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Economy And Livelihood Of Nocte: Tradition, Change And Continuity

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Introduction:

An economy is an area of the production, distribution and trade, as well as consumption of goods and services. In general, it is defined as social domain that emphasizes the practices, discourses, and material expressions associated with production, use and management of resource. A given economy is a set of processes that involves its culture, values, education, technological evolution, history, social organization, political structure, legal systems, and natural resources as main factors, these factors give context, Content and set the conditions and parameters in which an economy functions. The economic domain is a social domain of interrelated human practices and transactions that does not stand alone. Livelihood is defined as a set of activities essential to everyday life that are conducted over one's life span. Such activities could include securing water, food, fodder, medicine, shelter, and clothing. An individual's livelihood involves the capacity to acquire aforementioned necessities in order to satisfy the basic needs of themselves and their household. The activities are usually carried out repeatedly and in a manner that is sustainable and providing of dignity. In social and cultural means, i.e. the command of an individual family or other social group has over an income and or bundles of resources that can be used or exchanged to satisfy its needs, this may involve information, cultural knowledge, social network or legal rights as well as tools, land and other physical resources. People around the world earn their livelihood in different ways. They are engaged in different sectors and different occupations to support their lives. The environment they live in has a great impact on the types of livelihood they choose. The way people earn their living in developed and developing society is not the same. Most of the people in developed society are engaged in secondary and tertiary sector whereas in the developing and under developed society they earn their living by engaging themselves in primary and secondary sector. The livelihood of people changes with time as change in society is inevitable.

In the present study the attempt has made to study the economy and livelihood of the Noctes and to discuss the change and continuity in it.

Study area:

Nocte is one of the major tribe of Arunachal Pradesh. The tribe predominantly inhabits the Patkai Hills of Tirap District having a latitudinal extension of 26°38' N to 27°04' N and Longitude of 95°40' E to 96°16' E though some are found in neighbouring districts like Changlang District and Namsai District. Few Nocte inhabited villages are also found in some Districts of Assam like Dibrugarh District, Sibsagar District, and Namrup District. Noctes are traditionally known for their rich heritage, unique chieftainship systems, skill craftsmanship and historical salt trade. There are 71 villages inhabited by Nocte under Tirap District and 5 villages outside.



Map of study area

Methodology and database:

The study is descriptive in nature. Secondary datas were collected from statistical Handbooks and District Gazetteer. In order to know the economy and livelihood of the people, few Nocte villages were taken as sample where door to door survey was conducted for primary data collection. Stratified Multistage Random sampling method was used for the study where respondents were selected from villages which were in turn selected on the basis of location and population.

Findings:

The people of the land had utilized their indigenous knowledge to earn their livelihood since time immemorial. People depend upon nature for their survival and earn their living from it since ages. Agriculture is the main stay of Noctes. Owing to its physiographical setup the wet cultivation or permanent type of agriculture is not popular. People had to adapt themselves in the rugged terrain and infertile soil (Mountainous soil) thus shifting cultivation became pre-dominant in the region. Shifting cultivation is a type of subsistence farming where the production is just from hand to mouth. There is no surplus production where people can use it for commercial purpose. Shifting cultivation is the slash and burn method of cultivation where seeds are shown mainly through broadcasting method and the whole process of farming are done manually. After a year the cultivated field is left fallow to regain the fertility naturally before coming back to it in the next cycle. No fertilizers or pesticides are used in the field and farmers depend totally upon monsoon. Because of the adopted methods of farming in shifting cultivation the production is much less than the input. There are some villages which are located near the river valley. In those villages people adopted wet cultivation where the production was good in compare to the shifting cultivation. Many a times people of the hilly areas used to do manual labour in the field of people practicing wet cultivation in return of rice to feed their family

Beside agriculture people used to depend on the forest products for their survival. People used to earn their livelihood by selling forest products like fire wood, timber, fruits, vegetables, Honey, etc. in exchange of items they require. Some important economic activities of the people of the land based on forest products are the basketry, wood carving, etc. The villages having infertile soil where the food production was less, there people used to earn their living by exchanging basketry items with food items. Noctes living in upper belt had a very harsh life because of the topographical setup. The soil is rocky and thus is not suitable for agriculture purpose. They used to come down in lower belt villages to trade their basketry items in exchange of dry tapioca and dry arum. They took paddy or millet rarely as these crops can't be preserved for longer period unlike dry arum and tapioca.

The Nocte inhabitant areas have many streams and rivulets where abundant aquatic animals are found which good source of food are providing proteins to the people. Besides farming therefore, fishing was one of the important economic activities of the people of the region. . In every village fishing and hunting are done in both community level and individual. In community fishing all the people who are capable of fishing, irrespective of age and sex go for fishing. Noctes has always adopted indigenous fishing techniques which are eco friendly to bring least harm to the river ecosystem. They use net and Herbs locally known as '*Ru*' to catch fish. The good thing about fishing by *Chak* (net) is that they trap only the fishes which are big enough to eat and allow the small fishes to escape which are too small to eat. The *Ru* is a kind of plant whose leaves and barks are use for fishing. The juice of leaves and barks has some intoxicating substance in them which makes the fishes drowsy but don't kill them. In the state of their drowsiness people catch the fishes leaving aside the smaller ones. *Ru* is not poisonous for fish and doesn't kill them. Fishes after taking it felt drowsy but as the effect of it goes away they become fine and strong again. Another indigenous fishing technique known as '*longtak*' was very popular for fishing. *Longtak* is one of the techniques where the stones are kept in a pile for the fish to enter it and during catching that part of the river is diverted using mud and stone to make the catch easy by draining the water from other path. They worship the rivers and considered it as holy because many people earn their livelihood from it. On the basis of data collected from Borduria village it was found People use indigenous techniques of catching fish which are eco-friendly. Herbs (*Ru*) are used to intoxicate the fish to catch it. This herb doesn't kill the fish and fish regain consciousness after some time. Beside *Ru* traps made of bamboo (*Hap sak*, *chilang beh*) are used to trap fish. Some other techniques include diverting of river and blocking the flow of water from side with the help of banana leaves, mud and river load consisting of small and big stones (*Jo Chon*), pilling up of stones (*Longtak*) etc. In Pullung village people use more of *Loktak* technique to do fishing. From various data collected it was found that in almost all the villages the mentioned techniques are used for fishing.

Earlier people used to protect the river and its ecosystem as they knew that it is one of the main sources of the livelihood for them and for their future generation. Thought they were illiterate but they understand the concept of sustainable development unlike today where inspite of being literate people are least concern of sustainable development. With passing of time the concern for aquatic life changed. People started using harmful techniques of fishing which include blasting, poisoning with chemicals, using electric shock etc. which is killing the small fishes and polluting the water thereby, destroying the environment for future breeding.



1. Longtak



2. Hap sak



3 Ru (herb used for poisoning)



4. Trap (Hap)



5. Chelaang (to bell out fish)

Hunting:

Hunting is yet another important way through which people used to earn their living. Different indigenous techniques of hunting were adopted to do least harm to the animals. Trapping and bow and arrow were used to kill the animals. Mass killing of animals was never supported except in some occasions like festivals and other rituals. People understood the importance of flora and fauna as they depend on it directly or indirectly therefore; they adopt certain means to preserve them. Few days of the year were and still observed as Holy days where hunting is strictly prohibited and the people who violate the laws are punished as people believe that killing of animals on those days will bring bad things to the people and to the community. People followed many dos and don'ts while going for hunting. Women folk were considered to bring bad luck for the hunters therefore; they never take the gun or sword from the female's hand if going for hunting. Before going for hunting people took the help of *Taan* (Mangal) where they see the position of the leaves and predict whether they will get the prey or not. This method is prevalent even today i.e. people see *Tann* before going for hunting. If *Taan* is good then they go for hunting or else avoid that day. The expecting father avoids the hunting until the baby is born and attains certain age. In Nocte Society Chiefs are respected and regarded a lot. If any hunter gets the prey then the head of that animal was given to the chief as a sign of respect. This tradition still is practice today. In earlier days people used to hunt for their survival as they didn't get available meat require for their health. With time this has changed. Now meat is available abundantly in the market and thus people rarely do hunting. Now it is during festivals and important days of the year that community hunting is practice. Like in fishing there are two types of hunting which are community and individual. But here unlike fishing in Community hunting only men and boys who have attended adulthood are allowed to participate. Earlier people used to hunt animals using bow and arrow (known as *Dok Haap/Chhan*) Spear (*Pah*) and Sword (*Daang*) but later on guns were used for hunting. Sometimes trap were also used to trap small animals and birds using a kind of gum (*Chua/ neh*) extracted from tree (*Mechabang*). People don't hunt regularly.

Community hunting is done only during festivals or some special occasions thus, there is no danger to wild life extinction. Mass killing of animals is also not done as they do hunting only for a day. Individual do go for hunting but not regularly. And in most of the villages as a mark of respect the head of the hunted animal is given to the chief.

Tools and weapon used for hunting:



1. *Dok Haap* (bow & arrow)



2. *Khhaja Wancho* (Gun)



3. *Paah & Daang* (spear & sword)



4. *Thunu* (Catapole)

Trade and commerce:

i. Handicrafts

The People of the land have a penchant for fine arts and sculpture and thus they engaged themselves to earn their livelihood through carpentry, weaving and curving. Noctes had good knowledge of Geometry since hundreds of years. Based on the knowledge of it they make different shapes and size of baskets according to the requirement with the help of bamboo. Some of the shapes they made are conical, Rectangular, Square, cylindrical, spherical, angular. By this one can say that though they didn't had an elementary education but they had a lot of indigenous knowledge which was utilize for earning their livelihood. The people of upper belt were specially experts in making basket of different shape and size which they used to barter for food and salt and sometimes cloth with the people of middle and lower belt. Beside these activities people earn their bread by engaging themselves in pottery making, bead work etc. One can say that Noctes had a good knowledge of science which is clear from the fact that they made pots out of clay which had a high durability. Combined with the knowledge of Geometry they could produce the clay pot with perfect shape and size which were used for storing grains, yeast ball (weechhi) of rice beer and cooking. These pots were exchanged for food and other commodities. According to Chahu Agi, one of the respondents aging more than hundred years told that to make a clay pot they had to identify the quality of clay first and for that they had to search it inside the deep forest. The clay has to be mixed with water until it turns into soft substance which can be easily molded to form a pot like structure. To make it smooth the stone having smooth surface is used to beat the clay pot. Later on a huge fire is burn where it is kept until it turns hard. She told that it was tabooed to make clay pot at home therefore, they used to make it in the forest area and on the day of making pot they had to follow some rules like taking bath before seating for making *tit-poh* (clay pot) and not speaking to strangers while going for making it. *Tit-poh* was considered very precious and earned them good exchange as it was not everybody cup of tea. It took lots of energy and time and technique to prepare one pot. For cooking and for storing valuable items like medicine for rice beer the *Tit-pohs* (Clay pot) were used. Because of this reason the ladies who were

experts in pottery making used to be highly respected in the society. But with the coming of aluminum and steel pots the culture of making clay pot is no more practice in the society.



1. Author with Chahu Agi, the the maker of Tit-poh (clay pot),
Two size of Tit-Poh are shown in the picture



2. Chha-nak pha(for sieving millet) 3.Tum(for storing grains 4.Din (for carrying grains)
The shape of each items were designed according to the need.



5. Pha

6. Pha

7.Waankhoang(for winnowing)



8. Suklo (filtering rice beer)

9. Khoak (for storing things)

10. Pha (for drying crops)

ii. *Sum-khoak (salt making)*

Traditionally, one of the most important economic activities of Nocte was salt making which was very popular in some villages of the Nocte. The importance of salt has been felt by people since ages. Thus salt become one of the most important item for everyone. Noctes were aware of the importance of salt and for them it was a boon to have salt springs in their area. Before coming of common salt in the area the salt spring was one of the major sources of economy among the Noctes. Salt springs are called '*Sum Phong*' in local dialect and the extracting of salt from salt wells and springs is called *Sum-Kuak*. *Sum-phong* (salt well) is not found everywhere. It is found only in some selected places. Most of it are located in *Hakhun Ja* area and in *Hawa* area mainly, few are found in Phong side. The villages like Borduria, Paniduria, Pullung, Khela, and even Lazu (for few years) used to make salt from the salt well which was popularly known as *Sum Phong*. It is said that villages which used to make salt used to dominate the area as it was considered as one of the most important item for trading. Village like Borduria used to have a trade relation with Assam where salt was the most important item from Nocte area. One very old salt spring is located in Khela village where people used to extract salt for self consumption as well as for trade. This salt spring is used even today though salt is not made but now they directly use the salt water. Some salt springs are found at Khela, Longchang (Paniduria), Salla (Borduria), Longthan(Laptang), Thinnayan (Namsang), Thinpa (Pollung), Kheti Hanyan (Notun Kheti), etc, They used to barter salt with the plains of Assam to exchange the things they needed the most. Salt, one of the important components of our day to day life, was managed by the Noctes and they used to deal with the neighbouring areas/tribes. According to the sources available, there are around 150 salt well scattered in and around the Nocte hill .i.e. Tirap. The extraction of salt was considered a very important and holy task. Before making salt they perform some rituals seeking permission from the queen of the salt, known as *Sum Wangcha* who is the keeper/protector of the salt. It is believe that if the *sum wangcha* is not pleased then the making of salt fails. Either the salt won't be salty or it won't get solidified. Therefore, proper prayers by the elders should be done. For making salt special type of bamboo is used where the water is dried and make it to evaporate thereby, leaving the solid salt behind. In Hawa belt the women folks are not allowed in the salt spring as they consider the salt spring as the dwelling place of both benevolent and malevolent spirit and the women folks may get sick easily due to malevolent spirit. Salt was very important at that time as salt well were the only source of salt. They didn't have a contact with plain people thus they were not aware of the common salt that we take today. The village producing salt even had a political power over the areas where salt was not produced. According to the information collected during field survey it was learned that Assam had once set up partnership with the Saala (Borduria) people to produce salt but due to some problem the partnership broke. After it Nocte people continue to produce salt for some years. At Phong Nocte side in a village called Soha, there are 2 salt springs: Korok soom jong and Ngongwa soom jong where soom means salt and jong means water. These names have been given after the discovery of the salt springs by the 2 families, i.e. Korok and Ngongwa families respectively. In the past, the villagers used to make salt for consumption purposes. The process of making salt is very difficult. Women are not permitted to go near the salt spring. It is the man who can take out the salt water from the spring. It is believed that the salt springs are holy one. It is said that, whenever the people passed through the salt spring they used to make offer with the three branches of plant and do prayer to the God. Extracting/making of salt from salt spring is very tedious process therefore; people started buying cheaper and easily available common salt. Slowly with passing of time people started neglecting the salt springs. Salt springs became dirty and gradually weeds and trees started growing thereby making it almost unapproachable. Now people talk about the salt well and its extraction like a story and in fact it has become one. Once it was one of the most important economic activities and a source of living for many people but now it is just a tale to tell to future generation. But inspite of losing importance people still now consider salt spring as Holy place where the Queen of salt resides. Still now in some villages the salt well are preserved and considered as the dwelling place of salt queen who is worshipped. The people do rituals of offerings to take the permission of salt

queen if they visit the salt well to bring the salt water and keep it at home as it is considered as having some medicinal value which is good for cold and cough, for wounds, stomach ache, etc.



Sum Phong (salt well)



Change and continuity:

In many villages of Nocte changes have been seen in the economic activities of the people and the way they earn their livelihood with change in time. But the changes is not complete transaction but it is the change with continuity where people following the traditional ways and skills reached out for new methods of earning their livelihood. Government is also helping the people in promoting and marketing the products. Beside Government NGOs and SRLM are also playing active role in helping the people to earn livelihood through their traditional skills and practices. People of some villages are very skilful in weaving cloths, making ornaments from beads, crafting baskets from bamboo, wood carving (status), etc. which help them to earn their livelihood. Almost every family of Nocte owes a land of their own which they now are utilizing for growing fruits and vegetables and selling them to earn income along with growing crops for self consumption. Beside agriculture, its allied activities like animal husbandry, poultry, piggery, fishery, tea plantation, vegetable farming, flori culture, horticulture are at present gaining importance from where people are earning their livelihood. The region is rich in crops like tea beside rice and other vegetables so some population engaged themselves in tea industry as daily wage earner or the skilled and unskilled labors to earn their bread. Both plants and animals help to sustain human life and man has been living mainly by exploiting the plant and animal resources both directly and indirectly. People of North East depend on plant and animals directly to sustain their life. Rearing animals along with cultivating small plot of land is important activity of the farmers of the region. Of Animals reared in the region cow, buffalo, goat, pig and poultry are the main. These animals are kept in small numbers by the rural families mainly with little capital investment to earn their living. With the increasing demand of milk and milk products the development in animal husbandry is taking place which gives lots of scope to the people of the land to earn their bread in future. In recent years many schemes to develop piggery, sheep farm and poultry have been taken up which has helped the population to earn their living. In Chasa village it has been found that most of the populations are engaged in agriculture. Along with paddy and millet they cultivate betel leaves (*Phalu kai/palu Dak*), vegetables (*Sai Ka/phom Dak*), fruits (*panziak kai/bang ri*), bamboo (*nagat kai/waah*), palm trees (*Lah kai/ loh Bang*) which are important source of income for them. Beside primary activities the people of Chasa are also engaged in secondary activities which are also a good source of income for them. Important secondary activities in which people are engaged in are Handicraft and Weaving which include traditional cloth weaving (*nee tak/khat tak*), Bead work – (*lik huk/lit-wat*), Traditional bamboo craft such as carpet weaving (*dam vat/ham wat*) basket weaving (*chzong vaat/ sang vaat/pha-Din wat*), water carrier (*tithua/jo-tho*), plates (*tsaap/waan*), mate (*dam/Haam*), chair (*Tantong/tongthin*) etc. are the bamboo product found in Chasa village. Few people are also engaged in lumbering activity which is locally called '*pan zat*'. With time now large portion of young population and middle aged man are engaged in contractual labour work i.e wage labour. With more population becoming educated people have turned to tertiary sector. Most of them are now engaged in business, job (both

private and Government) and some are self employed by opening shops, restaurants and other centres to earn their livelihood. The people of Khonsa village are more engaged in primary sector and tertiary sector and very few are engaged in Secondary sector. Many new homestay, resorts and shops are coming up which are managed by villagers themselves and from where they earn their living. In Borduria, besides being engaged in farming, most of the people are either self employed by doing business or engaged in private sector or Government jobs. In Doidam some are engaged in Government job, few in business and private sector and most are engaged in agriculture and its allied activities. People are growing betel leaves and spices like chilli and black pepper along with food crops to earn revenue. In Lazu village very few are engaged in tertiary sector and more are engaged in primary sector and secondary sector. In Pullung village and Paniduria too most of the population are engaged in agriculture and its allied activities and only few are engaged in tertiary sector including both private and Government. In Muktowa village people are more engaged in primary sector than in tertiary. In recent years people started growing large cardamom from which they earn good revenue. In Thinsa village Kiwi plantation is gaining importance as allied activity beside traditional economic activities. In Luthong village some progressive farmers has come up who are earning their livelihood from flori culture, tea cultivation and other vegetables product. The people especially women folk of Lapnan village, Kaimai village, villages of Dadam area, Soha village, Naitong Village, Turet village, Subang village, Makat village, Noksa village, Tupi village, Pullung village now earn their livelihood through vendor markets in towns where they sell forest products, agricultural products, fruits, fish, spices and other local products. The people with skills in beads making, weaving, wood carving, basket weaving etc are selling their product through various retailers' shops, online marketing and NGOs which earns them good revenue. In every village change has been seen in the occupation and economic activities of the people through which they are earning their living.



Villagers selling forest products, agriculture products and livestock to earn their livelihood (at Duda Vendor market)





Handicrafts - beads work, bamboo & cane works and weaving works being sold in market through rural mart and other retailer shops in town.

Conclusion:

The demand of people changes with each passing days and thus with it the means to fulfilled those demands too change. The economic activities which used to fulfil the needs of people earlier are not enough now. With the change in needs of people with time there arises a need to change in economic activities too. Traditional way of earning livelihood still is dominant but now people have started looking towards new ways of earning their livelihood too. rather than depending on traditional way of livelihood. Noctes are using their traditional skills to earn their living. Many shifting plots have been converted to tea garden, fruits orchard, plantation plot for cardamom, battle nut, etc. from where people are earning good revenue. Those who are skilled in weaving, bead making, basket making and other forms of handicrafts are coming out to sell their products through shops both retailer and on-line. Many artisans are getting reorganization and awards from Government and other agencies which help in boosting up their skills and products more and also inspire the people of the area to explore their skill in earning their livelihood. People are now turning towards food and eco-tourism business by taking help from various Government schemes and Banks. Owing to rich tradition and cultural heritage these business are helping the people not only to earn their livelihood but help in generating employment and raising the standard of living. More and more people are now engaged in tertiary sector and Government jobs due to increase in literary rate and awareness amongst young people about the importance of education and tertiary sector.

Thus, it can be concluded that the economy and livelihood of Nocte is passing through a transaction phase where people are following traditional way of livelihood but at the same time trying to adopt new means of livelihood. The change in economic activities and means of livelihood has brought an immense impact in the socio-economic condition of the Nocte.

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