

**AGRICULTURAL LORES AND RITUALS OF THE NOCTE  
TRIBE OF ARUNACHAL PRADESH**

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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

The notion of documenting, safeguarding and disseminating the Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) has derived serious attention of social science scholars, cultural activists and States particularly after the UNESCO convention for safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage which was held in 2003. UNESCO stated that Intangible Cultural Heritage, also known as 'living heritage', refers to the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge and skills transmitted by communities from generation to generation. It provides these communities with a sense of identity and continuity, while promoting creativity and social well-being, contributing to the management of the natural and social environment and generating income. Much of what is called traditional or indigenous knowledge is, or can be, integrated into health care, education and management of the natural resources systems. ICH includes traditions or living expressions inherited from our ancestors and passed on to our descendants, such as oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, festive events, knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe or the knowledge and skills to produce traditional crafts. The importance of intangible cultural heritage is not the cultural manifestation itself but rather the wealth of knowledge and skills that is transmitted through it from one generation to the next.

The chief characteristic features of Intangible cultural heritage include the following.

It is traditional, contemporary and living at the same time. Intangible cultural heritage does not only represent inherited traditions from the past but also contemporary rural and urban practices in which diverse cultural groups take part.

It is inclusive. We may share expressions of intangible cultural heritage that are similar to those practised by others. Whether they are from the neighbouring village, from a city on the opposite side of the world, or have been adapted by peoples who have migrated and settled in a different region, they all are intangible cultural heritage – they have been passed from one generation to another, have evolved in response to their environments and they contribute to giving us a sense of identity and continuity, providing a link from our past, through the present, and into our future. Intangible cultural heritage does not give rise to questions of whether or not certain practices are specific to a culture. It contributes to social cohesion, encouraging a sense of identity and responsibility which helps individuals to feel part of one or different communities and to feel part of society at large.

It is representative. Intangible cultural heritage is not merely valued as a cultural good, on a comparative basis, for its exclusivity or its exceptional value. It thrives on its basis in communities and depends on those whose knowledge of traditions, skills and customs are passed on to the rest of the community, from generation to generation, or to other communities.

It is community-based. Intangible cultural heritage can only be heritage when it is recognized as such by the communities, groups or individuals that create, maintain and

transmit it – without their recognition, nobody else can decide for them that a given expression or practice is their heritage.

Most of the components or characteristics of ICH as defined by UNESCO is an integral part of Folklore studies and therefore the initiative towards the subject matter began much before the UNESCO convention. In 1812 the German brothers Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm commenced publishing influential volumes of oral folk narratives and interpretations of Germanic mythology which was inspired by many scholars and brought them into the field of folklore collection. Philologists during the early 19<sup>th</sup> century started collecting large amount of cultural materials of many genres like fairy tales, oral epics, folk games, riddles, proverbs, arts and crafts from all over Europe. In 1846, an English antiquarian, William John Thoms suggesting a new word “Folk-lore” and the new term caught on and proved its value in defining a new area of knowledge and subject of inquiry.

Several scholars have tried to define folklore in different ways and therefore there are a number of definitions. Dundes (1965: 2) asserts that the term “folk” can refer to any group of people who share at least one common factor. It does not matter what the linking factor is. It could be a common occupation, language, or religion – but what is important is that a group has some traditions that it calls its own. Dorson (1972:1) stated that Folklore emerged as a new field of learning in the nineteenth century, when antiquarians in England and philologists in Germany began to look closely at the ways of the lower classes. The word they used to denote this subject was Volkskunde. Ben Amos (1971:13) defined folklore as artistic communication of small groups and George H. Schoemaker (1990) classified folklore into verbal folklore and non-verbal folklore. Hymes (1971:50) stated that oral narratives are a form of communication which uses words in speech in a highly stylized, artistic way. The

distinction between the artistic use of words and ordinary or scientific usage is not always clear-cut. The starting point for demarcation, of course, is the conceptualization of linguistic forms by the members of a culture. The more stylized speech forms in a culture are usually differentiated by linguistic labels. These are the labelled verbal genres which the analyst typically glosses as ‘myth’, ‘folktale’, ‘legend’, ‘song’, ‘proverb’, etc. However, because all speech can be viewed in terms of artistic and expressive qualities, oral literature is best understood as “the more highly organized, more expressive end” of a continuum between a stylistic and referential dimension. Adams (1990:23) stated that “Narratives can be told, written, sung, acted out, danced or performed in many other ways”. Oral narratives, i.e. myths, legends, tales and songs, are expressed, not only in symbolic words, but also in symbolic acts like rituals and rites, dance and drama, etc. Bascom (1965) defines myth as tales believed as true, usually sacred, set in the distant past or other worlds or parts of the world, and with extra-human, inhuman, or heroic characters.

Dorson (1972:2) classified folklore into oral literature, customs and practices, performing folk arts and material culture. This basic classification of folklore helps us to understand the nature and characteristics of various genres, however in Indian context particularly in Tamil Nadu, these genres cannot be treated as an independent element, and instead they are interdependent in nature. For instance, oral narratives such as myths, legends and epics are enacted in rituals through various performances, mourning songs are performed in funerals, customs and beliefs are also associated with material culture and agriculture, and many performing folk arts are considered as rituals in religious and life cycle practices. Therefore, the various genres of folklore should be studied in a holistic way along with the socio- cultural context in which it exists.

Thus it is clear that the study of folklore includes myths, epics, legends, riddles, narratives, proverbs, lullabies, lamentations, tongue twisters, anecdotes, songs, jokes, life cycle ceremonies, plays, pastimes, rituals, customs , practices, dance, music, theatre, fairs, festivals, material culture etc. that are orally or aurally transmitted from generation to generation. The works of early philologists mostly dealt with collection of “text” but later in due course of time when folklore developed as an academic discipline, the attention of folklorists and social anthropologists was given to the socio-cultural context in which a particular genre exists because the meanings or functions of any genre of folklore or ICH. These are greatly determined by the cultural contexts in which they occur.

Arunachal Pradesh is inhabited by more than twenty six major tribal communities, and thus presents an interesting cultural mosaic. Though there is a blending of cultures, yet the tribal communities have preserved their distinct knowledge systems, oral and performing traditions, language, customs and practices, fairs and festivals, arts and crafts etc. This rich cultural heritage has always drawn scholars from various parts of the world to Arunachal. But still many aspects of such intangible cultural heritage remain undocumented and researched scientifically. Agriculture plays a significant role in shaping the life and culture of the indigenous communities and a number of rituals, performances, narratives, festivals, customs, practices, beliefs and knowledge systems are associated with agriculture.

The ritual celebrations / festivals are generally performed annually in a particular time which is based on the agricultural calendar. The primary function of these traditional cultural practices is to appease the supernatural spirits in order to secure protection, fertility, prosperity

and good agricultural yield. Ritual performances in the form of festivals are seen all over the world. Most societies periodically set aside portions of time for traditional celebrations. These celebrations are moments of special significance for the group or community. These recurring moments of special significance, with the celebrations that fill them, are what constitute festivals, and ritual performances. However festivals cannot be defined as a particular kind of behaviour, rather it is a set of traditional behaviours, and it is often the context for other genres of folklore. Thus it is an amalgamation of beliefs, vows, rituals, myths, legends, narratives, performances, material culture etc. In the modern socio-cultural context, identification, documentation, preservation and dissemination of these cultural practices associated with agriculture is an urgent need in order to understand the traditional world view of the indigenous communities. With this brief understanding, this research is an attempt to study and document the rituals and practices associated with agriculture among the Nocte tribe of Arunachal Pradesh.

## **1.1 OBJECTIVES**

1. To document the socio cultural profile of the Nocte,
2. To document ritual celebrations, festivals, customs and belief systems associated with agriculture among the Nocte, and

## **1.2 METHODOLOGY**

This research is multidisciplinary in nature and is being carried out through extensive field research among the Nocte tribe domiciled in Khonsa and Noksa villages in Tirap region of Arunachal Pradesh. The first hand empirical data are collected through extensive fieldwork in the natural socio- cultural context by following the triangulation research methodology i.e.

interview, observation and audio visual documentation. Secondary sources are also consulted to enrich the research.



## CHAPTER II

### BRIEF PROFILE OF THE NOCTE

The Noctes are one of the major tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. They occupy the North Eastern part of the Tirap district which forms a part of the mountainous tract of the North-eastern frontier of India and upper Myanmar. Tirap district lies between the latitudes  $26^{\circ} 38'N$  and  $27^{\circ} 47'N$  and the longitudes  $96^{\circ} 16'E$  and  $95^{\circ} 40'E$ . Etymologically, the term *Nocte* (also spelt as Nocte) comprises of *Nok* which means 'village' and *te* means 'people'; thus the term *Nocte* means 'village people' or 'villager' (Dutta, 1978). The term generally refers to both the people and the language. Earlier, the people were also known by different names such as *Namsangia*, *Mohongia*, *Borduria*, and *Paniduria* as found in the old administrative reports. These exonyms were purely based on the existing Nocte villages at the time of the survey. These villages also have their local names such as *Thinnyan* (Namsang), *Sahla* (Borduria) and *Longchang* (Paniduria).

Noctes are chiefly concentrated in Tirap district situated in the southeastern part of the state of Arunachal Pradesh, India. It shares state border with Assam in the North, an international border with Myanmar in the South, and a district border with Changlang in the East, and Longding in the West. According to 2001 Census, the population of Nocte is 32,957 (2001). In Tirap district, Noctes can be found in Khonsa, Namsang, Soha, and Lazu circles,

Rajanagar-I, II and III in Bordumsa circle in Changlang district and Joypur in Dibrugarh district of Assam.

The District derives its names from the principal river, 'Tirap' which flows through the Changlang and Tirap district of Arunachal Pradesh starting from the south to the North until it falls into the Noa-Dehing river in Assam. The name appears to have its origin in the Bodo word 'ti' meaning water. The land has a picturesque beauty of its own. Tirap District is inhabited by two major tribes i.e. Nocte and Tutsa.





*Photo 1,2 & 3 : Nocte men folk*

Nocte villages are situated on hills slopes and also on the slopes of the hills. The villages are thickly populated with cluster of houses huddled together. Each village is surrounded by its own cultivable lands. The boundaries of villages are well defined and in most cases by a river or a streams. Small paths are maintained by villages to connect one village with another. These paths are the main routes of communication. In each village there are several paths leading to different cultivated fields. These paths are well maintained, during the time of cultivation of those fields. Each village has a number of sub-divisions called *Sum* in Nocte. Each *Sum* of the village has its own *Morung* or Bachelor's house where the young boys of the *Sum* sleep at night.



*Photo 4: The Khonsa village landscape*

Availability of water and suitable cultivable land are the two important considerations for establishment of a village in a particular site, where these two conditions are favourable. Omen is taken to decide on the establishment of a new village. A house for the purpose of dwelling is called *Hum, Hom, Jim*, by Noctes of different area. The house type is similar in all Nocte villages. Some variation is found in the use of buildings materials. In interior area the roofs are thatched with leaf. The main structure of the house i.e. posts, beams, etc. are made of wood and bamboos. Floor and roof are made of split bamboo. Traditionally the shaman selects the suitable place to construct the house through omen reading. The houses are built at a height of four to twelve feet from the ground level. The land on which the house is built is uneven and undulating. *Tako* leaves are used for thatching the roof. A typical Nocte house is



of the Chang pattern consisting of a *Wakka* or a big hall and an inner room which is known as *Humnyu*.



*Photo 5 & 6: The traditional house of Nocte*



*Photo 7: The Pigsty*

Linguistically, Nocte comes under the Tibeto-Burman language family. Gupta (1971) *An Introduction to Nocte Language* has mentioned six dialects of Nocte such as *Hawa-jap*, *Phothung-jap*, *Khapa-jap*, *Tang-jap*, *Jope-jap* and *Laju-jap*. They are mutually unintelligible. These dialects spread across different villages of Nocte community. As far as Nocte language is concerned, no proper linguistic studies have been done. Nocte has no script of its own. The writing system is not standardized. None of the Nocte varieties (as mentioned) have been taught in schools, colleges or any other educational institution. A book called *An Introduction to the Nocte Language* Gupta (1971) is the pioneer text on the language. Dutta (1978), *The Noctes* is another important book written on people and their socio-cultural aspects.

## **SOCIO-POLITICAL STRUCTURE AND ORGANIZATION**

**Nocte Sub-Group:** Dutta classified, “ The Nocte subgroup on the basis of regional division viz. *Koute* Nocte and *Hawa* Nocte. *Koute* Nocte means hill people and *Hawa* means plain people. Thus, the people of hill or upper region, called *Koute* Nocte and the people of lower region or plain lands, referred as *Hawa* Nocte”.

The main sub- groups of the Nocte may be classify based on the area of migration or close similarities in dialects and other aspects of culture are as follows:

1. Tutsa or Tut Nocte:
2. Olo or Laju Nocte
3. Koute Nocte
4. Hakhun Nocte

5. Hawa Nocte
6. Phongsung Nocte
7. Khapa Nocte
8. Damlak or Lamlak Nocte

All these above – mentioned sub- groups are territorial in their distribution except Tutsa and Laju. These groups have their respective dialects, i.e. ‘Tutsa’ or ‘Tut Nocte’.

### **TUTSA OR TUT NOCTE**

The Tutsa are one of the prominent sub-groups of Nocte inhabiting in adjacent areas of Changlang district of Arunachal Pradesh on the eastern side of Tirap district. Tutsa also inhabit in Changlang district in Tirap district they are scattering over 19 Villages according to 2001 census. Their inhabited area lies in the sub–patkai region cover by hilly terrain and deep gorges. The dialect spoken by them is ‘Jopjap’.

### **LAJU NOCTE OR OLO**

Another sub- group of Nocte is the Laju or Olo who lives in the south eastern corner of tirap districts; dilated in the entire Laju circle. They scatter over 11 villages namely Lazu, Pongkong, Lonkhong, Sanlizm, Longbo, Raho, Longliang, Lainwang, Chinhaen ,Nogbo and Thumjang. The Laju Nocte refer themselves as ‘Olo’ and the term ‘Laju’ refers to the name of village as well as its people who migrated from Laju village , like Tutnyu village is the original home of Tusta. The Laju village is the original or mother village Laju Nocte. The dialect spoken by them is ‘Lajujao’ or ‘Lajuret’.

## **KOUTE/ DADOM NOCTE**

The Koute Nocte are also one of the sub-groups of Nocte, inhabits the mountainous terrain of the sub-Patkai range. They scatter over 10 villages; it occupies the central part of Tirap district of Khonsa circle. The dialect spoken by them is alike to that of Hawa and Hakhun Noctes with only a little variation.

## **HAKHUN NOCTE**

Hakhun Nocte occupies the central areas of khonsa circle. The villages inhabited by them are about five namely Thinsa, Khati, Khela, Sipini, and Khonsa. The Hakhun means, the land located below or beneath. Hence, Hakhun are the inhabitants of the land just below to the hills or the Koute Nocte.

## **HAWA NOCTE**

The Hawa Nocte are inhabited in the villages namely Salrh { Borduria}, Thingdong (Kaimai), Longthan (Laptang), Longchang (Paniduria), Wasathong (Hanyan), Sumsi Pathar and Thingnyan (Namsang), except Namsang and Wasathang rest are located in the north- west of Khonsa circle. The rest two are located in Namsang circle. The meaning of 'Hawa' is plain land or lower region land. Hence, Hawa Nocte is plain people or settlers of lower region. The dialect spoken by them is 'Hawajap.

## **KHAPA NOCTE**

The Khapa Nocte resides in the area neighboring to the Hawa Nocte, Hakhun Nocte and KOUTE nocte. The villages are Tupi, Noksa and Pallung. The Khapa Nocte



refers them as Kashik, which means the earliest settlers of that area. However, the other sub-groups of the Nocte called them 'Khapa' and its meaning is almost similar to 'Kashik'. The dialect of Khapa Nocte is 'Khapayap'. It is worthy to note that almost all the Nocte sing their folk songs in Khapa dialect, their main festivals are Kunya and Melok.

### **PHONGSANG NOCTE**

They inhabit in Namsang circle i.e. 45 kilometer down from Khonsa, The Headquarter of Tirap district. In the central part of the circle, they scatter over seven villages. The villages like Soha, Turet, kenon, Dongron, Subang and Mopaya, collectively known as Phongsung Nocte due to similarities in their dialect as well as their inhabited region. However, Other villages like Lamlo, Phinthing, Longkhang, Doidam and Namsang are also included with them due to their same geographical area. The Phongsang is derived from the word 'Phongsuk'.

### **LAMLAK OR DAMLAK NOCTE**

These sub-groups of Nocte are inhabited near the Phongsung Nocte and Hawa Nocte of Namsang. They found in a single village called Doidam. Therefore, they usually refer them as 'Doidam Nok' i.e. 'The people of Doidam'. The Damlak Noctes are designated by different names; The Hawa Noctes called them 'Lamlak' The Tutsa called them 'Damlak' and the Phongsung by 'Tangdah'. The meaning of Damlak is the people who had forgotten the Koute.

## **SOCIAL STRUCTURE**

In general, the social structure of Nocte is stratified into two divisions such as *Lowang* ‘the royal family and his descendants’ and the *Chhana* ‘commoners’. The chief called *Lowang* occupies the highest position in the social hierarchy, then the *ngoang-awang* ‘village council’ and *humdongwa* ‘head of the clan’. Every Nocte village is headed by chief and his subordinates. The succession of chief is hereditary. The chief, along with the *ngoang-awang* maintain the law and order of the village. Every decision pertaining to village development activities are taken collectively with the consent of the chief. With the introduction of Panchayat Raj System for local administrative reason, the ZPM, ASM, GPMs and Gaon Buras also occupy the important place in the society.

Noctes follow patriarchal and patrilocal system. The father is the head of the family. The blood line or social lineage is traced through father. They follow nuclear family system. Monogamy is the common practice but polygamy is not completely non-existence in the society. However, it is generally confined mostly with the royal families or some affluent people. Both love-marriage and arranged-marriage systems are practiced. But love marriage is preferably more. Widow re-marriage is sanctioned under certain circumstances. Divorce is socially accepted under certain conditions.

## **BELIEF SYSTEM**

Noctes, in general, are nature worshipers. They also worship their ancestral spirits. They profess their faith in the ancestral spirits known as *te-awa-moang* meaning ‘spirits of the forefathers’. They pay homage to their ancestors in all occasions by invoking their names

before taking meals or wines, in observing rituals or rites and the other social functions like festivals, birthdays, house warming ceremony, cultivation of new field, marriage ceremonies, etc. In Nocte, the term *Joban* is synonymously used for God. They believe in both benevolent and malevolent spirits. They do animal sacrifices such as pigs, dogs, buffaloes, etc., to appease their *Joban*. At one point of time, Noctes were also believers of Vaishnavism. Of late, a sizable number of Noctes have embraced Christianity as their new religion. As per the record of Joshua Project the adherent numbers of believers is 49.51%. Nevertheless, some Noctes still follow their traditional ways of worshipping their *Joban* and other supernatural forces.

## **ECONOMIC LIFE**

Noctes are by nature agrarians and agriculturists. They practice *jhum* ‘shifting’ cultivation massively. They mainly cultivate crops such as paddy, millet, maize, and other agricultural products such as arum, yam, colocasia, tapioca, etc. They also do poultry and cattle farming such as rearing pigs, goats, and buffalos. They use traditional agricultural implements like *dao*, *Janhun* ‘a small hoe’, a bamboo or iron or bone scrapper and a wooden stick (pointed at one end) for weeding. Use of manures and irrigation are not common, it entirely depended on natural fertility of the soil.

The traditional handicraft and handloom works are important part of their economic pursuits. Their handicrafts include such as traditional baskets, bowls, plates, tools, cane chairs, wooden tables, bamboo water-tubes, etc. Weaving is another important activity particularly among the women. The weaving products include such as traditional coats, bags, *galle*, etc. Wood curving is an important activity of men. They are fond of curving their ancestral

replicas from woods. They also carve statues, animals and many other decorative items. Men generally use implements such as *daos*, spears, knives, axes, bows and arrows to carry out their agriculture and other activities.



**Photo 8 to 11:** Different kinds of bamboo baskets

## **CHIEFTAINSHIP**

The Nocte social organization is based on the Chieftainship which the chief is the supreme. The chief is at the apex in the society. He dictates the day-to-day authority or gives verdict in accordance with the traditional customs, norms and usages along with the collective view of other village elders, which is popularly known as 'Ngongawang'. The social position and privilege that the chief enjoy is very distinctive in comparison to the others members of the society. The people pay great respect and loyalty to the chief. The institution of the Chieftainship is hereditary in nature. It is the eldest son who inherits the crown of responsibility for the welfare of the people.

Chief is the most important person in Nocte society who is believed that all laws are ultimately derived from the chief and his council. The chief is the political head of the Nocte community. Though, in early society, he was not an autocratic chief. Any decision taken in the village is given unanimously with the consultation of village council- 'Ngongawang'. The chief function is being checked by the village council.

## **NGONGAWANG (VILLAGE COUNCIL)**

The village is the nerve centre of the socio-political life of the Noctes. The village council, chief as the head is the judicial-administration body of the entire society. The political life within the village was controlled by the chief with the help of a body of village elders called 'Ngongawang'. Each village has a council of elders, which maintain law and order, takes decision on intra and inter village disputes and also organize development activities in

the village. Anything starting from head hunting to the disputes of smallest nature and welfare activities are discussed and decided by the council.

Presently, Nocte village councils are functioning as village panchayat (including Goan Bura) and undertake all sorts of activities for the development of the village and thereby of the people, besides deciding smaller disputes in the village. The council meets in the house of chief. When accommodation in the chief's house become insufficient due to the presence of a large number of people, the venue is shifted to the chief's pang.

### **DORMITORY SYSTEM (*PANG*)**

Dormitory is a vital in the Nocte society because it acts as learning institutes of folk culture and center of village authority. The youth learn folk crafts, songs, oral history, customs and so forth in the village dormitory with the elders. Dormitory, '*Pang*' or '*Pa*' system plays an important role in social, political and economic and cultural life of the people since time memorial. 'The number of *Pang* in a village depended on the size of the village, its different divisions (*chum*, *Sum*, or *Rader*) and the number of grown up boys. The *Pang* were constructed on the pattern of the dwelling houses with are large hall without any partition walls. In each *Pang* a long drum, called '*tham*' was kept invariably on one side of the hall in the days of warfare, log was used to give signals of danger. In the modern period log drum is more often played in chivalry than to give signal of danger such as in sudden outbreak of fire, or to announce the killing of some big game such as tiger, bear etc. There are different notes or rhythms played on the drum to communicate different messages. A bamboo rack was made on one side of the *pang* where all the heads of war victims (*Ran Kho*) were kept. *Pang*

was constructed on a cooperative basis and all the members belonging to a particular pang worked together on completion of the pang, they celebrated with feast.

During emergency to alert the villages, log drum (*Tham*) is beaten three times and by only one person. But to declare coming of a festival there is no limitation on the numbers of times it is beaten or on the number of people participating to beat the drum. To inform the people of a social service to be undertaken by the village also Log Drum is beaten by any number of people and there is no limitation on the number of times it is beaten. This was practiced since the days of warfare and is continued to be followed by some of the villagers. There are various dormitories (Pang) found in the Nocte society, viz. *Nokpan* (General dormitory); *Sumpan* (colony dormitory); *Panmipan* (boys dormitory) and *Janchho Pan* (Girls dormitory). According to custom, a person who has performed a ritual called 'chamkat' is accepted as member of dormitory. This system is also found among the other tribes like Wangcho and Adi of Arunachal Pradesh and even existed in other parts of India. The Nocte youth learn the folk songs, dance, crafts and customs in this dormitory. Dormitory formerly acted like a guard house where young bachelors mounted day and night, well equipped with all the weapons of war. As guard house for the village, *Pangs* were constructed by the entrance to the village, to provide a look out against the approach of the enemy. There was no fixed age for admission into the *pang*. In some villages a boy on attaining maturity had to perform a rite called *pamikhe* before he joined a *Pang*. He had to present a pig or a few fowls and rice-beer to the boys of the *pang* at the Chalo Loku festival. Before the rite is performed the boy is called *Leta* but after he joined the *Pang* he became a *Pami*, which denotes a young bachelor. After a boy became a *Pami* he had to join the other members of Pang in all kind of work required to be performed by them, failing which a fine (mat) is levied

upon him. The *Pang* was also venue of the village councils or others gatherings of the villagers. Some of the village meetings such as those for the selection of the Jhum fields, or for understanding of any developmental work were also held in Pangs. The bachelors of Pang helped widows and old persons in cultivation, working on a cooperative basis. The bachelors who always remained in the Pang day and night as guards to protect the village from any accident are called *Thinbamb*

Girl's dormitory was also prevalent in some Nocte village like in *Kheti* and *Lapnar*. They perform ritual to enlist as member of village girl. In some village, '*Jancho Khe*' is performed during festival in dormitory. However, in some villages perform the same ritual in *Ju Hum* of a village. Dutta mentions, "When a girl attains puberty, a ritual called "*Janchno Khe*" is performed. The girl give a chicken and some rice beer to the pang of her *Sum* (group), from this day, a girl who has called *Leti* or *Lechi* (becomes young maiden) in the girls *Morung*".

P.K.Bhuyan states, "that nowadays says the dormitories have become gradually flexible and not functioning in the same way as it as earlier. The village council takes most of the decision collectively for selection of Jhum plots for cultivation, fixation of dates for celebration of festivals and ceremonies and decision to go out for fishing and hunting". Dormitory was very important platform for socio-political activities of village. However, its functions are gradually declined in the present society due to advent of modernity where people are keeping themselves in personal job or business. Despite of its present position, important issues is still placed and decided in dormitory.



## **FESTIVALS**

Festivals are the integral part of the socio-cultural life of the people. Most of the festivals are performed in connection with the various stages of agricultural work. The festivals are celebrated in different modes and times incorporated with a lot of rituals and sacrifices. Some of the important festivals are *Chalo loku*, *Ronglo*, *Hoaju*, *Kapkhut*, *Chanda*, *Chahliwan*, etc. A common Nocte festival called *Chalo Loku* is celebrated every year during November especially in those areas (particularly in Tirap district) where the Noctes are in sizable number. There are number of folk songs and dances such as *Loku Boang* (festival dance), *Ranwen Boang* 'war dance', *Chang Boang* and *Sam Boang* 'ceremonial dance', *Kongkong Khip*, *Loku Se* 'festival songs', *Chang Se* 'Ceremonial song', *Nathunnuen Se* 'Lullaby songs', *Samdo* and *Samra Se* 'Love songs', *Ranwen Se* 'war song', and *Chhahthut Se* 'paddy pounding songs' etc.

## **DRESS AND ORNAMENTS**

The traditional attires of Nocte men consist of numerous cane belts wrapped around the waist. They wear loincloth called *Kharih* in Nocte. They also put on traditional necklaces called *litto* and wear headgear called *longsom-khaphok*. Women wear a *gale* around the waist reaching down to the knee. Upper portion of the body is covered with blouse. They also wear necklaces made of colourful beads such as *litphiang*, *memiet*, earrings, bangles, etc., around their neck.

They also put on traditional hair band. Tattooing of special designs was also common in olden days.

### ***Male Dress***

1. *Khetrih* – Traditionally it is blue coloured loin cloth with red ends decorated with two rows of white cowrie (locally known as *litken*) like seeds. Sometime it is also decorated with various designs. It may also be in different colours. But in olden times it was simply plain clothes worn by the male.

2. *Pasong* is a decorated spear. *Pa* means spear and *Song* means *a decoration done by filling the hole*. For decoration they use fur of the goat mostly white sometimes that which is dyed with natural colour.

3. *Suk khephok* is the head gear. *Suk* means a sharp figure or triangle figure. The head gear is in triangular in shape. They use long teeth of the pig or of some other animal on the headgear as a decoration. The hornbill feather or tail is also used on the head gear as a decoration. The head gear is decorated with the hair of the person who was hunted down during the head hunting expedition. Placing it on the head gear is a sign of great honour. Traditionally Noctes' hair is shaved up to the crown where a small portion is worn long.



**Photo 11 to 13:** Nocte men in traditional dress and ornaments

4. Arm's lace is worn on the hand. It is made of fur of a goat or of elephant task. They also use anklets of palm leaves, a few girdles of cowrie shells or cane loops just below the knee.

5. Male also wear garland made of Marigold. The Chalo Loku festival begins with the blooming of this flower and a type of orchid locally known as *Langfumpo*.

6. *Lohjok*: 'Loh' means *New yam leaf* and *yok* means *bud of the leaf*. *Lohjok* is used for decorating oneself. It is worn on the hand, leg, arms etc, which adds beauty to the person who wears. It is known as *Lohjok khepok*. With this one can dance even if one does not have the real head gear.

7. They also wear a bundle of cane belt on the waist.

8. *Litto* is a local garland which is worn on the body. Some may also have a bead necklace with a coin-pendant.

9. A Mithun horn fitted with a tuft of dyed goat hair hangs at the right side.

10. A cane basket which is fitted with a bell at its bottom and decorated with tassels of black bear's hair or palm leaves is hanged at the back

### ***Female Dress***

Females wore different dresses to distinguish themselves from other.

1. Local *Gale* which is white or cream or red in colour. It is secured around the waist. Traditionally a blue piece of cloth is wrapped around the upper part of the body. Now a days, women and young girls use various types of blouses to cover themselves.

2. *Lit Khephok* is the name of the cap which is wore by the women. *Lit* means *Garland*. So it is the garland cap on the head of a woman dancer.

3. They also place the small feathers of the tail of the parrot or peacock on their ears. They bundle it and keep it.

4. *Chaangsi Khetlet*: *Changsi* means *small bell* and *khetlet* is wooden material used for supporting the hair. It is used to prevent hair from getting loose hair during the dance.

5. *Lit phiang*: *Phiang* means *flat* (garland) which is used on the body. It has two tassels decorated with white cowrie like seeds of a plant and they hang it from their shoulder.

6. *Patey* is a belt worn on the waist during the dance. It is a metal necklace fitted with small bells.

7. They do not use shoes or sandals traditionally during dance. Generally girls do not use *Lohjok*. It is mainly for the male dancers.



**Photo14 to 16:** *Nocte women folk in traditional attires*









Photo17 to 32: *Different kinds of ornaments used by women folk*

## **FOOD HABITS**

Nocte food comprises of rice, millets, maize, colocasia, yam, arum, tapioca, sweet potatoes, etc. Locally produced rice beer called *kham* (particularly made of paddy and millet) is very popular drink. Mostly, they are non-vegetarians. They take chicken, pork, mutton, and other wild animal meats. In earlier days, consumption of beef was restricted due to the influence of Vaishnaism, but at present, no such restriction is observed. They also take *Sali-khave* (which includes betel nuts, betel leaves and some wild root) by both men and women. At present, ration such as rice, salt, sugar, flour, etc., are provided by the government through fair price shops. They also consume foreign liquors and take other substances such as tobacco products, cigarette, bidi, etc.

## **AGRICULTURE**

The Nocte tribe's traditional economy is shifting cultivation, hunting, gathering and fishing. Since last two decades some of them have started wet or permanent cultivation. The lands used for the cultivation are non-cadastral and the ownership is vested to the chief of the village or of the community. The period of *Jhum* cycle depends on two factors – the fertility of the land and the density of population in that area. If the land is fertile it can be cultivated for two or three years, with crop rotation. Agriculture is the basic means of livelihood of the Noctes. The slash and burn method which is called *Jhum* is the primary method of cultivation practiced by them. In *Jhum* cultivation a patch of land is cleared, trees cut down and after these have been left for some time to dry, they are burnt. The soil is then stirred with a stick sowing a broad casting of seeds is done. The effect of jhumming is mainly soil erosion which ultimately makes the soil unproductive. The indigenous methods to check soil erosion are



Contour banding and strip cropping. Moreover, after cultivation of the patch for two or three years the Noctes move to another patch. Today, however, in many villages where sufficient land is available, wet rice cultivation has been adopted in addition to terrace cultivation.



*Photo 33& 34: Jhum Cultivation and the millet crop*

The indigenous and traditional types of agricultural implements of the Noctes consisted of a 'Dao', a small hand hoe, a bamboo stick Iron or bone Scraper for weeding and a wooden stick pointed at one end. With these implements they cultivate all the crops in Hum fields. Through it takes quite a long time to either clear or cultivate a small patch of land. Though the soil condition is suitable for growing many crops and fruits trees ye the Noctes grown only Paddy, Millet, Chilies, tapioca, maize, some local pulses and vegetables. Millet forms the essential part of the diet and has also a very significant relationship with great pomp and grandeur. Local names for the main crops: Paddy- *Cha* or *Chacham*, Millet- *Hami* or *Simoi* Arum- *ton* or *Leng*, Tapioca- *Bang Hathon* or *Bang Khu*, Maize – *Pu bong*, pulses- *Fisi* and *Fidong*, Chilli- *Pichit*, Potato- *Hakhon*. These names, however, vary from village to village due to variations in dialect. Rearing of animals like cows, goats, pigs, dogs, cats and poultry are common practice among the Noctes. These animals are domesticated not mainly for commercial purpose but for food, sacrifices, trade and payment of bride price. They also served as a medium of exchange.



*Photo 35: The millet field*

Among all rituals, agricultural rituals are one of the oldest. There are specific rituals for each and every stage of agriculture starting from the selection of land to harvest. These are conducted specifically to improve crops, animals, drought and famine. The aim of rituals is to appease the super natural spirits and garner favour with deities and spirits; this is done by forming a bond between the person performing the ritual and the deity or spirit. This becomes important since communication with deities and other spirits is an important part of rituals. Similarly, animal sacrifice based on myths is usually an integral part of most rituals. These verbal lores and rituals are integral part of culture, interdependent in nature and justify each other's existence. Oral Narratives and rituals are traditionally transmitted from one generation to another and are closely associated with religious practices, life cycle ceremonies and agriculture. The primary function of these practices is to appease the supernatural spirits in

order to secure protection, fertility, prosperity and good agricultural yield. Several belief systems are associated with these rituals and narratives and they are sacred in nature. Generally it is performed by the shaman during a particular time generally based on agricultural calendar.

All the festivals of the Nocte tribe are related to agriculture. This is reflected in their agriculture cycle of the year with each festival associated with different crops and seasons. Like other tribes of Arunachal Pradesh, the Noctes of Tirap district also depend upon agriculture and allied activities for their livelihood. They live in close relation with their nature. This is expressed through their festival, dances and songs and folk literatures.

The process of agriculture cycle begins with the selection of the agriculture plot in the last part of September. The agriculture field is selected by the village elders by looking in '*Wha shok*' (eggs) and '*Whapok*' (Bamboo tube). After the selection of the field, the clearing of the jungle in the agriculture plot begins in November. The slash and burn technique is used in the agriculture field for cultivation of the crops. The dried up jungle is burned out in the month of the December. The burned trees are cleared and are used for firewood. After the clearing of the burned trees, the process of sowing millet seeds begins in the month of January.

## CHAPTER III

### AGRICULTURAL RITUALS AND FESTIVALS

The Noctes celebrate two major festivals in the villages called *Chalo* and *Ronglo* every year. The purpose of celebrating the festival is to propitiate the god, Almighty *Rang* for his blessing in order to attain good crops and wellbeing of the village. The festival being celebrated in Lazo area of the Olos is known as Worang. The way of celebration differs from village to village. The *Ronglo* festival is celebrated during May-June, after reaping the millet. Some villages have now given up millet cultivation and therefore they do not celebrate this festival. The *Chalo* festival is celebrated during November every year. This celebration has a special significance to the villagers. These festivals signify the end of one cycle and the beginning of another. The new *Jhum* cultivation is taken up immediately after this festival.

#### ***RONGHOAN FESTIVAL***

*Ronghoan* is a harvest festival of millet. Noctes work simultaneously in two fields that are *Chhanpho* (Millet plot) and *khop* (paddy plot). While working on *khop* (paddy field) in the month of April, the millet grows and ripe in *Chhanpho* leads to the crop to be harvested in June month. *Ronghoan* is the main festival of the Nocte tribe in Khonsa village. The festival starts from 18<sup>th</sup> June to 22<sup>nd</sup> June and it is celebrated for five days. This festival is celebrated



in some villages during the month of July/August and in some villages after reaping of the paddy during the month of October/November. After calculating the digits of the waxing moon, the date for starting the festival is fixed by the village elders.



*Photo 36: Khalikha- the deity*

The festival begins in the morning with the gathering of the youth members (male) of the village in the chief's house. The ritual of the festival begins with the sacrifice of a piglet as an offering to their god '*Khalikha*' for blessing in the festival. The blood of piglet is collected as an offering to their god. The male members of the village gather and stay in the chief's house

for the whole day. They take their meal there and get ready for the invocation of the spirits in the afternoon. In noon, the youth members begin to proceed in the sacred place of the village lead by their chief and elders. Here they clear the way to *Khalikha* place and its nearby areas. After that they ask for the permission to celebrate the festival and offers piglet blood and betel nuts to *Khalikha*. Every family in the village offers betel nuts and leaves for the male members in the family. The festival is only declared open after this ritual. Without this ritual, no animals or chickens are allowed to kill in the village premises. Youth below the age of 15 yrs and Female members are not allowed to take part in this ritual and also outsiders are not allowed to enter the village during the first day of the ritual. Outsiders and women are strictly prohibited to visits their sacred place during this ritual. In evening every members of the village stays in their houses. The first day of the festival ends with the people staying in their respective houses.

#### ***A. Phamlam***

In the second day of the festival, each clan members begins to gather in their head houses in the morning. The village is divided into many groups on the basis of their clan title and relationships. On this day, the village is divided into two or three groups, i.e. Bangsia and Socia, Mesia and Tesia, and Lowang group. *Mo* (buffalo) is sacrificed on this day. Every clan member contributes some money to buy *Mo* (buffalo) from Assam. The numbers of *Mo* sacrifices in the festivals depends upon the numbers of the clan members. Some groups sacrifice one while others sacrifice more than one. *Mo* or buffalo sacrifices begin with the shooting in the chief's house. With that the other clan's sacrifices takes place. Before the sacrifices of *Mo*, it is tied on the entrance of the house and the head of the family performs a ritual. Where they chant some prayers and sprinkle some rice beer or *jhummin* on the head of



the buffalo. And then it is shot by gun by the young boy or adult of the family and clan members. After that the buffalo is hacked into meat pieces and is distributed among the clan members.



*Photo37 & 38: Shoot and kill- The Buffalo sacrifice*



Photo39& 40: Distribution of the sacrificed meat

Women folk also participate. They bring some rice beer or *Jhummin* with them and serve it to the male members working outside. Each female members of the clan bring some rice beer with them as a gift to the hosting house. They usually sit inside the house and prepare rice beer and lunch for the male members. In evening, they went to markets for buying of gifts and



offerings like betel nuts, chicken and other things for the festival. Village members are divided into two groups that is *Lowang-sum* (chief clan) and *Mogjun-sum* (other from the chief clan). Each group takes their dinner in the respective head houses.

In night, the ritual of *Sungwang* is performed in *Morung or pa* (boy's dormitory). The boys attaining certain age gather in the village *Morung* and to recognize that he has reached the adulthood age, a ritual is performed. This ritual is called *Sungwang* as it is performed to distinguish the adult from the young boys. Then the older boys are named as *Pangmi*. The families of the boys prepare food, meats and rice beer and give pigs to the whole group. They beat the log drum and dance whole night in the *Morung*. In this ritual, the old members introduce the new members to the group and welcome them. Only those boys that have gone through this ritual are allowed to attain the prayers and offerings in their sacred place of *Khalikha*. Such rituals were also there for the girls in the past named as *Jhangpan*. But its practiced has stopped now.

### ***B. Kuhnyong***

On the 3<sup>rd</sup> day of the festival, the clan members have their lunch in their head clan house. Sometimes this occasion is kept in the houses where some members of the family or relatives die. Some of the family members goes back to their field and bring millet with them. Any member in the family can go and bring millet with them. A pig is sacrificed in the chief council house and the blood of that pig is used in ritual for giving blessing in every household in the villages.

Pig blood is considered as a sacred and holy. Millet is touched by the pig's blood which is taken to every household by the members of the chief's clan. The person prays and chants in the entrance of the house before the ritual which is in the *Khapa* dialect. He prays for the good harvest and blessing in the family. He goes to every house in the village and touches the millet crop with the pig's blood. He doesn't enter into any houses in the village throughout the ritual. From the entrance he blesses the family. After that the millet is kept in *Chapkhap* (main entrance).



*Photo 41 & 42: Ritual of blessing the crop*

The concept behind this festival is that a person cannot sprinkle the pig's blood in whole millet crop and cannot bring the whole crop for the blessing. They consider only one millet is enough to represent the whole crop of millet in the field. So, in the ritual only one crop of millet is used. This festival is related to the rituals and offerings to the millet and *Kahlikha*. After the completion of this ritual, the people begin to dress themselves in their traditional attire for the night dance.



*Photo 43 : Men folk performing longdrum*



In that night, the male members gather in the chief's house for the dance and celebration. They wait for the female members of the village. The dance only starts only after the arrival of the girls in late midnight. Both male and female come in their full traditional attire. It begins from the *Morung* or *Paa* (dormitory) where the young boys beat the log drum and gives message to the village about the beginning of the celebrations. Village elders and chief perform ritual and chanting. Then *Jhummin* is served to every elder member in the dormitory and with this they begin to march towards the chief house. This night is dedicated to the young boys and girls where they are allowed to dance with each other.



Photo 44 & 45 : Elders perform chanting in men's dormitory

Village members dance whole night in the house of the chief. Dance is divided into two forms. First form begins in the early part of the celebration where each dancer follows the drum beats and song sung by the elders in the middle of the dance circle. The dance group goes in the circle motion around the chief house and the dance movements are in normal speed. The song sung in the celebration is in *Khapa* language. Only the elders are able to sing the song in the festival. Second form is *khapa* – this dance forms starts in the early dawn of the next morning. This form is quite fast and energetic than the former. Here the dance movement begins to move little faster and the steps are bit different from the earlier form

where the dancer goes in circular motion by forming long human chain. With the dawn of the day, dance ends in the early morning.



*Photo 46, 47, 48: Men and women folk performing dance in the chief's house*

### *C. Thanglang*

The fourth day is continuation of the third day, the youth of the village dance till the morning in chief's house from the previous night. After the completion of the dance, the female member goes back to their house to take rest, while the male members go to the *Khalikha* place. Only those boys are allowed to participate here who have undergone through the ritual of *Sungwong*. They begin to chant and pray here for the blessing and good harvest. They also praise the lord for its blessing on the village members. It is also consider as the beginning of New Year in the annual calendar. After coming back from the sacred place, they go the *Rangwa* (chief council house). After taking some rest and meals, they begin to visits every house in the village. They dance and sing songs related to that particular house as every clan in the village has their own history and roots in the past. Each song is based on their titles clan. These songs are sung and lead by the elders; not by priest and shamans like in other tribes of Arunachal Pradesh.



*Photo 49: Men folk singing and dancing in front of the house*



*Ronghaun* festival songs are ceremonial and cannot be sung by anybody and everybody. These songs of the Noctes are sung by the village folk singers, usually old men of experiences, chosen by the people. Women folk are not allowed to sing the *Ronghaun* songs. These songs are tough for many villagers to learn or sing as all the *Ronghaon* festival songs are in the rare *Khapa* dialect not in the village dialect. The villagers in their full traditional attire dance in many circles around the singers who stay at the centre. Different clans have their own songs related to particular households. There are also songs especially for the chief clans, which cannot be sung by the commoners.

The festival on this day begins in the sacred place of *Khalikha* (Male deity) and throughout the whole day they roam and visit every family in the village. They sing and bless every houses and drinks *Jhummin* in every family they visits. In evening, they lastly visit *Longtham wang* (female deity) and end their dance in the female goddess temple. The elders sing the song related to the end of the festival. The day begins in the *Khalikha* side and end in the *Longthamwang*. The sacred place of both deities lies in opposite direction as *Khalikha* resides in West while *Longthamwang* lies in the East.

#### ***D. Mangru***

The final day of the festival is known as *Mangru*, i.e. *Mang* means ‘dead’ and *Ru* means ‘finished’. During this final day, the villagers construct a house in both *Khalikha* and *Longthamwaan* place. According to the myth, in this period both the good and evil spirit visits the place during the festival. So, in order to guide the good spirit to reside in the village a house type structure is constructed in *Khalikha* and *Longthamwaan* place by the village members. They do some chanting and rituals in order to drive away the bad spirits. They also



make a bow and arrow in that house. This signifies that they have killed the bad spirit from the bow and arrow kept in *Khalikha* and *Longthamwaan* place. With this ritual the festival comes to end.

## ***CHALO LOKU FESTIVAL***

The word *Cha* means ‘paddy’ and *Lo* means ‘to chase’, *Ku* means ‘the season’, thus *Chalo Loku* is the festival celebrated to bid farewell to the old season and welcoming the new season. It is a celebration of hope and festivity. It is divided into three parts celebrated in three days. *Chalo Loku* festival is celebrated every year to preserve and protect Nocte cultural heritage and traditional glory.

*Chalo Loku* festival is celebrated every year in the season of autumn usually after the harvest of paddy. The celebration is organized when people are free from their works. Loku festival celebrated with ritualistic ceremony to thank ‘*Rang*’ (almighty god who is the creator) for the providence and to seek blessings from the ‘almighty rang’ for prosperous and peaceful life of the people. Every Nocte village has a *Paang* (Dormitory) where a big trunk of a tree (a log drum) is kept as a drum to beat (locally known as *thaamthut*) during the Loku festival. Chalo Loku consists of different parts such as dance, merrymaking, gossiping, collecting food items, common meal, visiting families with dance and having meal together, paying homage to the chief of the village, singing of folksongs and narration of past experiences, omens for the following year and so on. The Loku festival has a noble underlying motive that this celebration brings people of the village together. The celebration reminds people to forget their mutual hatred and animosity thus they become one in love and affection.

The moon plays a vital role in the decision making process. Every important decision especially dates of the festival is marked by the moon. Traditionally, *Chalo Loku* is celebrated on the New moon day. Now taking into consideration various practical problems 6<sup>th</sup> of November is fixed for the festival. 10<sup>th</sup> of January is fixed for *Chhaliwan Loku*, an agricultural festival where finger millets locally known as *Hammei* are shown in the *Juhm* land. Cock-fight is also part of the festival. The villagers bring their trained cocks to fight with each other on the third and fourth day of the festival.

On April 10<sup>th</sup>, *Kapkhut* festival is celebrated. It is a festival of sowing the paddy known as *Champo* in the old *Jhum* land. After the festival, the elders of the village decide on the land for the next *Jhuming* cultivation. This is done by a ceremony of breaking the egg on a leaf. They read the omen looking at the broken egg and accordingly they select the land for the *Jhum* cultivation.



*Photo 50,51: Buffaloes to be sacrificed*

### *A. Phamlamja*

The first day of the festival is generally called *Phamlamja*. *Pham* means *provisions*, *lam* means *to search* and *Ja* means *day*. So it means ‘preparation day’. So on the first day, people collect or search for their food items and other things which are used for the Loku fest. The celebrations begin by slaughtering buffaloes, pigs, fowls, for meal. Besides *kham* (rice beer), rice, vegetables, spices, firewood for bonfire, etc. are made available for the festival days. People collect all the traditional ornaments and dresses that are kept ready for the celebration. Generally people put on new clothes. Both boys and girl go to the forest to collect the so-called *nyap* leaves for making dishes and cups. They also collect subscription of rice and beer from household. The *kham* is used for entertaining guests and performing ritual ceremonies.







*Photo 52, 53, 54: The sacrificed Buffaloes and meat distribution*

### ***B. Tamkatja/Chamkatja***

Second say is called *Tamkatja*. *Tam* means ‘platform made of bamboo’ where people sit and eat together, *Kat* means ‘going’ and *ja* means ‘a day’. It reminds the people of a ceremony done in the house of a young man who is initiated into adulthood. Here adulthood meant becoming an elder in a family. It is allowed only when one separates from his father’s house and begins to stay in a new house. So generally the eldest one who remains in the father’s house takes part in this ceremony only after the death of the father but the younger sons who move to other house or separate from the father’s family after marriage joins this ceremony much early.



*Photo 55: Women and kids in festive attires*



*Photo 56: The ritual of offering Pan*

Here the village elders and the young boys go to the *Chhahtam* (a bamboo platform where ritual is performed). They wear traditional dresses and carry with them *Kham*, boiled meat, rice, etc for community feast at the *Chhahtam*. The crowd is led by the chief who offer prayers for the well-being of the people and for better agricultural products. At *Chhahtam*, ceremonies are performed by the chief of the village or the local priest and *Kham* is used for this purpose. The young men who are initiated into adulthood gather in a place or a house called *Chhahtam* according to their clan. Each of the four clans has their own separate *Chhahtam*. *Tam* is the place where meat and wine is kept. It is generally far away from the village. One who attends this ceremony is recognized as a full-fledged member of the village or community. All those who attend this ceremony in the *Chhahtam* have the duty to protect the village. So they remain in the *Morung* or *Paang* together. They also promise that they will take part in all the community activities.

The young man who goes to *Chhahtam* brings his share of food mostly the head of a pig. They cook it just after cleaning it nicely. They do not cut it into pieces. They sit together in circle and share the pig head, each one taking a bite from the same piece. After eating they dance and go to the house of the chief and then they go to the dormitory called *paang*. On this day, people also visit the houses of their friends and relatives.





*Photo 57: The men folk in festival attires*

This is a ceremony done in the house of a person who died after the previous *Chalo Loku* festival. The immediate relatives and friends pray for the dead person. The eldest son or the people close to the dead declare after pouring a bit of local beer that the dead person will not dance again.

In the afternoon the people return from *Chhahtam* to the chief's house. Dancing continues all along the street. They move tripping forward for sometimes then halting while flexing the knees and brandishing the swords or the spear that is in their hand in the air and then again move forward. They repeat this movement till they reach of the house of the chief. They fire guns when they reach the chief's house. In the chief's house they dance for two or three hours. This very dance is called *Taamwangboang*. *Nong* (Local drum) is used for this occasion. After the dance they go the *Paang* for rest.

### ***Khepaboang***

On the evening of the second day festival, the *Paangdong* clan gathers together in the house of chief and dance together. Both male and female can participate in this dance with their traditional ceremonial dresses. Two types of dances are performed during the night; *boanglin* (dance done with the rhythm of the continuous playing of the single beat of the drum. It is a slow dance) and *Khepaboang* (dance done with the rhythm of the continuous playing of the fast beats of the drum.) After the *boanglin* the ceremony of *Pongtasah* (a religious ritual) is done. During this ceremony the brave men of the village are remembered and people pray to them. The other three groups go to their own *Ju-hum*. *Ju* means 'local rice beer' and *hum* means 'house'. So *Juhum* is the house where local rice beer is kept. Each clan selects a house for this purpose. It is permanent and during the construction of the house the clan makes sure that the house is built for this purpose. It is made sufficiently big so that more people can be accommodated at the time of the festival where ceremonies and dances are performed. While dancing they form a circle. One dancer sings a part of a song when all other take a short step with the right foot to the right, then they flex the knees and take the left foot beside the right one. The movement is repeated. When the leader finishes the song, others repeat the chorus. Rice beer is collected from each house for sharing during the dance.

It is also a time for the young men and women to see and meet each other and find partners for their life. The young ladies are otherwise kept inside protected. The young and unmarried boys and girls of the same clan are not allowed to be in the same house. The *Paangdong* girls go the *Matey-sum Ju-hum* where *Matey-sum* boys remain for dancing and distribute the rice beer and vice versa. *Khetey-sum* and *Mongchan-sum* boys remain in the same *Ju-hum* and girls of the same clans go to this *Ju-hum*. As a rule, the boys and the girls of



the same clan are not allowed to dance together. Since these two clans are very small in number they know each other well. So it is easy for them to find partners from the other clan.

### ***Rangtam***

*Rang* means *sky* and *tam* means ‘dropping of rice beer’. During this ceremony the head of the family is invited and he pours out few drops of local rice beer from *Khaplang*, a glass made of bamboo which is used only for this ceremony, asking or praying for protection from his ancestors. After which each member of the house also does the same.



*Photo 58: The men folk having Jumin during festival*

### *C. Thanlangja*

The third day of *Chalo Loku* festival is called *Thanlangja*. *Than* means ‘street’, *lang* means ‘to finish’ and *ja* means ‘a day’. Thus, *Thanlanja* literally means ‘a day to finish the dance by dancing through the street’. On this day the people according to their clan keep on dancing around the village. A group of drummers and male dancers arrayed in their dancing costume and holding swords or spears in the right hand dance through the village to the beat of the drums. They move forward with tripping steps for sometime then halt for some time while flexing the knees and brandishing their swords or spears in the air and again they move forward.



*Photo 59: The Ritual Procession*

In the morning of *Thanlanja* the village elders and the chief see the omen by breaking eggs collected from the village. At this moment they select new *Jhum* land for the cultivation on the basis of the omen shown by the eggs. On this beautiful occasion, the villagers used to visit each other’s house to taste food and drinks. This day, everybody goes to *songlongthong* (the courtyard of chief’s house) and dance there. In Borduria village, after dancing in the house of

the Chief, each clan go to the field nearby and dances in group. When the *Paangdong* clan dances if the chief is not present personally a person catches an umbrella and stands in the middle representing the chief. They enjoy by taking food and drinks and ends the celebration by bidding farewell to the festival singing:

*Loku la lien ta*

*Changpo laju ta*

*Panri la chum ta*

*Tha ja chono jo*

*Nepa ba huro jo*

*To hangloma cha hangloma*

It means: Loku has gone, Blooming flowers have fallen down. Fruits have mellowed. Go away Loku and please do come in the next year with a new spirit (carrying lot of yam) and with the blessing that we will reap a good harvest.

### ***Chinlit***

On the 3<sup>rd</sup> day of the festival a religious ceremony known as *Chinlit* is performed. *Chin* means ‘ginger’ and *lit* means ‘to wear’. Tying of ginger is done in the maternal uncle’s house. It is done by the maternal uncle’s wife. It is performed in order to ask the special protection of the ancestors from all evil influences, diseases and sicknesses. There is no age limit for this. It is done even for elderly members of the community. *Chinlit* is traditionally done on the third day of the festival and it was a simple ceremony. Now it has become a special ceremony and a day of celebration in Borduria.

The gifts and presents are given when this ceremony is performed for the first time. People also give gifts to the children according to their capacity. The in-laws family goes to the house in procession, which is led by a person in whose house there has not been an abnormal death, abnormal children, deformed children, children dying during birth (*pamcha*), etc. This procession is done only when it is performed for the first time, other times it is a simple ceremony.

### **FESTIVAL SONGS (OR *LOKU SE*)**

The word *sey* means 'song'. *Lokusey* or *Loku* (festival) songs are very special. According to one legend, a person named Lotha Khunbao came down from heaven and became the first chief of the Noctes. He is believed to have taught them the art of singing and dancing. They begin to sing by praising god for protection, good harvest, etc. Then they pray asking blessings from god for the days to come. They also sing the praises of the Chiefs who died. Their heroic and glorious deeds are remembered even this day through some of these songs. They also remember some of the Ahom kings; slowly and steadily the songs turn romantic. These songs are also a kind of conversation, telling of folklore, sharing of old experiences and sharing with the young the story of their ancestors who were brave. It could also be a debate and if not careful can turn violent.

The *Lokusey* is a strict singing. The singing has to be properly maintained. The end part of the song must be the beginning of the next year's *Chalo Loku* dance. If the song is wrongly started it is considered as a bad omen. So when the song is ended the singer tells the people about it and the dances are stopped. They remember the last part of the song to begin the *Lokusey* in the coming year. The singing is done in group so many individuals know the

end part of the song. So even if a person dies, the others begin it from the proper place. These songs are generally not used for leisure. They take it as a bad omen and are afraid that something bad may happen if it is simply sung. During the festival a log-drum known as *Nong* is used for dancing. Both side of the drum is used by beating either side of it by hand and stick during the festival. But the use of it differs; for instance, in an ordinary dance, people use only one side of the *Nong* (e.g. *Boanglin dance*), whereas in *Khepa* dance which is reserved only for *Paangdong* both sides are used. They also use bell made of brass which is tied on the local bag which the men hang at their back during the dance.

### ***KUNYIU FESTIVAL***

*Kunyu* is a significant agricultural festival of the Nocte tribe who inhabits the Tirap district of Arunachal Pradesh. It is celebrated in the four Nocte villages namely Noksa, Polung, Old-Tupi and New-Tupi where *Khapa or Kasik*, a dialectical variant of the Nocte language is spoken. Etymologically, *Ku* means ‘festival’ and *Nyiu* means ‘big’. Earlier, no specific day was fixed for this festival but for the convenience and to maintain solidarity among the community, of late it is celebrated annually on 25<sup>th</sup> April every year for three consecutive days. The underlying motif behind the celebration of this festival is to defy the predicaments of natural disasters (drought and famine), through the means of revelry and merry-making. Rituals are performed for yielding bumper paddy harvest in order to survive throughout the dry season.

A night before the festival, all the bachelors makes *Morung* (bachelor’s dormitory) their base. They sing and dance whole night long on the tune of the log drum and other musical instruments. The festival starts with each family offering *Yichi* (tapioca-beer),



popularly known as *Jumin*, to both the paternal and maternal uncle and the head of the clan to seek blessings from them. It is followed by a mass procession of the youth along with the Chief, accompanied by the council members, towards the *Ranglam* (a mountain), which they believe is the path to heaven. In *Khapa*, *Rang* means ‘sky’ and *Lam* means ‘path or route’. Here, they perform *Wan-Wan* (libation), sing songs of praise to their guardian deity for the over-all well-being of the village.



Photo 60: Dance and Music during Kunyiu festival

On the second day of the festival, buffaloes are ritually sacrificed. The ritual sacrifice is called *Loilang*, where *Loi* means ‘buffalo’ and *Lang* means ‘to sacrifice’. Usually, 2 or 3 buffalos are sacrificed in a village which can exceed judging on the number of the population. Before the sacrifice, the village women perform a purifying ritual wherein they sprinkle *Yichi* and ginger paste on the buffaloes while synchronously uttering incantations. They perform *Wan-Wan* to commemorate their ancestors (*Tedong*, *Bedong*, *Phedo*, *Aaphu*). A local plantain leaf called *Lemei* (*Le* means ‘good’ and *Mei* means ‘leaf’) is folded in a conical shape to be

used as containers to perform *Wan-Wan*. This particular leaf has socio-cultural significance and used in all the rituals of the Nocte tribe.



**Photo 61:** Men and women folk arriving the cheif's house during festival

*Shyaram-Shya* ritual is performed in the evening of the third day by the womenfolk of the village. The women go to their agricultural fields where they sprinkle tapioca beer and thinly chopped ginger pieces on the crops. The act symbolizes purification. They bring back bunches of paddy from the field and store it in their house which they belief will ensure bumper harvest and self sufficiency. After the ritual, the village youth gathers near the *Morung*. The *Morung* boys start beating the log drum which indicates the beginning of the feast. Then, the youth along with some elderly village men sing and perform the ceremonial dance through-out their way towards the chief's house. The village community gathers at the chief's house and performs *wan-wan*. Then they gear up for the traditional group dance which is to be followed by feasting. The chief, being the leader of the community, is bounded by the

obligation to organize the community-feast in his house. The feast commands the mandatory participation of each and every house-hold of the village.

On the last day, rituals are performed in the agricultural fields in order to bid farewell to the guardian deities and spirits. After the ritual the whole village observes taboo for the whole day which restricts them to work in their fields, hunting activities and to travel beyond the jurisdiction of the village.

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