



Research Paper

Kinship: Genealogical Relationships of Nyishi People Of Arunachal Pradesh

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Abstract:

Kinship System in most societies plays a significant role in the socialisation of individuals and maintenance of group solidarity. It is important in the society and extends its influence on almost all the activities in the social, economic, political and religious spheres. So it is a study of the behavioural and organisational dimensions of human society. It is the Kin group which takes care of one's livelihood, career, marriage, protection and social identity. The central fabric of Kinship is biology. It is because of biology that we find Kinship in all human societies. According to South African anthropologist, Meyer Fortes, "kinship is an expression of some fundamental feature of social structure. In every society the biological link of Father-Mother-Children and between siblings is recognised as the basis of kinship. Moreover Kinship is not merely a bundle of rights and duties; it is also emotional and affective. They are relationships of co-operation and sharing of emotional and physical security".

The Nyishi people of Arunachal Pradesh like all other beings are organised on the basis of Kinship. They conceptualise their Kins as comprising of two kinds of people, who are both related to each other. One category of the Kins is recognised as agnate or consanguineal and the other category as affinal. They give more importance, consideration and inclined to his Kins in his patrilineal line. The kinship relations within the agnate group are that of more intimacy and frankness. Whereas the kinship relations with the affinal groups are full of formalities and restrictions. Their Kinship is largely classificatory because they use certain terms of reference both for their lineal as well as for the collateral and filial relatives.

Keywords: Kinship relations with Agnate and Affinal groups, Kinship terms of reference and Kinship terminology.

I. Literature Review

Social organisation has usually been taken as a synonym for social structure. So, social organisation of a small group or a tribe is the organisation of inter related roles at a particular time within an expression of certain permanent or semi-permanent structural principles. Various writers and scholars have presented social organisation of man in their own way, according to the situation demanded. As a result each of them deal on same subject but differ in their content. The following are some of the important books which were consulted and referred by the researcher in his research paper, such as:

Ahuja, Ram (1993) in his book "*Indian social system*" discussed the concept of traditional joint family, clan organisation, marriage rules, kinship and its categories.

Another authors Singer, M. and John, B.S. (1968) in their book, "*Family, Kinship and Marriage in India*", has discussed separately the descent groups, marriage alliance and affinal transactions and so on.

Bhandari, J.S. (1996) in his book, "*Kinship and family in the North East*" has discussed the clan organization, Kinship and marriage system of different tribes of North – East India.

Chutia, Ramchandra, (2003) in his book, "*The Hillmiri of Arunachal Pradesh*" has talked about the domestic life, kinship relationships, pattern of house construction and marriage system of the Nyishi (earlier known as Hillmiri) in detail.

Doshi and Jain, (2001) in their book, "*Social Anthropology*" has given the basic concept of the family, marriage, kinship and clan. It was of great help and guide for the investigator because it served as the starter in her research work on Social organisation of the Nyishi (Hillmiris) of Kamle District of Arunachal Pradesh.

Beside these, few more books and research articles from some reputed Journals, whose details have given in the reference section, were consulted by the researcher while writing this paper.

II. Methodology

The research works for this paper was based on both primary and secondary sources of information. Research tools, especially interview, participant observation and questionnaire were extensively used for the collection of primary data. In order to collect primary data, the researcher carried fieldwork in four Nyishi villages under Gopen circle of Kamle District. Since the four selected villages consisted people of different clans, the researcher conducted interviews with the members of each clan separately in order to get authentic informations. Interviews were conducted with the Nyibus(Priest), Gaonburas(Village heads), Gaonburis(Women village heads), village elders of both sexes and few Government officers belonging from the four selected villages. Questionnaires concerning the subject were prepared and presented to the educated members of the society in order to get diverse viewpoint in the subject selected by the investigator. Questionnaires immensely helped the researcher to compare and contrast the opinion given by different individuals and deduce appropriate answer and knowledge regarding the chosen subject. As the researcher herself was from one of the village chosen for field study, participant observation was carried out to a large extend in the process of collection of primary data.

The secondary data were collected largely from books, articles and pamphlets. Further, reading materials from library of State museum and important documents from Statistical Department of Arunachal Pradesh, which were relevant to the subject, were also consulted by the researcher.

III. Introduction

The biological relationship between man and women is the fundamental bond on which depends the human society. It is they who bring about offsprings on the earth and their inter-relationship lead to the formation of Kinship groups. Thus Kinship is a social organisation based on blood descent (Reddy, 2001, 287). The composition of the Nyishi people are strictly based on male agnatic (blood) kins who are genealogical related to each other with reference to a common ancestor. It is the patrilocal rule of residence among the Nyishi which entail the male members to continue live with their family of orientation after marriage along with their wife and children, whereas the female members of the family leave and enter into new family through marriage. These prescriptive rule of patrilocal residence results in the emergence of family comprising of a man, his father, mother unmarried brothers and sisters including grandfather and grandmother. However, when the man grows up he interacts with few more relatives. They are his own wife, brother's wives, sister's husbands, their children and finally daughter-in-law, son-in-law and grandchildren. No doubt, the brothers in the Nyishi society after their marriage begin to live in independent house within the periphery of the same village. In these ways Kinship relations go on increasing and after few generation gaps the Kin groups from the daughters line turns into affinal relations.

KINSHIP RELATIONS AND TERMS OF REFERENCE WITH THE AGNATIC GROUPS:

Since the Nyishi society is organised on patrilineal descent system, it gives more respect and consideration to his Kins from patrilineage. As a member of an elementary family he has his own rights and obligations towards the other members of his family. He gets his clan name from his father and also inherits his property and is obliged to help him in discharging his social and economic responsibilities and when he dies carry his corpse. So, for the Nyishi the bond between Father and son assumes socially the most significant relationship. This relationship is formal, aloof and restrained. The formal relationship between them is due to the authority of the father and the subordination of the son. They converse only when they must and it is confined to specific problems concerning household works. During his adolescence he gets all necessary help from his father to pay the bride price for his respective wife and to built separate house for himself and his wife after marriage. However, though they live in separate house all important decision are collectively taken under the supervision of the father. Among the Nyishi, the Kinship terms for Father is *ABO/AB/EBBE* and for son if eldest *AA YAME HURTUK*, younger *AA YAME HONYA* and for middle *AA YAME LEPPA-GE*. The relations to father's brother is also similar to one's own father. A man does not indulge in loose talks with his father's brother nor does jokes with him. Rather he obeys and shows great respect as he would to his father. But, they make terminological distinction to his father's brother on the basis of their relative age. In case of father's elder brother he uses terms as *API/PARO* and if younger then *PI/PEI*. These Kinship terms are also extended to father's parallel cousins. However, the Nyishis have more intimate and affectionate relation with members of his own family then with the classificatory father and his family. The relationship between the mother and son in the Nyishi society is very different from that of father and son relationship. The son has more intimacy and loving relationship with her. She is more affectionate and indulgent towards him. A son quarrels and argues over small things and many a times disobeys her. The Kinship term for mother is *APA/ANNE/ANN*. The same Kinship terms is extended to father's brother's wife. However, there are qualitative differences in his attitude

towards her as compared to his mother. He has less intimacy and frankness towards her as compared to one's own mother.

Among the Nyishis, daughters are very much loved and adored by all the members of the family. The father is especially very lenient and affectionate towards his daughters. These are because the daughters as they grow up have to be given to other people in marriage. After marriage they are rarely seen in the parental house. Further the family members are much unsecured about their daughters and concerned whether their married life will be happy and will their in-laws love and take good *care* of them as they are in their parent's home. The Kinship term of reference for daughter among the Nyishi is *AA NYIJIR*. But the term of reference for the eldest is *ANYI-YANE*, the youngest is *AA NYIJIR HONYA* and the middle is *AA NYIJIR LEPPA-GE*.

Since the patrilineal Nyishi society is based on patrilocal rule of residence, the relationship between the brothers tends to be of great importance. They are next in importance to the father-son relation because after the death of the father either of the sons continue to live in the parental roof and the ancestral land is equally divided and cultivated by the brothers independently. Usually the brothers during their childhood form a play group along with cousins and other children. But as they grow up, the relationship between the brothers are no longer intimate and relax. Their formal relationship is more pronounced if the age difference between them is greater. They are seldom seen talking platitudes or about their personal affairs with the elders. The brothers are collectively referred by the Kinship term as *EBBE-BIR*, but the term of address for the elder brother is *ACHE/EBBE* and that of the younger is *BIR/BIRE*. The relationship between the patrilineal parallel cousins is more or less the same as with own brother. The behaviour between them also varies according to their relative age. The Kinship terms for them are the same as for one's own brother. The relationship between brother and sister is almost opposite of the brother-brother relationship. A sister is very informal with her brothers both elder and younger, though the elder is respected and obeyed and the younger brother is loved. A brother has a very important place in the life of a sister. It is the father and the brother who arrange the marriage of their sister. Apart from the relationship with brothers, the relationships between sisters are also very affectionate and intimate. They work together and disclose their secrets to each other. So the Kinship term for elder sister is *ANYE/NYANI* and for the younger is *BIRME/BIRM*.

The relationship between the grandparents (father's father and mother) and grandchildren of the Nyishis are that of frankness and intimacy despite the age difference. The Kinship term for grandfather is *ATO* and grandmother is *AYO/AYI*. These similar term of address is also applicable to the classificatory relation i.e. Mother's father and mother. The parental grandparents are usually the constant company of their grandchildren. When grandparents are quite aged and have ceased to be active members of the household, they become all the more fond of their grandchildren. Since they are very close to each other both may indulge in vulgar jokes which provide some sort of entertainment to them. However their jokes are only verbal. So very often the grandfather may tease and indulge in vulgar jokes with his grandson's wife, who in turn may also reciprocate in the same way. Similarly a grandson may joke unhesitatingly with his grandmother both real and classificatory.

Apart from the Kins of one's own family, the Nyishi people also recognise some Kins from his mother's family. The most important is his mother's brother (*KI*) whom he gives enough love and respect. Between them wild joking and teasing are observed. The *KI* and one's own brother enjoy the same responsibility of getting the marriage of their sister. Also the *KI* is the protector of the niece and nephew from any problems. These same responsibilities are observed and discharged by the sons of the maternal uncle as the same term of reference is used for him i.e. *KI*.

KINSHIP RELATIONS AND TERMS OF REFERENCE WITH THE AFFINAL GROUPS:

In the Kinship system of the Nyishis, the relationship between the husband and the wife is the most sacred and exalted. The relationship of maximum intimacy is firstly between husband and wife and then between parents and their children who constitute the nuclear family unit. Though the husband is the head of the family, he seeks the advice and co-operation of the wife in all matters be it domestic or outside matters. Whenever the husband is in any trouble including illegal affair with another woman it is his wife who give the maximum support, consolation and try to pull him out of the trouble. It is the husband and the wife who work diligently and make property for the children so that when they die the children may live in peace and prosperity. Husband-wife relationships also increase the Kinship ties because once married, the husband develops relation with wife's parents, kinsmen and vice versa. The Kinship term for husband is *NYILO* and wife is *NYIM*. The Kinship term for brother-in-law is the same as *MAKTH* if elder and *MAKHBO* if younger. Co-operation between the real brothers-in-law is an expected norm. They also participate in the family rituals and celebrations at each other's place. The relationship between *MAKHBO* and *RIGNE* (sister-in-law) is joking, thereby showing their potential of becoming husband and wife or surrogate form of marriage. Such relation is also prevalent among the *RIG* (husband's brother) and *NAT* (brother's wife), showing the prospect of levirate form of marriage. However, the relationship between the *MAKHBO* and *RIG* (wife's brothers) are very formal.

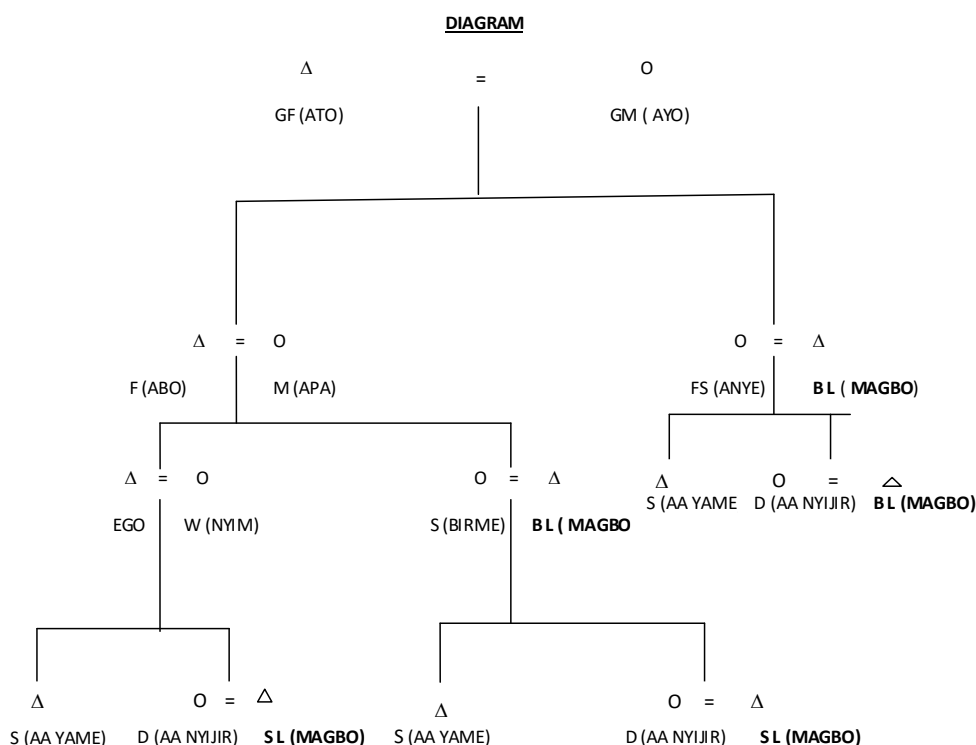
They had to respect and obey each other in any matter whether within the family or outside. The same is the relationship of *MAKHBO* with *AYO* (mother-in-law) and *ATO* (father-in-law). But the relationship between grandfather and grandmother and son-in-law is little loose. They may discuss all matters including sex and personal affairs freely to one another.

The relationship between *RIGNE* (sister-in-law) and *NAT* (brother's wife) are friendly and cordial but in some cases there arises tension between them, especially when the Rigne is still unmarried. When the brother was bachelor he used to give more attention and affection to his sister. But after his marriage his attention is shifted to his own wife and children. This diversion of attention and affection often causes tension between the Nat and Rigne and these very often manifested in the shape of a verbal clash. Therefore, the Nat and Rigne relationship to a large extent don't develop into intimate relationship though the Rigne may be a prospective sister-in-law of the Nat, in case she marries the brother of the Nat. The relationship between the *APA/ANNE* (mother-in-law) and *NYAME* (daughter) is very intimate and cordial, though exceptional cases are there. The married daughters after leaving the loving arms of her own mother find solace under the loving care of the mother-in-law. If the Nyame belongs to any Kin groups of the mother-in-law or father-in-law, then the relationship between the in-laws are very smooth and full of love, care and understanding. Both work in the same sphere. They chat and discuss all the problems for the progress and prosperity of the family. Apart from these, there are also cases of bitter relationships between the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. They keep on rebuking each other over small matters. These often lead to separation of the son from his parental roof and live independently with his wife and children.

KINSHIP TERMINOLOGY:

The Nyishi people reckon their relationship mainly through the male line. The Kinship is largely classificatory because they use certain terms of reference both for their lineal as well for the collateral and filial relatives. For instance, the term *ATO* is used to address one's father's father, mother's father and all those who stand in the same generation and relation to him in the clan. Similar is the case with the term *AYO* (grandmother). In the same way, man's father's sister's husband, sister's husband and daughter's husband are referred as *MAKHBO*, though they are of different generations. *NYAME* term is used to address son's wife and brother's son's wife. Similarly *RIGNE* is used to address husband's sister as well as wife's sister. The term *AA* is common for man's children, brother's children and sister's children. Whereas, grandchildren of both agnatic and affinal are commonly termed as *AA-GE-AA / AA-HOR*.

The following diagram shows how the *MAGBOS* of different generations and from different families are identified with one single Kinship term in the Nyishi society.



EGO	:	Speaker
D	:	Daughter
S	:	Son
GF	:	Grandfather
GM	:	Grandmother
F	:	Father
M	:	Mother
FS	:	Father's Sister
BL	:	Brother-in-law
DL	:	Daughter-in-law

(Source: Personal Interview)

IV. Conclusion

The Nyishi people have certain uniqueness of their own in terms of Kinship relationships. However they like other human society are in transition period due to interaction with the people of other cultures and societies. Therefore, it is the responsibilities of the present generation of the society to be on their guard against the onslaught of modernization, so that their rich culture and value system in the form of family ties and kinship relations could be preserved without much damage.

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