronger feeling of social cohesion, and posses greater ability for cooperation than those who are dispersed and live on their farms. Each type of habitat furnishes a different farm work for social life<sup>2</sup>. Social Institution would consist of the inter-relations between particularly types of groups, viz. those groups which make social life possible<sup>3</sup>; the family, clan, etc are example of such groups.

The tribal societies in the *Nahs* are organized on the basis of clan or village, and the social relations are determined by kinship and locality. Despites social and cultural differences, there

are some factors common to all the tribes. As a matter of rule, each of the tribes is endogamous, and is divided into a numbers of clans, which are exogamous, that is to say, marriage is legitimate within the tribe, but not within clan. In fact, clan is very important element in the institution of tribes' society, and a breach of clan rule is a serious offence. It is also plays a very important role in regulating. Marriage within or sub-clan is strictly prohibited, and anybody violating this rule is never allowed to go without punishment. Society is patriarchal, monogamy is the general rule but polygamy is recognized. Some aspects of social institution of *Nahs* are discussed under following heads:

## A. Family

Likewise, all the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh are patriarchal. Father is normally the head of the family. The tribes are also patrilineal whereby descent is traced through the males. All over the state the smallest unit of the society is the family. In some cases, joint family system is also found. The family consists of father, mother and their children. Normally, the right of inheritance to property devolves through the male member of the family.

Among the *Nahs*, the family is called "*Nime or Nam*"<sup>4</sup>. They preferred joint family system. Family was the smallest social unit comprising of men with his wife and children. They prefer this, because joint family system helped them in agriculture and other manual works and also to maintain family system properly<sup>5</sup>. Besides, they follow joint family system because of their emotional attachment with each others<sup>6</sup>. They did not like to move away from their family and settle down separately by establishing a new house. Even after the death of the father, the family does not break up as a general rule but continued to live in the same house<sup>7</sup>. Sometimes, with the increase of the family members and with the varied interest there may be arguments and quarrels among them. The limited accommodation in the house, which has only one fire heart, caused inconvenience which led to establishment of a new family<sup>8</sup>.

The head of the family was the father, who has to look after the affairs of the family. He has full responsibilities for smooth functioning of the family in every angle. He looks after the economic needs of the family, settlement of marriage problems, various social and religious activities, and agricultural activities of the family. Over all responsibilities of the family, goes to the father as the head of the family. He has to advise to his married and un-married sons and daughters in various occasions. All the family members have to respect and obey the commands of the father<sup>9</sup>.

After the death or in absence of father, the eldest son takes the charge of the father. Mother or the eldest daughter does not take the charge of the headship of the family in the *Nah* society. All the members of the family have to show respect and obey the eldest son including mother. All the younger brothers and sisters have to obey the command of the elder brother. All the manual works are done by both male and female folk. There is no division of works. Both male and female of the family jointly carry out the agricultural activities, collection of fire woods, cash earning, gathering, gardening etc. but fishing and hunting are done by male folk only.

In the family system of the *Nahs*, the son after getting married has to construct separate fire hearth within the same roof. Generally, they constructed separate house after married. There was no major reason behind it. Father continued to stay with his wife and un-married children. But in

the old age, parents generally stay with either eldest or the youngest son, depend upon the love and affection.

During the field study it was revealed that the *Nahs* distribute the parental properties amongst the male children. In exceptional cases, due to the quarrel in the family, they insisted on the division of the family property. Their father gives them separate plots of land for cultivation and they built their own granary<sup>10</sup>. In the initial stage, under such circumstances, the relations between the brothers and between the sons and their parent remained strained. Though they live in the same village, they do not care to visit each others. This strained relation could not last long. Soon the artificial walls of separation and bitterness crumble down. Death and marriage in any of the families, festivals, rituals etc. bring them together. Ties of blood did not allow them to remain away from kin on such occasions<sup>11</sup>. The parents take the charge of distribution of properties, both movable and immovable equally to their sons. All the parental agricultural land was distributed equally. All the domestic animals such as *Yaks*, *Pla*, *Sene*, *pigs* and birds (poultry) were also distributed equally to the sons. Daughters got only share of their mother's ornaments such as *Tarkoji* (precious bangles) or *Koji* (bangles), *Rognik* (ear rings), *Tassang* (necklaces) etc. Daughters also get the share of traditional female dress and utensils from parents. Sometimes, the rich parent gift one or more *Yak* and *Sene* to their daughters as a token of love, but it is not compulsory in their culture.

## **B. Clan**

A clan is a category or a group of persons having a definite status in society which permanently determines their relation to other group. The relative position of the clan in the social scale arises from the degree of prestige, mightiness and superior or inferior attached to the status. The clan system is like a *Gotra* system of Hindu religion. In some cases, the clan is defined as a group of peoples having different origin and migration, but living in same area or villages. Further, the clan is also defining as the agent by which the people can maintain their matrimonial relationship. In Arunachal Pradesh, clan playing an important role in the field of politics, social affairs as well as to maintain matrimonial relation<sup>12</sup>.

Hence, Individuals, both men and women, inherited their clan membership from their fathers, as well as their surnames. They perceived their clan as their extended families, and all the members of a single clan regarded each other as "cousins." From this fundamental perception came the ironclad rule that one must marry outside the clan. To marry someone of the same clan amounted to incest. While clan incest did not produce the same degree of anathema as brother-sister or parent-child incest, it sufficed to evoke outrage, scandal and criminal sanctions. The clan as also served important economic and cultural functions, both in terms of mutual aid, training youth and collectively maintaining the rituals of the life cycle<sup>13</sup>.

Among the *Nahs*, the clan is the most important element in the society. The *Nah* society is divided into four clans viz. *Chader*, *Hapi*, *Hari* and *Tissi*. They call the clan as "*Ngillung*". The clan system of the *Nahs* is exogamous in nature. To put in other words, it was and still is, considered as a serious crime to marry within the same clan. Inter clan marriage is not encouraged in the *Nah* society and violation of this rule is viewed very seriously. In fact, the *Nah* clan rule can be compared with the Hindu System of *Gotra* in which the male and female of the same clan is considered as brother and sister and do not marry. In the *Nah* society the breach of the clan rule is a social calamity. The *Nahs* are strict in the clan rules<sup>14</sup>.

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The main characteristic of the clan system of the *Nahs* are confine on the marriage system and mutual relationship. All the clans are not differing from each other in economic, social and political aspects. All the religious rituals and ceremonies are same to them. All the economic difficulties or profits are shared by them. The only difference is that, they do not marry from same clan. They regard the members of the same clan as brothers and sisters and marry from other clans. As per the observation during field study, they respect and have mutual understanding with the same clan. If any problem arises, may be marriage, death or dispute, the clan member always safeguard each other. They always ready to make any sacrifice for the sake of their clan<sup>15</sup>.

### C. Sub-Clan

During the field study, it is found that the *Nahs* are again divided into various sub-clans. Accordingly, the *Chader* clan which is the largest clan in the area is divided into three sub-clans viz., *Dengri*, *Derin* and *Dersi*. Likewise, *Hafi* clan is divided into three sub-clans viz., *Hima Namlo*, *Hiji Namlo* and *Hider Namlo*. It is known that, other sub-clans of *Hafi* clan including *Hider Namlo* are now in Tibet (China). *Hari* clan has two sub-clans viz., *Finte Namlo*, *Ria Namlo* and *Rikang Namlo*. *Tissi* clan is divided in three sub-clan like *Rape Namlo*, *Chansi Namlo* and *Jangro Namlo*. According to the mythology of the *Nahs*, the three men named *Chader*, *Hafi* and *Hari* first came to *Taksing* valley. *Tissi* followed them and came later in this area. Thus, the *Nah* generation evolved from these four men<sup>16</sup>.

As per the field study, it is found that some other tribes intermixed with the *Nahs* and called themselves as *Nahs*. They are *Tai*, *Bai*, *Barum*, *Tarba*, *Nade*, *Solung (Puroik)*, *Hiba* etc. Though they call themselves as *Nahs*, they have no mythological relation with the *Nahs*. They are settled in the *Taksing* area and also participate in all the social, political, economic and religious occasion with the *Nahs*. Therefore, the clan system of the *Nahs* is based on absolutely Patriarchal and unilateral. In the *Nah* society, the clan group is strong and they always try to protect their clan from any danger<sup>17</sup>.

The *Nahs* of *Taksing* circle are very cool and peace loving people. They do not discriminate the other clans. They regard and have respect towards other clan. They live together in harmony and share all the sorrow and happiness. Thus, there is no any social stratification amongst the clans. Though *Chader* clan is the largest clan, but they do not discriminate the other clan. Likewise, though the *Tissi* clan is the smallest clan, but they enjoy equal status in the *Nah* society. Therefore, they do not have ideas and knowledge of the stratification in society.

### D. Slavery

History of slavery system is old as human being itself. From the time immemorial, Kings, nobles and the rich people had thousands of slaves. Powerful and strong men had dominated the poor people as their slaves. These slaves had served their master till their death, and also their generation had to serve the generations of same masters. The poor and weak people were made slaves by warfare and raids and by other more variable events as penalty for crimes, or compensation for indebtedness, purchase etc. A slave is regarded as a living something not someone, when he is owned by another man<sup>18</sup>.

Slave or slavery system prevailed in the *Nah* society in the very past time. The area of *Nahs* lies between the neighbouring tribes like *Tagins*, *Nyishis* and Tibetans. The area of the *Nahs* was the

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main trade route between *Tagins* and *Nyishi* with Tibet. So, *Tagins* and *Nyishis* traded with the Tibetans for cloths, Dao, ornaments and especially for salt. According to the informant, it is said that, the *Nahs* were prosperous and richer than that of *Tagins* and *Nyishis* before independence or before 1962 Indo-China war. Because, being settled at the trade route, they collected taxes from *Tagins* and *Nyishis* pass through their areas. The *Nahs* also had trade relation with the neighbouring tribes. There was no money system, only barter system was prevailing. Salt was available in the *Nah* area. So *Tagins* and *Nyishis* brought slaves to exchange salt. *Solungs* were slaved and bartered to the *Nahs*. *Nahs* paid pig or salt to the *Tagin* and *Nyishis* in barter. Still there are many families of *Solungs*, not as slave, but as one of them<sup>19</sup>.

Slaves were very useful for *Nahs* in various activities like in agriculture, domestic, hunting, fishing; firewood carrying etc. The rich *Nah* people bought slaves to show their wealth and pride in the society. During marriage, the rich people sent two or three slaves with his daughter to look after the works of the bride in her husband's family. If the bride's family was rich, a good number of slaves were sent to show their richness. Besides, if the marriage demand is high and it could not be met up by the bridegroom, then slaves were sent instead of properties. Gradually, time has changed after India's independence. Due to political interference of the government in the area, slavery system has declined. As per observation, at present, the system of slavery has completely vanished away in the study area<sup>20</sup>.

#### **E. Social Stratification**

Men are essential equal, but differ from one another in many non-essential qualities which belong to the physical, moral or intellectual orders. In human life, inequality in accidental is as common as equality in essentials. But these differences do not constitute by themselves any social problems, unless large number of men is affected by them developing thereby some common interest and loyalties which distinguish them from other categories or group of men. Stability in the group thus formed is another requisite for social stratification.

As per interview with Mr. *Logu Chader*, lone Political Interpreter of the area, it is known that in the earlier days there prevailed a social classification. That was between the slaves and the masters. The society of the *Nahs* was divided into two groups viz; the Masters (*Nahs*) and the slaves (*Solungs*). The masters regarded themselves as superior and treated slaves as inferior. But all the clans of the *Nahs* like *Chader*, *Hafi*, *Hari* and *Tissi* were regarded as equal in status from the beginning. There was no classification amongst the *Nah* peoples. But all the *Nah* clans treated slaves as lower class. Time has changed after independence of India. Due to political interference of the government in the area, social classification came to decline. As per observation, at present, the division of society is completely vanished. Slaves have now changed their surname and taken the surname of their masters. Politically and socially, they are now freemen and enjoying equal rights. They have constructed their separate houses, own separate lands and properties. Some of them are now richer than even their masters. But psychologically, the existence of social stratification is still found, because, if dispute arises between the original *Nah* people and the *Solung Nah* (after surname changed), original *Nahs* use to humiliate the *Solungs*. But in practical, there is no social classification in *Nah* society now<sup>21</sup>.

## CONCLUSION

To sum up, *Nahs* are peace loving peoples. Father is regarded as the head of the family and the family is based on patriarchal system. They prefer nuclear family system. In the past days, they preferred joint family system. But gradually, joint family system is disappearing as of now. Because, the joint family system created some misunderstandings amongst the members of the family. Under joint family system, they constructed long house with three to four fire hearts, where all the family such as father with mother and un-married children and all the married sons have separate fire hearths. These types of joint family system are now disappearing. The *Nah* society is divided into four clans and again these clans are divided into various sub-clans. Also, they are always ready to defend their clan from outside dangers. It is revealed from the present study that slavery system was prevailing in earlier days. Due to the slavery system, the society of the *Nahs* was divided into two social groups. Now, both the slavery system and social stratification have totally vanished, due to the interference of the government. In addition, it is unveiled from the study that like other tribes of Arunachal Pradesh, they also bury their dead bodies. They believe in malevolent and benevolent spirits too. They also believe that unnatural death is an act of malevolent spirits. They offer various sacrifices to the spirits to appease or for their welfare. However, health and hygienic status of the *Nah* villages is very low. It is found to be dirty and barely take up cleanliness drive around the surrounding of their houses and villages. Nevertheless, the *Nahs* of *Taksing* circle are very similar to other tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. Especially, they share lot of commonalities with *Nyishi*, other groups of *Tagin* and *Monpa* tribes of Arunachal Pradesh.

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