

Title	Family and Kinship Systems of Taron, Karoung Village, Kachin State
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Family and Kinship Systems of Taron, Karoung Village, Kachin State

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Abstract

The majority of Taron groups are found in Karoung village, which is also known as Arundam or Adonlong village in northern Kachin State. This village is situated in the northernmost part of Myanmar. It is a mountainous region. Tarons are famous as great hunters. Their household unit is patrilineal extended family. When the sons get married, they have to follow their husbands and live with their parents-in-law. This is called patrilocal residence. In olden days, a Taron had three to five wives living together in the same home. So they practised polygynous marriage. Kinship system is patrilineal descent. Matrilineal descent system is not found at all.

Introduction

The township of Naung Mung in Putao district is in the northern edge of the Kachin State. In the north and east, it is bordered by the People's Republic of China and in the west it is connected with the Indian border. Because it is situated in the northern most part of Myanmar, it is surrounded by snow-capped mountains and deep river valleys. It is a region of great natural beauty, with its high mountain ranges and peaks, ever green forests and rare flora and fauna. It is the home of the phet-deer, the red-panda and the ice mountain goat called "Asar". The natives believe that insects called "shepatee" is of medicinal value for strength and energy.

The majority of the national ethnic groups living in Naung Mung township are Rawang, Lisu, Jingpaw and a few Tibetans. They belong to the Tibeto Myanmar group of people originally living in the highlands and plains of central Asia and the river basins of the Yangse and the Hohangho rivers in western China. They gradually moved southwards and finally settled in Myanmar. They became the tribes of the regions they settled in. The Rawangs settled in the source regions of the Maykha river, the AdumLawmg river valley, the Sangkhu Lawng river valley and the Taron

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river basin. From there they gradually spread to Hkaunglanfu, Machanbaw, Sumprabum, the Triangle and right to plain Khan-ti.

The Taron nationals belong to Rawang tribal group and originally came from the region of Taron river basin in China. They came along the Hta-La stream and settled in the present place Arundam (Karoung) region. They called the themselves Taron people because they were born in the upper regions of the Taron river basin. In Rawang language it means "people living in the source of the river". The Taron people's original region is The Taron river basin and Taron stream. They were people of average height. But the Taron people living in Myanmar are found to be short in height. Originally, the Taron people usually lived in big rock caves and the deep forests.

Among the ethnic groups living in Naung Mung Township, the Taron nationals are the least in number. From Pangnamdim town in Naung Mung township if you go westward along the May Kha river, (55) miles away is K around village, settled by the Taron nationals. There are (30) families now with a population of (179) people. Of these people there are (5) genuine Tarons, (4) of luamdum clan, (1) of Sondum clan. According to patrilineal descent system, there are (13) families with a population of (84) people who claim themselves as belonging to Taron tribe. Karoung mans "village" in Taron language, so the name indicates that the Taron people were quite powerful in the past. Some Tarons have married the Hta-Lu and later the Hta-Lu increased in number and began to have more influence. The Arundam clan who belong to the Hta-Lu tribe named it Arundam village when they became the elders of the community.

Family Organization

The Taron family organization is Extended Family system. It is made up of the old grandfather and grandmother of paternal line and the son's families. When the eldest son marries, he still lives with his parents by bringing his wife home. When the second son marries, he also lives with his parents. Only when the second son gets married or when the eldest son's family has got the first son or when they prosper enough to have separate living, the eldest son's family can move to another place. Although the sons live together with their parents, their livelihood is separated from the family. When the girls of the family marry, they have to go away with their

husbands and live with the parents-in-law. Likewise, when sons get married, they bring their wives to their houses, in accordance with their custom of the patrilocal residence.

The father as the head of the house has the greatest authority. He manages the household with justice; so that all the members of the family fear, love and revere him. Although the father is supposed to be the final authority in everything concerning the family, the mother has the right to give her view in the family affairs. So the father often consults the mother and the sons and daughters. In reality the father does not assert his authority alone. But the family can only give suggestions and the final authority still rests with the father. When the father dies, the eldest son take on the authority, until he sets up a separate household. Then the second son takes on the responsibility. In the event of having no sons, the mother takes on the responsibility, helped on by her husband's brothers. So they live as patrilineal extended family type.

In the past, a Taron may have three to five legally married wives. Once there was a village headman called Ah- Thon- Laung- Phon, who was a famous hunter and brave fighter. He had five wives. Although they all live together under one roof, each wife is given a room and a fire place for herself. So a man with two wives will have a two-room house, the man with five wives will have a five-room house. Taron community of former days had the custom of polygynous families. Each family has a separate business of their own. But in building or repairing a house all the families have to help which show their unity in this living together system.

The first wife as the greatest a authority and she has the right to reprimand all the other children. The youngest wife is the one he takes out to ceremonies or to the public place. The Taron family has to struggle very hard for their daily needs, so that they have very little time for leisure. As soon as day breaks, they have to get up early and cook breakfast. It is millet or corn or yam. They drink plain tea or drink some fermented drink they have made. Then the whole family have to work in their taung-ya. Even the ten year old children have to work in their taung- ya. The younger children also accompany the elders either carried or walked. Sometimes they may leave the children with their grandmother. They usually cook their afternoon meal at the taung- ya after the morning's hard labour. When they are not working in the taung- ya, they do not cook the afternoon meal.

Instead they eat the vegetable like cucumber, yam, cassava, and fruits for nourishment.

They have to work very hard in the taung- ya till dark. So they usually eat their evening meal too in the taung- ya. When they have any meat got by hunting, they eat it by hunting; they eat it by smoking it on a fire. The dried meat is usually eaten boiled with a lot of chilies and salt. After the evening meal, the Tarons usually sit around the fire and talk while they work. The women cook food for the pigs and men prepare the bow for the next day's hunt. They make the strings for the bow. They seldom visit other houses in this free time because they are too tired after a day's labour for their daily food. They must have sound sleep for the night.

Kinship System

In observing the kinship system of the Taron people living in Karoung village, we see two kinds of kinship. They are kinship by blood and kinship by marriage. In kinship by blood, it is kinship traced by following the kin only from the paternal side. It is Patrilineal descent¹. The kinship is not traced through the mother's clan. So Matrilineal descent² is absolutely not found. They practise Unilineal kinship system. When a woman marries, she has to live with her husband's family and her children belong to her husband's clan. Tarons are the descendants of the Rawang which can divide into five sub-tribes as follows;

- (1) Malang
- (2) Matwang
- (3) Lungmin
- (4) Tangsar
- (5) Daru

Darus can be sub-divided into seven sub- groups. They are;

- (1) Ahkupai
- (2) Anampai
- (3) Ze-wang
- (4) Rami
- (5) Dashu Wang
- (6) Hta-Lu
- (7) Taron

Taron can be divided into two clans. They are;

- (1) Sondum and
- (2) Luamdum

Two clans of Taron group lived in the Taron river basin of China; on the rock mountain of "Lon- pin- la- kha". The Sondun clan lived on the peak of the rock- mountain called "La- khar- hta". The Luamdum lived in "La- kha- phan" at the foot of the mountain. The Taron nationals often come down to Myanmar main land to places where they could do agriculture. Thus they came to Karoung village, now (Arundam) where Hta-Lu tribes live. We learnt from (100) years old Hta- Lu national U Dazan Abai Sin, who lived in Gawaing village that the first group to arrive were Takasun and Ah- thon- laung- phone. Now, there are only (5) genuine Tarons in Karoung village, (4) Luamdum clan are brothers and sisters. Originally there were eight of them and four had died.

No	Name	Age	Height	Remarks
1	Luamdum Nan-hsein	60	4 feet 3 inches	1 st daughter (alive)
2	-	-	-	1st son (dead)
3	-	-	-	2nd daughter (dead)
4	Luamdum Dee	-	-	2nd son (dead)
5	Luamdum Sin	-	-	3rd son (dead)
6	Luamdum Mar-hta	50	4 feet 3 inches	3rd daughter (alive)
7	Luamdum Darwi	45	4 feet 5 inches	4th son (alive)
8	Luamdum Nwin	43	4 feet 2 inches	4th daughter (alive)

The first daughter Luamdum Nan-hsein has a little daughter Chan-yein- nin but who the father is not mentioned. The little girl is now (13 years old) and by looking at her name, the father must be a Hta-Lu national. The names of the first son and the second daughter were unknown since they died young. They could not tell the ages of the second and third sons, Luamdum Dee and Luamdum Sin. The third daughter Luamdum Mar-hta is a spinster, assumed to be retarded. The fourth son Luamdum Darwi, married a Hta-Lu woman (Chan-ye- du- na) and had a son who died at the age of two months. She also died about two years ago having fallen from the mountain into the ravine while gathering honey. She was (32) years old at the time of her death. The fourth daughter Luamdum Nwin also is a spinster. The Taron nationals practise the patrilineal system, so only the

sons can inherit the clan name. The Taron men learn the names of their male ancestors orally (by rote) to remember their lineage. (Luamdum Darwi's lineage chart is attached.)

Luamdum Htein-bar and Luamdum Phu-saul both married Hta-lu women and the children become half-caste Taron and Hta-lu. Luamdum Du-yee-shun, the son of the first wife was to be married. To keep the tribal blood pure they had to find a wife from the same tribe. So the lesser wife went to the Taron valley and brought back the bride. Her name was Dazondan Nan-sar of Dazondan clan. The four pure Tarons in Myanmar today are the children of Luamdum Du-yee-shun and Dazondan Nan-sar. Sondum Son-wan (100 years old) is of Sondum clan, and the only surviving pure Taron today. (Sondum Son-wan's lineage chart is enclosed.)

Although the system is patrilineal descent, they are quite close and loving towards the mother's relatives. There is no discrimination between the father's side and the mother's side relatives, but father's relatives have more privileges.

In kinship by marriage, the relatives of the bride and the bridegroom are quite friendly towards each other. There are a few prohibitions concerning marriage. They must not marry a man or a woman of the same clan. For example a Luamdum male cannot marry a Luamdum female and a Sondum male cannot marry a Sondum female. But a Sondum man can marry a Luamdum woman and Luamdum man cannot marry a Sondum woman. That is why the Taron tribes do not have **Endogamy**¹ but practise the **Exogamy**² marriage system.

The daughters of the brothers can marry the sons of the sisters. It is cross cousin marriage. In Taron language, it is called **Mayousan**³. But on the other hand a brother's son cannot marry a sister's daughter. In Taron language, it is known as **Phan-htan**⁴. Besides any son or daughter of elder brother cannot marry any son or daughter of younger sister. It is called parallel cousin marriage and it is prohibited. (The chart of marriage system is attached.)

¹ The rule that marriage must be within a particular group or category of individuals

² The rule that marriage must be outside the group

³ The relatives who can be married

⁴ The relative who cannot be married

The relatives of both sides in kinship by marriage have a complete understanding of each other. They are loving and united. The relationship between the parents-in-law is smooth, each respecting the other. The sisters-in-law also get along well with each other as real sisters and the brothers-in-law also are like own brothers. There is harmony and understanding between both parties.

Conclusion

Concerning the short height of the Tarons in Myanmar, a Hta-Lu elder said that the early Tarons were of normal height. Then they began to grow shorter with each generation. Besides the Taron tribes now living in the Taron river basin are of normal height some tall and some short. Luamdaw Dawi's father Luamdum Du-yee-shan was a man of normal build. But his mother Dazondan Nan-sar was less than four feet tall. It was told by the elders that when she was brought from the Taron river valley in China to Myanmar, she was carried in a basket (palaing). So it is believed that the Tarons in Myanmar are short in status due to family gene. The Tarons who have married Hta-Lu tribes in Myanmar are of normal build, so not all Taron are dwarfs.

The Taron population is small because of the environment in which they had to live. They had to bear extremes of the weather and natural disasters. They had to work very hard for their daily food and shelter. Deficiency in basic food led to malnutrition and disease. They also lack knowledge of agriculture and animal husbandry and the customary prohibitions regarding marriage such as "Mayousan" and "Phan-htan" which have made them mix with other ethnic groups.

Although the Tarons have married the Hta-Lu tribes, they still practice the patrilineal System. So the Tarons males continue to keep alive their tribe. There are (13) families with a population (84) people who are registered as Taron tribe. Many other national ethnic groups in Myanmar also have found that they have intermixed with other tribes for the past three or four generations. These Taron -Hta-Lu nationals hope that their tribe will continue to survive if they can go on practising their marriage system.

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