



## FAMILY AMONG THE NAGAS IN ASSAM: A CASE STUDY IN HAHCHARA ADRASA NAGA VILLAGE IN SIVASAGAR DISTRICT OF ASSAM

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### ARTICLE INFO

#### **Article History:**

Received 24<sup>th</sup> September, 2017  
Received in revised form  
12<sup>th</sup> October, 2017  
Accepted 03<sup>rd</sup> November, 2017  
Published online 29<sup>th</sup> December, 2017

#### **Key Words:**

Accessory Gallbladder,  
Open surgery,  
Cholelithiasis.

### ABSTRACT

Like many other tribal societies of northeast India, the Nagas have a patriarchal family structure. In this type of family, the males are characteristically superior in all affairs of family matters. Women are debarred from all sorts of power, authority and decision making processes. In this context, taking part in politics by women is restricted and the women suffer from multiple barriers which bar them from active and positive political involvement. The Naga society is basically agriculturists. Both men and women take active parts in agricultural activities and that way the women are co-workers in all forms of agricultural activities. Similarly, there are some areas of economic activities where women take active part in running of the economic sides of family.

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**Citation: Simanta Boruah, 2017.** "Family among the Nagas in Assam: A case study in Hahchara Adrasa Naga Village in Sivasagar district of Assam", *International Journal of Development Research*, 7, (12), 17624-17629.

## INTRODUCTION

North East India consisting of eight states is a vast area being inhabited by numerous tribal people from time immemorial. In Assam a large number of tribal people take an important place in that direction. There are nearly forty tribes in Assam, each having its own dialect and different way of life. Regarding the tribal, Mukhi has said, "They are freedom lover and have preserved much of original culture of India. They have their own social, cultural, economic, religious institution." Family is a basic institution of society and interrelated to each other. As universal institutions both are complex systems and sociologically have a great importance without which a society cannot survive. From primitive age family has been in existence. As an universal institution and life long process family and marriage system have been applicable to tribal society. A clan is a constituent of a tribal community. To have a clear knowledge about a clan of a tribal people, one should and must know its society, culture and also its internal problems profoundly. A citizen of a free state should know the different aspects of its people for its welfare and safety of the social life of its people.

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We are dependent upon a few books published here and there and from time to time to know about the tribal people of Assam, their social development, as we have no scope, nor there is any advantage to know or study them in their midst. History proves that all people of Assam couldn't advance equally on various historical grounds. A time came when the tribal people of Assam lagged behind their other non-tribal brethren. Consequently they are deprived of many advantages. It is believed that the Nagas, an important tribe among the tribes of Assam, are a bit advanced. They have their own language and colorful culture. Among the hill tribes of Nagaland the Konyak Naga clan occupies and constitutes the largest area and population. There are two Konyak Naga villages in Assam, particularly in Sivasagar district. They have contributed much towards the rich civilization of Assam. Unfortunately, researches in different aspects of the Konyak Nagas living in Assam have been scanty. Efforts to bring the Konyak Nagas to light would add a lot of knowledge about them as well as enrich our culture substantially.

### **Basic concept of Family**

Family is a primary social unit representing both an institution as well as an association. It is the oldest amongst all other institutions and associations, and forms the backbone of our social structure.

As a primary group the families are the first and most universal of all forms of association. From the sociological point of view, a temporary alliance between a man and woman for sexual gratification cannot be said to constitute a family. In order to constitute a family the sex relation should necessarily be permanent and definite enough to allow for the procreation of children and for an appropriate arrangement for their upbringing. In this way, the family as a part of society is a system of relationship. It is a web of mutual relationships between the family members.

### **Burgess and Locke have discussed the family as follows**

“Family is a group of persons united by the ties of marriage, blood or adoption; consisting of a single household, interacting and inter-communication with each other in their respective social roles of husband and wife, mother and father, son and daughter, brother and sister creating a common culture.” From the above mentioned definitions we have come to know that families are of different forms, namely primary or nuclear family, joint family, patriarchal family and matriarchal family. The concept of primary or nuclear family has been accepted for the present study. A family consisting of husband and wife with or without unmarried children or widowed parents may be termed as nuclear family. On the other hand, in a joint family system, basically all the members of the family live together under one roof and are related to each other in one way or the other directly and indirectly.

In matriarchal family the husband lives in the house of his wife and the mother wield the authority, while in a patriarchal family the wife lives in the house of her husband and the father or the husband is all in all.

### **Objectives**

- The present study is concerned with the study of one major important social institution of the Konyak Nagas of Hahchara Adrasa Naga Goan, Sivasagar.
- In attempts to study the changing aspects of this institutions.
- It tries to highlight some of the issues of sociological interest such as family role, differentiation, division of labour within family and nature and types of social institutions, the internal organization of life and culture of the Konyak Nagas of Hahchara Adrasa Naga Village.
- In aims to know the changes regarding family which have taken place in the Konyak Naga society of Hahchara Adrasa Naga Village.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The present paper is based on both primary and secondary data. Primary data are collected through interview schedule, both participant and non-participant interview. For the present study the interview schedule is constructed structurally. Some data are collected by the help of participant observation. Secondary data are collected through interview guide. Records are collected from the Panchayat office etc.

### **Explanation**

About Hahchara Adrasa Naga Goan which I have selected as a model for the study of family and marriage system of the

Konyak Nagas, is situated in the Hahchara Mouza of Sivasagar sub-division. The village is located at a distance of 8 K.M. from the south-east of Sivasagar town. The Haripara road that runs through the village divides it into two parts. The village is connected with other area with metalled road. Historical Gargaon is situated at a distance of 2 Km to the eastern side of the village. The Dikhow River is flowing at 1 Km distance to the southern side. To the northern side of the village there is Kheluwa Development Block at a distance of 2km.

### **Its history**

Historical source about Hahchara Adrasa Naga Goan are scanty. However, it is believed that the first inhabitant to the village migrated from Joboka and Chinphoi village of Nagaland in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Till 1830 there was no trace of Naga people to that area. Most probably the earliest Naga inhabitants had no land owned by themselves, and they cultivated in the available land of others. They worked as daily labourers in the neighbouring villages and used to earn their livelihood. Gradually they were able to collect land for their own. Possession of land helped to the extension of their families and led to become a full-fledged village.

### **Topography**

Hahchara Adrasa Naga Goan is more or less a plain tract of land with large plots of paddy cultivation in the northern and southern parts. The under welter parts of the village are covered wild bushy growth and woody plants. A drain of about eight feet in depth and ten feet in breadth runs south to north along the village. During rainy season the Naga villages use it for fishing. The uncultivated land is covered with busy growth and useful trees such as Aiar, Simalu, Maj, Silikha, Teteli, Amlakhi, Chatiana, Nahar, Orium, Saal, tokkou various kinds of bamboos. The chief fruit trees to be seen in village are – betel-nut, betel-plum, coconut, mango etc. People depend upon rain water for major cultivation. They use tube-well and pond water for drinking and other domestic purpose.

### **Population and household**

The total population of the village is 408. All of them are Konyak Nagas. Out of total 192 male and 216 female. The total number of household in the village is 100.(One hundred). The conditions of the homes are RCC buildings nos.14, Assam type or pakka houses nos.30 and the rest kaccha houses nos.56. The Caccha houses are made of bamboo, wood, and tokkou leaves. Each house is divided into 3-5 rooms and one of which is used for kitchen. The villagers generally keep a room of their house to serve guest.

### **People**

People of the village belong to Konyak clan of the greater Naga race. They are said to have settled down in this village before the British rule was established in Assam. They have scanty facial hair, epicanthic fold and prominent cheekbone. They are brown and light brown coloured. They speak Konyak dialect among their community and Assamese with non-Naga people of Assam.

## Occupation

The primary occupation of the Konyak Nagas of Hahchara Adrasa Naga village is agriculture. They, like other Assamese people, cultivate Sali rice. During winter season they cultivate mustard seed, different kinds of vegetables etc. Nearly every household of the village has plots of land for vegetable production. But for a few rich families, nearly each family rear pigs, chicken etc. Besides, there are many in the village engaged in government service and business. Some also earn their livelihood as daily labourers. The women flock engage in weaving and bring additional income to the family.

## Language

The Konyak Nagas of Hahchara Adrasa Naga Goan speak their dialect among them. As a plain tribe and due to long close contact with neighbouring Assamese people, they know the Assamese language and can speak the same fluently. At home they speak in their own dialect. But they usually use Assamese in communication with non-Naga people. The Naga students of the village read in both Assamese and English medium.

## Agriculture

The Konyak Nagas of Hahchara Adrasa Naga Goan are primarily dependent upon agriculture. Majority of the population of the village are agriculturists. They are highly accustomed to Sali cultivation. They seldom cultivate Ahu rice. In the month of February the agriculturists cultivate Kochu in their own land or in the land of neighbouring people. Mostly kochu is produced for self-consumption, but in urgent need of money, they sometime sell it at Simaluguri daily market.

## Dress pattern

In matter of dress the Konyak Nagas of the villages still wear their traditional Naga garments. The women folk generally wear a long cloth round their waist and an upper garment. But for the eldest men all wear both long and half pants and shirts. The old people wear only a piece of cloth round their waist rest of the body remains uncovered. The girls now days wear frock, sarees, skirts, chadar, seluwar kutta like the neighbouring Assamese girls. But during their religious occasion and festivals they wear their traditional dress.

## Diet pattern

The Konyak Nagas of the village are food-loving people. Their prime food is rice. They eat pork lavishly. They use pork in religious festivals, rituals etc. 'Dried fish' is another item of their food.

## Important public place

There is a 'Morong' inside the village. The front of the Morong is decorated by carved wood and long-drum. All the communal festivals either religious or aesthetic are celebrated in the front yard of the Morong. Inside it there is the dormitory of boys where unmarried boys above 15 years, stay at night. Just nearby the 'Morong' there is a library-cum club & nearby other side a musical school. For burial of deceased person there is a grave yard inside the village.

Education among the Konyak Nagas of the village is expanding day by day. There is a lower primary school, an Anganbadi school, a girl's high school, a musical school, a medical sub-centre, a public auditorium and a water supply centre inside the village. A sub-post office was established in the village in January, 1978.

## Religion

The Konyak Nagas of the village are religious minded. They are all Hindu except two Christian residents in the village. They belong to 'Kala Sanghati' sect of Vaisnavite cult and are followers of 'Mairamora Satra'. It seems that their forefather adopted Hinduism during the later period of Ahom rule. Their religion and way of life is linked more with heavenly bodies like the sun and the moon than the God and Goddesses that are merely figments of imagination. The earth and the sky have greater significance for them. They do not believe in idol worship. They do not think of religion, magic, sorcery and ghosts separately, one independent of the other. They feel that the moon is like a man who is not secret of moving about in the darkness, while the sun remains hidden at night.

## Transport and communication:

The transport and communication system is good in this Hahchara Adrasa Naga Goan. It is connected with a public works department road. Mostly people maintain their communication with Simaluguri, Nazira, Balighat and Sivasagar. In south of the village a rail line runs Simaluguri to Dibrugarh. Simaluguri railway junction and Jorhat airport is about 4 km and 57 km far from the village.

## Family among Konyak Nagas

Family consisting of husband, wife, children and any other relatives, is the primary unit of the social structure of all human groups. In ancient time men lived in small families backing any kind of organization or permanence. They served to fulfill simple biological and psychological needs. Family is the backbone of a society, since it composes a society. Like any other family, the family in tribal society is also regarded to perform biological, economic and social needs. In tribal societies we can see four types of family system, namely primary or nuclear family, conjugal family, matriarchal family and patriarchal family. The family system in the Konyak Naga village of Hahchara, Sivasagar is patriarchal in which the father or any other eldest male member dominates whole life of the family. He controls the whole family as a leading member. The families in the past were mainly joint, but at present this has been changed into nuclear form. Majority of the boys set up their own family after marriage. Land scarcity, individual consideration etc, are the factors for which the married boys tend to separate. The following table shows the nature of the families among this Naga village.

**Table 1. Nature of the family**

Nature of the family	Total
Joint	19 (19%)
Nuclear	81 (81%)
Total	100 (100%)

The above table indicates that most of the families are nuclear in nature, that is, 81 (81%) and number of joint families is 19

(19%). The numbers of nuclear families are more than those of the joint families.

### Size of the families

The total number of families in Hahchara Adrasa Naga goan as found at the time survey is 100 nos. For our convenience, we have classified the size of family according to number of persons in each family. The following table shows the size of the families.

**Table 2. Size of the family**

No. of family members	No. of families	percentage
1-3 individual	16	16%
4-6 individual	40	40%
7-9 individual	28	28%
10 above	16	16%
Total =	100	100%

The above table shows that the highest frequency of family which consist 1-3 individuals 16 families, 4-6 individuals 40 families, 7-9 individuals 28 families and 10 above 16 families.

### Function of the head of the families

In the families of Konyak Nagas, the heads play a remarkable role. His predominance in the family is quite noticeable as well as distinct. The following table shows the head's representation in the following affairs.

**Table 3. Function of the head of the family**

Function of the head	No. of respondent
Economic management	60 (60%)
Social function	8 (8%)
Marriage	10 (10%)
Political function	6 (6%)
Religious function	16 (16%)
Total	100 (100%)

The above table no-3 shows that economic management is the main function of the head of a family. But sometimes the same head of the family has to perform all these social roles according to the need and consequences. In some cases father is the sole decision making authority of the family, but the money-earner is his son. In this case, the son occupies the dominant role in economic management. The father may simply be a legal advisor. When the economic management is carried on by the son, the head represents in other socio-political and religious function. Father's opinion in the marriage of his children is very necessary.

### Preference regarding sex and ideal number of children:

The Konyak Nagas, specially the illiterates, think that the children are gift of God. The parents, like those of other Indian parents, give more preference to male children to female children. But at present it has been seen that the parents love their children, both male and female, in an equal manner. The following table shows the ideal number of children and the children who get preference in the society.

### Joint family and family planning

The Konyak Nagas of the village had in the past lived in joint families for several generations. The numbers of family members have been seen 2-15 in this village.

**Table 4. Preference of respondent regarding Sex and ideal number of children**

Preference regarding sex	Male	58 (58%)
	Female	12 (12%)
	No. personal choice	30 (30%)
	Total	100 (100%)
Preference regarding ideal no. of children	1-3 children	50 (50%)
	4-5 children	44 (44%)
	6-7 children	06 (6%)
	Total	100 (100%)

The family having lowest number of members is 2nos. consisted of only husband and wife. They want to live jointly for their agricultural economy. However, for their economic backwardness, occupational engagement etc, they now prefer to nuclear family system. Thus, in the Konyak Naga village of Hahchara, joint family system is breaking down with the passage of time.

### Family planning

Modern education and thought, economic backwardness etc. has touched deeply the Konyak Nagas of Hahchara. A good number people of the village are educated and well-informed of what are happening around them. They are well-conversant of the several measures taken by the govt. of India so far to control birth rate in the country. Therefore, the present villagers are trying to adopt family planning as far as possible. The following table points out the attitude towards joint family and family planning.

**Table 5. Attitude toward joint family and family planning**

Attitude towards joint family	Good	26 (26%)
	Bad	74 (74%)
	Total =	100 (100)
Attitude towards family planning	Good	76 (76%)
	Bad	24 (24%)
	Total =	100 (100)

The above table shows that out of 100 families 26 nos. of families advocates joint-family system, while the remaining 74 nos. of families are inclined to nuclear type of family. As for family planning 76% respondents prefer to family planning and 24% are against it.

### Property inheritance

Property inheritance is the most essential in the tribal societies. As the families of the Konyak Nagas of Hahchara are patriarchal, the property is inherited by the son or sons after their parent's expiry. On the other hand, if the parents have no male issue, property goes to the hands of their daughter or daughters. In case the parents have no issue the ownership of their property transfers to their near relatives, such as brothers, sisters etc, or any other people whom they wish to give their property.

### Status of women in society

It is universally admitted and really true that in tribal societies women occupy an equal place with their men folk. There is no marked preference for a boy or girl. Both are equally liked and treated. The status of Naga women in the village seems to not inferior to the male Nagas.

Though the Naga society in the village is patriarchal, the women and men folks here have equal status. They take part in every sphere concerning day to day life. The social positions of the women present a distinction place among the Naga society. They take part actively in their social festivals, religious ceremonies. These words of Mr. Antai Konyak a Naga writer conform to the Konyak Nagas of Hahchara, "truly we are peculiar people. We are all equal, men and women here an equal social status. We have no caste distinction, no high or low class of people. There is no communal felling; neither there are religious differences to disturb our harmony with our condition." In education too the women are not lagging behind their men folk who feel pride in getting their girls educated. Many Naga girls are pursuing their education in high school in the local area and in the nearby colleges. A few educated Konyak girls of the village are serving as teacher, nurse, engineer, Goan Panchayat employee etc. Above all, the Konyak Naga women are not regarded as depressed group. They participate in every sphere of activities.

### Basic findings Family

- At present the Konyak Nagas of Hahchara gives more importance in nuclear family than joint family. The total number of family is 100 nos.
- In our findings out of 100 families 16 household consist of 1-3 members, 4-6 in 40 households, 7-9 in 28 household and 16 above in 3 households.
- The head of the family plays all in all roles in the various activities.
- They advocate family-planning system and most of the families of the village abiding by it practically.
- The women folk enjoy a high and respectable position in the society.

### Conclusion

The above discussion highlights the family system of Konyak Nagas of Hahchara, Sivasagar. The Naga society is a patriarchal society. The village gives important significance of various types of changes in tribal social structure such as family system. So far as the family system of the Konyak Nagas of Hahchara is concerned, it has been found that family as an institution has undergone much significant changes in its nature. Traditionally Nagas are in favour of joint family system. But at present most of the families of the village are nuclear in nature. The mode of living of the families has changed from traditional Nagas to that of the modern social life. However, it has been remaining a family in patriarchal which the father still holds the supreme authority. Unlike in the past, daughters have also rights over paternal properties. The male members are supposed to be supreme authority for management of the family. The wife has right to take part in decision making, tension management and integration of the family. In the field of occupation too change is conspicuous. The family members are no longer attached to only agriculture, pig-rearing, weaving etc. The youngsters have come out from within the four walls of their houses to seek and engage in different occupations. Thus, we find among them doctors, engineers, nurse, teachers, meat and fish seller, vegetable traders, grocer etc. The new modes of occupation in which they are engaged, gradually changes their family system.

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