

Title	The Taron: one of the hidden groups of hill ethnic groups in Myanmar
All Authors	Nyunt Nyunt Win
Publication Type	Local Publication
Publisher (Journal name, issue no., page no etc.)	Mandalay University Research Journal, Vol.6, 2015
Abstract	<p>The Taron is one of the ethnic groups of Kachin National and they are descended of Rawang ethnic group. The majority of Taron groups are found in Ikaround Village, which is also known as Arundan or Adonlong Village: in northern Kachin State. This village is situated in the northernmost part of Myanmar. It is a mountainous region and it is surrounded by snowcapped mountains and deep forest with valuable and rare flora and fauna. Now, there are only (5) genuine Tarons in Karoung Village. The Taron's life is poor and full of hardships. They have to work the whole day on the Taungya and hunt in the forest. Their household unit is Patrilineal extended Family. When the son get married they bring their wives to their homes to live with their family. When the daughters get married, they have to follow their husbands and live with their parents-in-laws. This is called patrilocal residence. In olden days, a Taron had three to five wives living together in the same home. Concerning the short height of the Tarons, it is believed that the Taron in Myanmar are short people due to a family gene.</p>
Keywords	mountainous region, genuine Tarons, household unit, Patrilineal extended family
Citation	
Issue Date	2015

The Taron: one of the hidden groups of hill ethnic groups in Myanmar

Nyunt Nyunt Win*

Abstract

The Taron is one of the ethnic groups of Kachin National and they are descended of Rawang ethnic group. The majority of Taron groups are found in Karound Village, which is also known as Arundan or Adonlong Village: in northern Kachin State. This village is situated in the northernmost part of Myanmar. It is a mountainous region and it is surrounded by snow-capped mountains and deep forest with valuable and rare flora and fauna. Now, there are only (5) genuine Tarons in Karound Village. The Taron's life is poor and full of hardships. They have to work the whole day on the Taungya and hunt in the forest. Their household unit is Patrilineal extended Family. When the son gets married they bring their wives to their homes to live with their family. When the daughters get married, they have to follow their husbands and live with their parents-in-laws. This is called patrilocal residence. In olden days, a Taron had three to five wives living together in the same home. Concerning the short height of the Tarons, it is believed that the Taron in Myanmar are short people due to a family gene.

Key words: mountainous region, genuine Tarons, household unit, Patrilineal extended family

Introduction

The Taron national ethnic group lives in Naung Mon Township, in Kachin State which is in the northernmost edge of the Union of Myanmar. On the north and east of Naung Mon Township is the People's Republic of China and to the west, it shares a border with India. In the south, there is a car road from Putao to Machanbaw and Suprabaun. It is surrounded by snow-capped mountains and deep river valleys. The high mountain ranges are covered with ever-green forest with valuable and rare flowers. It is a region of natural beauty.

The Taron national belongs to Rawang tribal group and originally came from the region of Taron river valley in China. They came along the Hta-La stream and settled in the present place Arundam (Karound) region. They call 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. Karound village is on the eastern bank of Adum Lawun stream and inhabited by Htalu, Taron and a few Tibetans. Karound village is 55 miles distant from Pannamdim town if you go along the Maykha river valley. The objectives of the study are:

- To identify the livelihood of the Taron ethnic group in Myanmar.
- To receive and preserve in time the almost extinct cultural traditions, and by suitable modernization to develop the social and economic conditions of the people.

Literature Review

A social group consists of several related individual families, especially those of a man and his sons or of a woman and her daughter, residing in a single large dwelling or a cluster of smaller ones. Family is the basic social institution. One or more men, living with one or more women in a socially-sanctioned and more or less enduring sex relationship, with socially

*Professor, Dr. Department of Anthropology, University of Mandalay

recognized rights and obligations, together with their offspring (Beals, R.L and Hoifer, H, 1966).

Crapo, Richley H, (2002) mentioned that a society in which the extended family was the ideal was premodern China. In China, lineal descendants from father to son to grandson were the backbone of family organization. The family continued through time as a permanent social entity. As older members were lost through death, new ones were added through birth. When the sons grow up and marry, they build new houses for themselves close to their paternal home. Moreover, the new couple also lived with the husband's family. Harveland, William A (1999) illustrated that Polygynous family means that a man can marry many wives and the children of their wives live together in the same home. In other words, Polygynous family is a family that staying together under the same hut, although the children are from different mother, but same father. If he can afford, he may keep one family in one hut another family in another hut. He may live with them in turns. If a man has the means to support several wives, he is able to present a richer and better equipped household to the world. More women can prepare better cloths and food. If women's handicrafts are marketable or suitable for exchange, his household wealth will be increased.

Harveland, William A (1999) also mentioned that Patrilineal descent is the more widespread of the two basic systems of unilineal descent. The male members of a patrilineal descent group trace through the males their descent from a common ancestor. Brothers and sisters belong to the descent group of their father's brother's children. A man's son and daughter also trace their descent back through the male line to their common ancestor. In the typical patrilineal group, the power for training the children rests with the father or his elder brother. A woman belongs to the same descent group as her father and his brothers, but her children cannot trace their descent through them. A person's patrilineal aunt's children, for example, trace their descent through the patrilineal group of her husband.

Lenkeit, Roberta Edwards (2001) illustrated that cross-cultural study of kinship provides insight into the flexibility of human adaptive strategies. Family ties are at the core of human culture, and anthropologists have learned that understanding them is often essential to a full understanding of a culture's economic system, political system, or religious structure and other socio-cultural systems.

Materials and Methods

Qualitative research methods are used in this study. The emphasis is put on the use of ethnographic interviewing methods. In this study, three different types of research methods were included to enable data triangulation, with findings from ethnographic study compared and contrasted with findings from in-depth interviews IDIs , Key informant interviews (KIIs) and data from document reviews. IDIs were conducted with three informants who are Dawi's siblings. Twelve KIIs for their ways of life were carried out. Purposive sampling method was used to illustrate **The Taron: one of the hidden groups of hill ethnic groups in Myanmar.**

Results and Discussion: Form of Family

The form of Taron family is Extended Family system. It is made up of the old grandfather and grandmother of paternal line and the sons' 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 separate 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 take their wives to their houses, in accordance with their custom of the **patrilocal residence**¹.

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 takes 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 rooms house, the man with five wives will have a five rooms house. Taron community of former days had the custom of **Polygynous Family**. 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 has the greatest 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 yams. They drink plain tea or drink some fermented drink they have made. Then the whole family have to go and 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, yams, 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 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 fall sound asleep for the night.

Now a day, There are (30) families with a population of (179) people in Karoung village the Taron, live. According to patrilineal descent system, there are (13) families with a population who claim themselves as belong to Taron ethnic group. Of these people there are only (5) genuine Taron (Figure:1) in that Kauoung village.

¹ A residence pattern in which a married couple lives in the locality associated with husband's father's relatives.

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 descent**¹. The kinship is not traced through the mother's clan. So **Matrilineal descent**² is absolutely not found. They practice Unilineal kinship system. When a woman marries, she has to live with her husband's family and her children become her husband's clan.

Tarons are the descendants of the Rawang which can be divided into **five sub-tribes**: (1) Malang, (2) Matwang, (3) Lungmin, (4) Tangsar, (5) Daru. Among Darus can be sub-divided into **seven sub-groups**. They are: (1) Ahkumpai, (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 Sondum 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 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 persons 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. They were originally eight of them and four had died.

Table-1. Darwi's siblings in Karoung Village

No	Name	Age	Height	Remarks
1	Luamdum Nan-hsein	60	127.5 cm	1 st daughters (alive)
2	-	-	-	1 st son (dead)
3	-	-	-	2 nd daughter (dead)
4	Luamdum Dee	-	-	2 nd son (dead)
5	Luamdum Sin	-	-	3 rd son (dead)
6	Luamdum Mar-hta	50	127.5 cm	3 rd daughter (alive)
7	Luamdum Darwi	45	132.5 cm	4 th son (alive)
8	Luamdum Nwin	43	125 cm	4 th 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 (Figure-2), married a Hta-Lu woman (Chan-yee-du-na) and had a son who died at the age of two months. She also died about two

¹ Descent traced exclusively through the male line for purpose of group membership

² Descent traced exclusively through the female line for purpose of group membership

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 (Table-1). The Taron nationals practice 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 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.

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 the 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 a luamdum man cannot marry a sondum womam. That is why the Taron tribes do not have **Endogamy**¹ but practice the **Exogamy**² system of marriage.

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 brother. Likewise no son or daughter of elder sister can marry any son or daughter of younger sister. It is Parallel cousin marriage and prohibited. (The chart of marriage system is attached.)

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 as real sisters and the brothers-in-law also are like own brothers. There is harmony and understanding in both parties.

Education

Karoung village has one primary school with 10 KG (kindergarten) pupils and 10 first standard (grade one) pupils. Because of difficulty in getting a teacher, the school's assistant. Clerk is teaching the children. The building is learning to one side a about to fall to pieces. There are no desks for the pupils any office furniture. There are twelve middle school Taron pupils who go and attend school in Putao. We see that the Tarons are paying attention to educating their children. They need to help of the authorities concerned to see that these Taron nationals receive higher education, be trained to take responsibility and return to their native region for development of their ethnic group.

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

Health

The most prevalent diseases are Malaria and worms. They also suffer from loose bowels, intestinal diseases and goiter. In a family there at least six to seven children and at most ten to twelve children and the oldest children look after the younger ones. There is no midwife to deliver the child. The mother has to deliver her own child. They are in great need of health education. So infant mortality is high but if they survive, they live a ripe old age. They also have to work till old age. We met the oldest Taron aged woman, Sondum Son – Wan, who is 100 years old.

Taron nationals die more from accident than from sickness. They fall down from the mountains or into the ravines of the Maykha river valley. They gather the fruit and roots of medicinal plants for use as domestic medicine. Magit bulbs and honey are used as strength giving tonics. The shepati (a plant like insect) is mixed with honey to take as health giving tonic. Although they have a lot of traditional medicines they prefer using modern medicine which is hard to get. So they have to use their own traditional medicine. Their domestic use medicines are khantauk roots, Mountain goat oil etc.

The Taron nationals have a good body structure. They have a light skin strong body. They have very little facial hair, like the moustache and sideburns. They are strong and sturdy people. It is known that luamdum Dawi could carry the weight like the other nationals, although he is being a dwarf. They could carry such burden easily difficult stones and cliffs of the ravines.

Economy

The chief economic occupation is Taung-Ya farming, hunting and bee- keeping. They grow wheat, corn, varieties of millet, sweet peas, and Nampangui. They can grow only enough for their family. They usually eat popped corn, wheat U Laing , Thon Sat. When relatives and visitors come they entertain with popped corn, U Laing and Lecha Cork which is tea with milk and salt. Scarcity of arable land, extreme climate and lack of technical knowledge, it is difficult to get self sufficiency even for the family. When they are free from work, the men climb the ice covered mountains to hunt as snares. When the ice melts, they dig for medicinal roots like Khantauk roots and search for Shipati insects. The Tarons are experts huntsmen because they go hunting for months on-end. Then they take the animal skins and animal products, medicinal roots and bulbs like Khantauk root and Magit Bulba, Shipati, cane baskets and bamboo containers along the ' Nanilakha' mountain valley trail to the little village ' Gyegtan ' and exchange them with what they need. They bring back dyes, salt, knives, funnel to blow the fire, socks and matches. It does not matter whether their goods are valuable or not. The important thing to get what they needed. So the barter system still exists in these regions. Today they do not have to pound the wheat for flour and in the mortar pound the wheat for flour and in the mortar pounders they have small water-powered mills. They also supplement their food by milling for hire. The charge is two condensed milk tins of four for milling one big square tin of wheat. Karoung village is lit by hydroelectricity. So, there is a potential of using hydroelectricity for other development purposes.

Religion

There are not any temple and monastery in that Karoung village, Tarons, live. Only one church is situated in the middle of the village. Now a day, all the Tarons are Christians and they attend to pray at the church in every Sunday. In that day, they came back home from their

Taung-Ya and the place which they hunt. In the Christian church, there are two stairways, one for men and the other for women. They also sit separately. So we see social grouping based on sex among the Taron ethnic group. They could also discuss their life's experiences, business and social situations here. Though it is said that Taron ethnic group of Karoung village have been converted to Christianity, the influence of worship of nat has not yet faded away. Tarons have never attacked their old belief and they themselves are taking part in the traditional ceremonies of worship.

Conclusion

The Taron populations are 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 made them mix with other Ethnic groups. So, the Taron ethnic groups as a dying out of dwarfs with only five genuine Tarons surviving now. Moreover, it is believed that the Tarons in Myanmar are short people due to a family gene and their daily food.

Acknowledgement

It is put forward my heart-felt acknowledge to Major General Maung Maung Swe, Commander of North Command. And again, a special word of thanks should go to Colonel Thein Nyunt, Minister and Colonel Than Swe, Director General of Ministry for Progress of Border Areas and National Races and Development Affairs. And then, all the teachers of Anthropology Department, University of Mandalay and Yangon. Last, but not least, thank you to the villagers who have answered my questions in collecting the data for this paper.

References

- Beals,R.L and Hoijer,H (1966) An Introduction to Anthropology
- Crapo, Richley H. (2002): Cultural Anthropology: Understanding Ourselves & Others, 5th ed.
- Gunagwei Chen(ed). (July, 2002) Biodiversity in the Eastern Himalayas Conservation through Dialogue, Kathmandu, Nepal: International centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD), Printed and bound in Nepal by Hillside Press Kathmandu.
- Haviland, William A. (1999) Cultural Anthropology 9th edition, Printed in the United States of America.
- Ko Ko,U. et al. (1966) Tarons in Burma. Rangoon, Burma; the Burma Medical Research Society
- Lenkeit, Roberta Edwards (2001): Introducing Cultural Anthropology, Manufactured in the United States of America.
- Min Naing, U (December, 2000) National ethnic groups of Myanmar
- ယိမ်းနွဲ့.ပါး (၁၉၅၅-ခုနှစ်မှ၁၉၅၆အတွင်း) ကချင်ပြည်နယ်-ပူတာအိုတောင်တန်းနယ်, အစီရင်ခံစာ



**Figure (1): Five genuine Taron
(from left to right) Luamdum Nan-hseinn, Sondum Son wan, Luamdum Darwi,
Luamdum Mar-hta, Luamdum Nwin**



Figure-2: Darwi in traditional dress