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Social Organization of Highland Village in Viti Levu

メタデータ	言語: en 出版者: 公開日: 2015-11-18 キーワード (Ja): キーワード (En): 作成者: 須藤, 健一 メールアドレス: 所属:
URL	http://hdl.handle.net/10502/5189

SOCIAL ORGANIZATION OF HIGHLAND VILLAGE

IN VITI LEVU

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Nadrau is a mountain village located in the upper reaches of the Sigatoka river in the Viti Levu island. The village belongs to the Navosa region of the Nadroga/Navosa Prefecture administratively. The founders were said to have migrated from the original village 10km downstream about 150 years before. Almost 110 people are now dwelling in about 20 houses 'vure'. No case of villages locating on the altitude higher than 500m above sea level has been reported regarding to the Oceanian islands except the New Guinean highland and the Fiji islands. The study of the village attracts great concern ethnologically and ecologically to clear the life of mountain people living under worse natural environments comparing to coastal and lowland people of the island. This report, however, is a preliminary one based on limited data collected from only one informant during the author's one day field study of the village.

Subsistence

The main crop of the village are 'dalo':Colocasia esculenta, 'via kana':Cyrtosperma chamissonis, 'vudi':Musa balbisiana, 'uvi':Dioscorea alata, 'tapioca':Manihot esculenta, and 'vauvauni viti':Hibiscus manihot whose edible leaves are utilized. Because of the lower annual temperature comparing to coastal and lowland area, sugarcane, 'kumara':Ipomoea batatas, 'niu':Cocos nucifera, and 'uto':Artocarpus altilis which are the main crops there are seldom grown in the village. Tapioca, 'yaqona':Piper methysticum, and recently introduced vegetables are mainly grown in the peripheral slopes cleared for the cultivation. Other crops are grown by slash and burn cultivation in the forest area away from the village. About 500m² secondary growth forest is burned and cleared annually. The cleared field is divided and yam, taro, banana, tapioca, and beans are grown separately. Newly

cleared field is used for a year or two before it is abandoned for next 15 years at least.

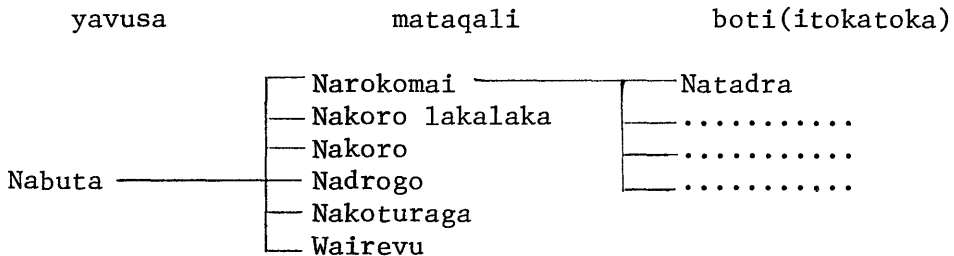
Potatos, tapioca, and 'yaqona' started to have commercial value since 1972 when a road to the near by town Tavua was constructed. These crops are now sold in the town's market with the following prices: \$5 for four to five pieces of taro, \$10 for 20kg of tapioca, and \$20 for five bundles of five year old yaqona root. The average monthly income of the village male from these crops is \$25.

Division of labor of the village traditionally categorized crop cultivation under slash and burn system for male whereas mat ('ibe') making from pandanus and bark cloth ('masi') making by battering inner bark of 'masi': Broussonetia papyrifera were for female. Disappearance of masi making during last 10 years, however, shifted also female to crop cultivation, and clear division of labor declined accordingly. The main livestock had been pig and chicken until 20 years before when cattle was introduced. Wild pig hunting in mountains and eel fishing in streams had also importance before.

Social Organization — 'mataqali', 'yavusa'—

Social group unit of the Nadrau society which owns land and form co-operative group economically and religiously is a localized descent group called 'mataqali'. It is basically a kinship group descending from one male ancestor. Mataqali can, therefore, be regarded as patrilineage. 6 mataqali groups are now known in the village. They are Narokomai, Nakorolakalaka, Nakoro, Nadrogo, Nakoturaga, and Wairevu.(Fig.1)

Fig.1 Geneology of descent group in Nadrau



They are ranked based on the time of migration, scale of lineage, and so on. Narokomai holds the best of the ranking. 'Mataqali' also relates to social status indicating hereditary occupation and job. 'Turaga'(chief), 'matanivanua'(spokesman), 'bete'(priest), 'bati'(warrior), and 'mataisau'(carpenter) are the example. 'Mataqali' members with these title do not always act and play the specific roles practically. These are the titles through

which politically subordinated 'mataqali' indicates political connections and relations among groups based on the servable role in the village society. In the Nadrau society, Narokomai takes the role of chief whereas the role of spokesman is done by Nadrogo.

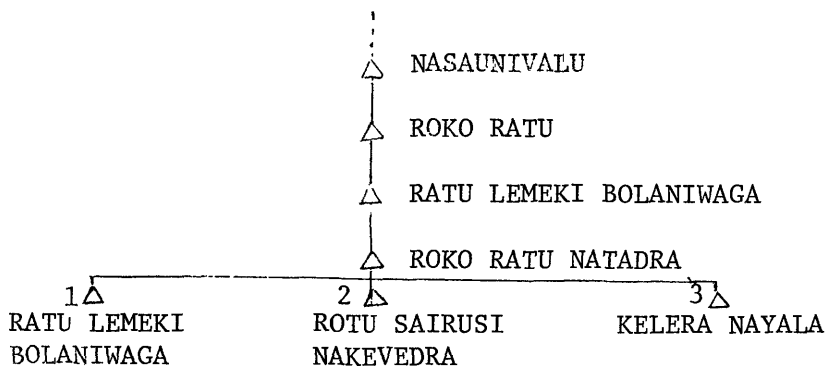
In the traditional society of Fiji, combination of these several 'mataqali' forms a superior social unit called 'yavusa'. Though the exact meaning is "land", 'yavusa' is a group of 'mataqali' allied under the idea of owning same ancestor. It functions externally as one group in case of wars to enlarge own territory and to expel invaders. There are cases that a village consists of several yavusa though only one 'yavusa' exists in the Nadrau village. The yavusa includes all of the six mataqali.

Family — 'boti' ('tokotoko'), 'vuvale'—

Mataqali consists of several extended patrilineal families called 'boti'. Boti came from "boti ni lovo" of "boti (edge/ one side) of lovo(earth oven)". It means "people who share the same earth oven". Boti is a unit of basical production activities and labor of village. It is also a group which organize rituals and feasts on the occasions like a coming-of-age ceremony of village member, reception for visiting important guests from outside, and construction of important buildings. Boti consists of patrilineal kin members of two to three generations. It has small ritual hut with alter to worship ancestor where 'yaqona' ritual is performed. 'Boti' member jointly clear forest for slash and burn cultivation and grow crops. The land held by each boti is divided and assigned by the chief of 'mataqali'.

The author chose the case of Mr. Roko Ratu Natadra who is 73 years old and the chief of the Narokomai 'mataqali' to explain the structure of 'boti' in the Nadrau society. He who has no brother organizes a boti with his three sons. All of his sons married and have their own households next to his house. (Fig.2)

Fig.2 Male descent line of Mr. NATADRA



According to the tradition of the Nadrau society, grandson succeeds to his grandfather's name. Mr. Natadra succeeded to Roko Ratu from his grandfather whereas his eldest son, Mr. Bolaniwaga, succeeded to his father's name, Ratu Lemeki. The basic dwelling unit of a house consists of a married couple and their unmarried children. This minimum dwelling unit or a household is called 'vu-vale'. In this way, Mr. Natadra's boti functions as fundamental social group which shares earth oven and performs both daily production activities and special feasts for specific ritual consists of four 'vu-vale'.

Segmentation of boti has developed traditionally by excessive demographical change either by over-population to the limited land resources or population shrinkage after wars and epidemics. The Narokomai lineage is now segmented into four 'boti'. The latest ramification of the lineage appeared when the chief was occupied by the generation of Mr. Natadra's grandfather. The segmentation in 'mataqali' has not appeared regularly through generations but as the result of unexpected unbalance between land resources and the population as mentioned above. Under present administrative system, a 'boti' has been replaced by minimum administrative unit called 'itokatoka' due to the over complicated diversification through the history. Introduction of 'itokatoka', however, made the situation more complicate to understand the Fijian society because the social unit of itokatoka is slightly different from that of boti which is strictly based on local self-sustained group.

Conclusion

The foundation of the Fijian village society consists of patrilineal descent groups called mataqali which own land as corporate groups. The Nadrau society of the Viti Levu island employed patrilineal lineage as the structural principle of mataqali, but in the Lau islands locating to the east the principle is not limited to that. Unbalance of carrying capacity among groups under certain natural condition of islands was the prime factor to make the inclusion of non-patrilineal people into mataqali member indispensable for the existence of a group. The definition of Firth was, therefore, applied to mataqali and it is now conceptualized as ramage (Sahlins 1962, Walter 1978).

Regarding to the study of the Fijian village society especially of the kinship group, it is necessary to develop comparative study in due consideration of natural environment which sustain groups especially the ecological factors like volcanic island and coral island, and lowland and highland.

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