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The Genesis of Socio-Cultural Developments in Nagaland



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Introduction

In recent times, the Nagas are the only people who are still holding on to their aboriginal, very unique and colourful way of life and culture. It would be good to have an insight into the origin of the Nagas as a tribal race, which followed animism for centuries before embracing Christianity. The sequel of transformations did not end here but continued through various developments in social, cultural and economic spheres. The transformation comprises notable milestones like formation of the Naga Club followed by NNC, Akbar Hydari Agreement, enforcement of article 371A, attaining Statehood, Shillong Accord, birth of the NSCN and its further splitting into various sub-factions, presently ongoing Naga Framework Agreement and Peace Accord and partial removal of Armed

Key Points

- Article 371A of the Constitution of India (1949) facilitates the Nagas to preserve, protect and retain their unique 'Naga' identity and way of life.
- The Nagas have different customs and traditions as per tribes and each custom has some logic behind it. Some of these are match-making customs, head hunting and occupation of mountain ranges for settlement.
- Naga customs and Traditions, being well protected under Article 371A, are conforming with the Indian Law and the State has granted autonomy to a fairly large extent to different tribes.
- The aspects which are binding them together and are responsible for conferring them the unique identity as Nagas, needs to be nurtured further. The aspects that are peculiar to a tribe and leads to divisiveness in the society, needs to be harmonised well so as to make it an asset for the Naga society.
- The Nagas need to learn lessons from the rest of India and the world wherein many customs and traditions have been suitably modified to remain relevant in current times.



Force Special Powers Act (AFSPA) from selected locations. On the flipside, the Nagas pioneered the North East insurgency and sadly even today, it is thriving as the longest running insurgency in the world. It is an earnest endeavour of the Government of India to establish a lasting peace in the region. The changing times gave birth and impetus to social organisations like the Naga Hoho, Naga Mother's Association (NMA), Student Union and Tribal Apex bodies as also few NGOs working in the social, cultural and human rights sphere. The sequence of events and developments in Nagaland needs to be viewed holistically alongwith socio-cultural developments, so that grassroot issues, needing attention, can be identified precisely. An analysis of this with a practical and realistic approach will surely benefit the Naga society immensely.

Naga Identity to Nagaland as an Indian State

North East India was brought under British colonial rule over the 19th Century, starting with the annexation of the Garo Hills in 1822. This was extended to Assam in 1826, post the defeat of the Burmese in the first Anglo-Burmese War. The Treaty of Yandabo (February 1826), between the British and the Burmese, was instrumental in partially bringing the Naga Hills under British administration, although many parts, especially Eastern Nagaland, remained 'un-administered' throughout the British rule. Post the Treaty of Yandabo, the Naga Hills became sandwiched between Manipur and Assam, which were under British administration.¹ The British adopted various policies viz, 'Control from Outside', 'Control from Within', 'Non-interference' and 'Forward Policy' with the basic aim to bring the Nagas under their control. As far as the administration of these areas was concerned, a non-regulation pattern was followed— quite different from what was in vogue in the rest of British India. The full extent of various laws, rules and regulations were inapplicable. Once these hill areas/ tracts were annexed and the situation stabilised, a 'paternalistic' approach was adopted that allowed the people to exercise their discretion in their day to day affairs, as per their age-old customs and traditions. Traditional hierarchies and structures remained intact and tribal chiefs continued to wield authority over their respective tribes, with Naga *Gaon Buras* (Headmen) given a distinctive 'red blanket' as a symbol of their status. No treaty, however, was ever signed between the Nagas and the British even during the occupation of certain portions of the Naga Hills, basically central Nagaland as it exists today.



Another area which consisted of trans-Dikhu tribes i.e. the Eastern Nagaland, amongst whom the Konyaks were the largest tribe, remained 'un-administered' throughout British rule. Annexation continued unabated despite proclamations to the contrary by Queen Victoria following the first War of Independence (1857-58). However, what remained to be formally colonised were the areas of present day Arunachal Pradesh and the Naga & Lushai Hills. With the advent of Christianity, the Nagas following 'aboriginal animism' were converted. This mission was initiated by American Baptist Christian Missionaries in 1872, notably Dr. EW Clark², who laid the foundation of Christianity at Molungyimsen village in today's Mokokchung District. These missionaries were the 'harbingers of education' in Nagaland.

Under British administration, the Naga Hills were baptised with various terminologies such as 'Backward Tribe', by the Act of 1919, which was later on termed as 'Excluded and Partially Excluded Areas' by the promulgation of Government of India Act, 1935. These semantics gave rise to a feeling that the Naga Hills were not part of India and caused a lot of misconception among Nagas and other tribes about the status of Nagaland in British India. At this juncture, the seedling of Nagalim or independent Nagaland took root, and numerous Nagas felt that the Naga Hills were not part of India because these were an 'excluded area'. The 'excluded areas' came under the executive control of the Governor of Assam, and no act of the Assam or Indian Legislatures could apply to the Naga Hills unless the Governor so directed. Such an arrangement, with suitable modifications, continues even today as promulgated through Article 371A of the Indian Constitution, which lays down special provisions with respect to the State of Nagaland. This led the Nagas to believe that the hill areas constituted some kind of the British 'Crown Colony' — separate and independent from India. The administrative arrangement devised by the Government of India Act 1935, gave the British an advantage, in later years, wherein they used this provision to prevent national political parties from extending their influence in this region. The British were successful in preventing the winds of nationalism from reaching Nagaland and also nourishing the idea that once the British left India, the Nagas would be allowed to decide their own fate. This led to the Nagas total absence and non-participation in the Indian Freedom Struggle, which suited the British. The British succeeded in bringing most of the North East under colonial rule by the end of the 19th century. Their policies of excluded / partially excluded areas and the somewhat de-centralised pattern of administration kept these areas and their people out

of touch with the sweeping changes taking place in the rest of India, particularly in the political arena. Resultantly even today, some of the areas are still socio-economically underdeveloped and poorly governed.

Article 371A of the Constitution of India (1949) facilitates the Nagas to preserve, protect and retain their unique 'Naga' identity and way of life. The special provisions, with respect to the State of Nagaland are, that no act of Parliament in respect of:-³

- Religious or social practices of the Nagas.
- Naga customary law and procedure.
- Administration of the civil and criminal justice involving decisions according to Naga customary laws.
- Ownership and transfer of land and its resources shall apply to the State of Nagaland.

Development in Nagaland from Independence to Statehood and Post Statehood

Nagaland attained statehood on 01 December 1963. Since then, there has been a popularly elected democratic government in place. A popularly elected government, having the mandate of the people, should have been able to effect change and dispel the feeling of alienation and bring about development in the State. With successive governments 'working under the shadow of the gun' and both the elected government and the various factions claiming to be the rightful representatives of the people and heirs to the Naga national cause, development in the State of Nagaland has floundered. This is despite the fact that the people of Nagaland now have their own government and are free to "work out a pattern of life combining traditional values with the necessity to adapt themselves to the modern world".⁴ However, a weak infrastructure and an alarming rate of unemployment and impoverishment tells a different story.

There are many claimants to the unique Naga legacy, be it the elected governments or various armed factions. In a way, this rigidity in preserving their uniqueness, has only been a hindrance in the economic and social development of the State. Certain practices, which marginalises women from the development process in the name of customs and traditions, will always hamper the progress of the society as a whole. With changing times, Nagas have

realised this fact and are moving towards acceptance of women in many fields. Few examples are, five women contested in 2018 State Legislative Assembly elections and recently Smt. Phangnon Konyak was elected as the woman MP to Rajya Sabha's only seat from Nagaland. The people of Nagaland have to find a balance and work out a pattern of life combining traditional values and adapting themselves to the modern world. Traditional cultures, with all of their richness, variety and creativity need to be treated with respect and can make an important contribution to development, if not kept static but allowed to evolve continually. There are few Nagas of Nagaland, who are of the opinion that the NSCN (IM), today's so called dominant faction has not brought any economic benefits to the Nagas and they have not promoted a single economic initiative to benefit the people of Nagaland.

The Genesis of Political Activism and Rebellion

In World War I, few Nagas served actively in France. This exposure to the rest of the world sowed the seeds of Naga nationalism, leading to the creation of the Naga Club in 1918 under the stewardship of the legendary Angami Zapu Phizo. In 1929, the Naga Club submitted a representation to the Simon Commission wherein the Nagas stated that they wished to be left out from the proposed reformed scheme of India. They preferred to be under direct administration of the British. The British Government, however, did not agree and merely clubbed the Naga areas as 'Excluded Areas'.

In World War II the Japanese invaded Burma and attempted to enter India through Manipur and the Naga Hills. The Nagas were involved in extensive fighting that erupted in Ukhrul and in the Naga Hills— majority of the Nagas supported the British; a small group joined the Indian National Army (INA) and supported Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose. After the war, the Deputy Commissioner of the Naga Hills, Sir Charles Pawsey, established an organisation called Naga Hills District Council in 1945 to repair the damages of the war. However, in April 1946, in its Wokha session, it was rechristened as the Naga National Council (NNC). In due course of time, this led to the formation of the NNC in 1946, even prior to Indian independence. The NNC had urged the British that, in light of the ambiguous status of the Naga Hills and Tracts, these should not be included in independent India, but left to decide their own fate. The point to note here is that Nagaland declared independence on 14 August 1947, a day prior to India.



The famous Nine Point Agreement, known as the 'Hydari Agreement' or Naga-Akbar Hydari Agreement was signed in June 1947. In a nutshell, tremendous amount of autonomy was granted to the Nagas. Administrative issues of Nagaland pertaining to Judicial, Executive, Legislative, Agriculture, Land, Taxation, Boundaries and Arms Act were streamlined with the aim of governing Nagaland as part of an independent India.

Clause 9 of the Hydari Agreement became a bone of contention. This clause speaks about the 'Period of Agreement' which states, "The Governor of Assam as the Agent of the Government of the Indian Union will have a special responsibility for a period of 10 years to ensure the observance of the agreement, at the end of this period the Naga Council will be asked whether they require the above agreement to be extended for a further period or a new agreement regarding the future of Naga people be arrived at".⁵ However, this resulted in different interpretations as the Government of India implied that it was a peaceful step to integrate the Nagas into the Union of India and the Nagas misinterpreted it for grant of freedom after 10 years. Subsequently, the NNC got divided into Moderates and Extremists, with most of the moderate leaders eliminated by extremists in the 1950s and 1960s. On 22 March 1952, Phizo formed the underground Naga Federal Government (NFG) and the Naga Federal Army (NFA). As the Nagas were not psychologically prepared for the transition from British to Indian rule, a special status in terms of Article 371A, was promulgated in 1949. Many felt that it was accorded to appease the Nagas to join the Indian Union with the aim that Nagas continue to reap the benefits of existing autonomy and progress with the rest of India. Failure to reach any agreement on the issue of autonomy resorted in a full-fledged armed rebellion in 1956 which continues till date, as the longest running insurgency in the world.

Before moving ahead, a special note about the peculiarity of Naga insurgency is that whenever there has been an external aggression against India— be it 1948 Indo-Pak War, 1962 Indo-China or 1965 Indo-Pak War, or the 1971 war for the liberation of Bangladesh, the Naga insurgents never misused these critical periods of time for their benefit, in spite of lack of security force deployment in the area. Hence, it is clearly evident that Naga insurgency is more of a political problem than a law and order problem.



The Government of India sent in the Army to deal with the insurgency and in 1958, AFSPA was enacted. Subsequently, the Naga Hills, a district of Assam, was upgraded to Nagaland State in 1963 and the first state-level democratic elections were held in 1964. On 11 November 1975, the Government motivated a section of the NNC leaders to sign the Shillong Accord, under which this faction of the NNC agreed to give up arms and thus an agreement was reached, namely the Shillong Accord. This sought to end the rebellion, but it was rejected by a section of the Naga population as a sell-out to the Indian Government. During the 1980s, the NNC also further split into Accordist and Non-Accordist, which led to the formation of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN). A group of about 140 members led by Thuingaleng Muivah, who were at that time in China, refused to accept the Shillong Accord. They formed the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) in 1980. The other important leaders were Isak Chisi Swu and SS Khaplang— Isak Swu became the President and Muivah became the General Secretary of NSCN (IM). Isak Swu passed away in June 2016 and Muivah was also not keeping in good health since long, being approximately 90 years of age.

Over the years, the NSCN underwent numerous splits and fallouts, which gave birth to a number of factions. The split amongst factions was primarily due to personal gains, aggrandisements and interpersonal differences between leaders and their personal petty interests and rather than ideologies. The first split of the NSCN gave birth to NSCN (Isak-Muivah) and NSCN (Khaplang) after a violent clash. At the same time, the NNC began to fade away and the NSCN factions came to be seen as forerunners in the region. Thereafter, in 2011, NSCN (K) further split into the NSCN (K) and NSCN (Khole-Kitovi), with the former being more centred around the Naga areas astride the Indo-Myanmar border. Recently, the NSCN (KK) was rechristened as NSCN (KN) — Kitovi Zhimomi/ Neopao Konyak after Khole Konyak was defected to the NSCN (IM) in 2016 and become its vice chairperson.

In the past, the NSCN (KK) has always projected itself as a group that stands only for the Nagas of Nagaland. The NSCN (IM) has been demanding the inclusion of Naga inhabited areas of Manipur, South-Eastern Arunachal Pradesh, parts of Assam into the proposed scheme of 'Nagalim' (Greater Nagaland). The Khaplang faction that is NSCN (K) was asking for an independent Nagaland comprising the present State of Nagaland and the Naga Hills



of Burma, but not necessarily including other Naga inhabited areas. In 1997, a ceasefire agreement was signed, initially with the NSCN (IM) and thereafter with NSCN (K) in 2001 and subsequently with other groups. This ceasefire lasted, without any major incident, until March 2015 when the NSCN (K) unilaterally abrogated the ceasefire by launching attacks on the Assam Rifles and the Indian Army in Nagaland and Manipur. This led to a further split in the NSCN (K) through the birth of a new faction—the NSCN (Reformation) under Y Wantin, in April 2015. In 2018, the Myanmar based NSCN (K) split into two factions, one led by its impeached chairman of Indian origin Khango Konyak as NSCN (K2) and the other by Yung Aung NSCN K-YA(K-1).

Nagaland has been facing insurgency for more than six decades now and therefore, this has been one of the major reason for underdevelopment of the state. The idea of a sovereign Nagaland has weakened with time. Majority of the Nagas are of the view that 'Nagalim' is an utopian dream and therefore are okay with Nagaland under the Union of India with adequate freedom i.e. keeping their unique Naga identity intact. When questioned 'Do the insurgent outfits in Nagaland represent the aspirations of the common people?'. Almost everyone feels that, while they might have represented the aspirations of the Nagas in the past, but over the years they have been unable to fulfil those. This is the reality as perceived by the present generation and gradually dawning on the older generation too.

Understanding Uniqueness of the Naga Identity in Present Context

While reading and knowing about the anthropological trail, socio-economic and traditional factors, an inquisitive thought comes to the mind that, "what confers them an unique identity—"The Nagas!'"?. If one tries to find out, then will realise that there are numerous factors which are quite peculiar and unique to the tribes from this North Eastern belt— aspects like dwelling houses on hill tops and ridgelines, which are mostly hidden among clouds and beneficial for defensibility. Most of the Naga villages are perched on top of ridgelines and divided into Khels, with Khel entrances decorated and carved in wood or stone; migration to new heights and mountain ranges for want of space, shifting cultivation – 'Jhoom Farming', common eating habits with mostly carnivorous diets, similar costumes, peculiar design of houses and morungs, huge log drums, looks—mongoloid features, religious beliefs — animism, use of similar tools and weapons —Dao (bill-hook), spears



etc. No two tribes and villages have common language but the basics of lexicography are sharing common origin i.e. Tibeto-Burmese, festivals coinciding with sowing and harvesting of crops, animal motifs and totems. These are the factors which confers them an unique identity as 'The Nagas'. It is also pertinent to note that there are some aspects which are unique to a particular tribe and not common which will be emphasised subsequently, however these are enhancing ideology like 'unity in diversity' instead of becoming a dividing factor.

The Framework Agreement signed on 03 August 2015 is looked upon as an important event facilitating a more flexible template of peace making. The acknowledgement of the uniqueness of Naga history and culture by the Indian Government and the acceptance and primacy of the Indian Constitution by various parties involved, are the highlights of this agreement. This also signifies that the NSCN (Isak-Muivah) has abandoned the objective of 'establishing an independent sovereign state for the Naga people'. After the demise of Isak Chisi Swu, Muivah was the senior most Naga rebel leader of the faction. The contents of this agreement were kept secret. However on 20 July 2018, Shri R N Ravi, the (then) Interlocutor for Naga talks briefed the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Home Affairs that it was a departure from the NSCN (IM)'s earlier position of "With India, not within India". Mr Ravi also shed some light by stating that, the Nagas have now reached a common understanding with the Government that "boundaries of the States will not be touched and some special arrangements would be made for the Nagas, wherever they are". The concept of 'Greater Nagaland' may not be acceptable to the adjoining States and is not practical. Majority feel that the realignment of geographical boundaries is not a solution to the problem of insurgency in Nagaland.⁶

The Naga Peace Accord stakeholders belief in the Naga peace process is that, the Government will not approve any alteration in territorial boundaries and that 'One Solution for All' will be coming soon. All factions are taken on board. The State Government is advocating inclusivity in talks, it is promoting initiatives to project itself as a unifying factor and the State is also acknowledging the fact that any distortion of territorial boundaries will not be acceptable to the neighbouring States. The Civil Society Organisations (CSOs)



advocates inclusivity and early solution. However, the Manipuri Naga CSOs want inclusion of Nagas of Manipur.

The three contentious issues — a separate flag, Naga Constitution and territorial integration of the Naga inhabited areas, are still pending. The scope of the talks has been broadened since the NNPGs i.e. six other Naga armed groups joined the negotiating process. Having signed ceasefires, these underground Naga armed groups are now calling themselves 'Naga National Political Groups' and are operating as one block. Under the federal structure, the Central Government is not in a position to ask any other State to give away parts of its territory. Hence, 'the ball is in the NSCN-(IM)'s court' to persuade and convince these States, through democratic and political processes. The other issue is of no separate flag for the State of Nagaland, but any individual or group wishing to use a Naga flag for non-governmental purposes is free to do so. It is learnt that Nagas have agreed to sign a peace accord without a separate Naga Constitution and with a "conditional flag" that can only be allowed for non-governmental purposes. The third issue of a separate Naga Constitution should be resolved by democratic and political process.

Political Economy of Naga Insurgency

In spite of receiving the highest financial aid from the Centre, the State suffers with low quality infrastructure. For instance, despite a high road density, access remains a problem as many roads are dilapidated and prone to landslides, affecting transportation of people and goods & services adversely especially during monsoons. Hence, one experiences 'roadless roads' while travelling in Nagaland. Slow progress on infrastructure is affecting citizens' access to healthcare institutions in the State, most of which are Government run in predominantly rural areas.

The common man in Nagaland ends up paying half of his earnings as taxes to various underground factions even though he is not paying any taxes to the Government of India. Most communities of Nagaland (Nagas) are listed as Scheduled Tribes and are thus exempted from Income Tax under Section 10 (26) of the 'Tax' Act. But, as per the locals, almost everyone, police too, pays 'Tax' to several underground factions, the rates varying



from 12 - 24% of a month's salary or income. Nagaland has various insurgent factions who impose different forceful 'donations' — income, shop, commercial and house tax etc., to generate 'revenue' for their self-styled insurgent outfit. In order to fight this menace, Action Committee Against Unabated Taxation (ACAUT), a citizens group, was formed in 2014 to protest against extortion and multiple levies. Today, the acronym stands for Against Corruption and Unabated Taxation, which reflects the group's expanded sphere of activities.⁷

Nagaland, with over 50 years of its Statehood, is still lagging behind in economic development in spite of its immense natural resources and a larger prospect for the tourism industry to flourish. The prolonged insurgency coupled with the problem of unabated taxation and corruption has resulted in creating disillusionment among the people, who are not willing to establish businesses in Nagaland. Rampant extortion has furthermore, discouraged any worthwhile investments in the State from outside.

Religious Demography, Tribal Bodies and Institutions

The State's population is 1.978 million, out of which 88% are Christians. The Census of 2011 recorded the State's Christian population to be around 1.740 million, making it one of the three Christian majority States in India along with Meghalaya and Mizoram.

The Naga Hoho is an apex body of all the Naga tribes. It was formed on 25 June 1994 at Wokha. The main objective of Naga Hoho is to uphold the solidarity of the Nagas, safeguard and protect their traditional life, promote social, cultural, economic and political heritage and facilitate early settlement of the Naga issue. For decades, the Naga Hoho has held sway over every aspect of life in tribal dominated Nagaland. More than the Government of the day, it is the Naga Hoho that 'calls the shots'— without their approval, the Government cannot enact or pass any legislation. Thus, the Naga Hoho, in spite of being a non - constitutional body, enjoys tremendous power.

Women groups in North East India have persistently expressed their desire for peace and have condemned violence. The most prominent among such groups being the Naga Mother's Association (NMA). It came into existence on 14 February 1984 and encourages

human development through education, aims at eradicating social evils & economic exploitation and works towards peace & progress. The NMA provides facilities for de-addiction in a State wherein rampant abuse of alcohol and drugs exist. The NMA was also instrumental in the Supreme Court ruling in 2016 for implementation of 33 percent reservation for women in the Urban Local Bodies in Nagaland. However, the Naga Hoho felt that such a ruling would infringe upon Naga customary laws and hence organised called for boycott and violent protests in February 2017, which ultimately led to revoking of the provision in the Nagaland Assembly.⁸

The Eastern Nagaland Peoples' Organisation (ENPO) is an apex organisation of seven Naga tribes (Changs, Khiamnuingans, Konyaks, Phoms, Sangtams, Tikhir and Yimchunger) inhabiting the districts of Tuensang, Mon, Kiphire and Longleng bordering Myanmar. The ENPO is demanding the creation of a separate State within Nagaland. People belonging to the local tribes, across these four districts, first raised the banner for a new State on 25 May 2007 at a rally in Tuensang. They have alleged that successive Governments in Nagaland, dominated by the Angami and Ao tribes, have failed to bring about socio-economic development in Eastern Nagaland and that the area is suffering due to lack of proper infrastructure. The ENPO has argued that, the area was neither part of India or erstwhile Burma until Independence. After Independence, it was put under the then North East Frontier Agency and was only merged with Nagaland when the State was created in the 1960s. In spite of the Peace Accords being inked over the years, it is a 'Catch 22' situation wherein major Naga factions are demanding Greater Nagaland on one hand and on the other, the ENPO has raised demands for bifurcation of the State.⁹

Naga Customs & Traditions and Its Relevance in Modern Times

Since ancestral times, the customs, beliefs, values, and opinions of Naga society were handed down from their ancestors by 'word of mouth' and continued through practice. There are 17 major Naga tribes which include the Angami, Ao, Chakesang, Chang, Kachari, Khiamniungan, Konyak, Kukis, Lotha, Phom, Pochury, Rengma, Sangtam, Sumi, Tikhir, Yimchunger, Zeliang. The Ao tribe of Mokokchung is one of the largest Naga tribes. The Aos became the first Naga tribe to be converted into Christianity by Baptist Missionaries



in 1872. It is evident that, the Churches although were able to 'convert', but have been unable to 'integrate' Naga's till date. The Angamis are natives of capital Kohima and are well known for their art, architecture and colourful costumes. The Angamis also practices the interesting 'stone pulling ceremony' wherein the entire village gathers and pulls a large monolith from the forest to their village, thereby marking a chapter in their history. The Chakhesang tribe of Pfutsero are culturally alike to the Angamis. The Sema tribe of Zunheboto is also a large Naga community. The Lothas of Wokha district is another prominent Naga tribe who are well known for their bamboo crafts. The Zeliangrong tribe comprises of Zeme, Liangme and Rongme clans and hence the tribe name 'Zeliangrong' is combination of first syllable of each clan i.e. Ze-liang-rong. They dwell in remote villages in the mountains of southern Nagaland and Manipur, the Morung (dormitory) at Benreu village is considered the oldest in Nagaland. The Konyaks of remote Mon district were known for their head hunting traditions, many Konyak villages are still governed by their Angh (King). The Konyaks are also well known for their war dances during the Aoling Festival. Few Naga tribes such as Chang, Sangtam, Yimchunger and Khiamniungan co-exist in Tuensang area. Phom, Pochury and Rengma are some of the Naga tribes with smaller populations.¹⁰

Nagaland is the land of festivals. All the tribes celebrate their distinct seasonal festivals with a pageantry of colour and a feast of music. Nagaland has a rich linguistic tradition with as many languages as there are tribes, each exclusive to itself. What is even more remarkable is that, even within the language of a particular tribe, there are dialects mutually unintelligible. For instance, in some tribes like the Angami, every village has a slightly different variation even within the same dialect, this variance progressively increases with geographical distance. This makes inter-tribe and intra-tribe communication very difficult. However, in recent times, English has come to serve as the State language while Nagamese, a kind of pidgin Assamese, has become the *lingua franca*. The Nagas used to follow community life pattern i.e. hunt in groups, work in groups, eat in groups, sleep in groups and the social institutions have high essence.¹¹

In the past, a Naga village was never considered complete without the existence of a Morung. The first thing villagers used to do, soon after establishment of a village, was the selection of a site for the Morung. The village priest used to offer an animal sacrifice on that

site and then constructions of the Morung used to commence. Once completed, the traditional 'Morung' became the focal point of the village. It is also regarded as a place of congregation for announcements and meetings, with calls made by beating a big log drum. It is also used as a place for imparting tribe knowledge to the youth when they attain the age of puberty.

Morung—the youth dormitory, is a significant social and cultural institution, a centre for social, religious and political activities. Its significance is now dying down, and to some extent, is getting delinked from the Naga way of life due to modern education and Christianity. The 'Morung' used to teach techniques of agriculture, basketry, weapon making, hunting, blacksmith, folk songs, traditional dance and the girls dormitory used to teach activities like weaving. The principles of the 'Morung' or Sobaliba (an Ao-Naga term that refers to 'ethical way of living with regard to society, culture, tradition, environment and nature) governed behaviour. These also included extending help to the needy, sharing one's belongings, respecting elders, selflessness, truthfulness, honesty, adherence to customs, traditions and altruism. Naga oral traditions were kept alive in the Morung and passed on from one generation to the next in the form of folk songs, dances and folk tales. The 'Morung' played the role that the 'Church' plays in today's society. The match making custom of Angamis involves the dying posture of a strangulated fowl, which decides the fate of the couple and the Ao Mongsen tribe couple has to go on a trading expedition and the success of it decides the fate of the couple.

The Nagas used to give 'Feast of Merit'— a cultural phenomenon indicating the host's generosity, wherein the host used to offer paddy, buffalo, rice beer, pigs to the guests. Naga society never differentiated between the poor and the rich. For them, it used to be freedom for all and equal opportunities to all. The Missionaries came to Nagaland around 150 years ago and convinced the then 'animist Nagas' to convert to Christianity. Around that time, a lot was done by the missionaries in the fields of education and health, thereby bringing a marked change in the Naga Society.

The Nagas have different customs and traditions as per tribes and each custom has some logic behind it. Some of these are match-making customs, head hunting and occupation of

mountain ranges for settlement. The much talked about 'head hunting' tradition involves beheading a person / group of people from neighbouring hill ranges and decorating their skulls outside the house to portray bravery. The custom of Khel, which apart from being a part of the village, is responsible for cultivating a piece of land (community farming). Many Nagas are of the opinion that Naga customs and traditions are not the cause for tribalism and divisions in society, rather, the real cause is politics, NGOs and poor - rich divide.

The various institutions formed in modern times based on the Naga customs and traditions are as under:-

- Naga Hoho.
- Apex bodies of each Tribe, viz. Ao Senden.
- The Dobashis in the Customary Courts.
- Common discussions and gatherings at 'Morung'.
- Village council system headed by 'Gaonburhas'.
- Women Organizations viz. Vatsu Mungdang.
- Naga Mother's Association (NMA).
- Student Unions viz. Ao Kaketsier Mungdang.

The recent Naga customs, after embracing Christianity, involves the attending of Church meetings and mass. But there is no cross attendance i.e. one particular tribe and village, which is affiliated with a respective tribal Church, will attend mass only in that Church. It portrays inherent divisiveness along with strong cohesiveness of Naga society i.e. one Naga group from a village on one ridgeline/ mountain top goes 'head hunting' and attack the Naga's from adjoining ridgeline/ mountain top. So, when it comes to unity within a particular tribe/ village, then they were very cohesive and on the other side they were a strong foe to the neighbouring Naga tribe/ village. It is akin to the age-old Naga tradition of mass, community worshipping of spirits and supernatural powers. It reflects the modern way of social unity, since each individual attends a Church of a particular denomination as per his/ her beliefs. It plays an important role of bonding the group of people in a peaceful manner and in mending the wayward behaviour of individuals and the society at large.

As per the Nagas, the age-old Naga customs and traditions still holds importance because of the unique identity of the past and that it is still relevant in the present era and needs to be cherished. They still like to adhere to the customs and traditions that are peculiar to their respective tribes. However, majority do feel that a common customary law can be developed. Though, this is a complex task, due to uniqueness of each tribe, however the purpose is to strike a balance and reach out to commonness at places possible so as to strengthen the cohesiveness amongst Nagas.

Naga customs and Traditions, being well protected under Article 371A, are conforming with the Indian Law and the State has granted autonomy to a fairly large extent to different tribes. For example, the Sumi tribe practices hereditary kingship, each individual tribe has different councils at various levels of hierarchy i.e. village, range and tribal level and it deals with disputes as per customary laws. Customary Courts have been vested with powers to decide cases involving customary laws. Autocratic traditions like the position of the Konyak tribe head i.e. 'Angh' is still respected in the democratic State Legislative Assembly. Article 371 A, also protects the land, natural resources, customs and the identity of the Nagas.

'Naga Customary Laws' are largely patriarchal in nature. Some of the reasons and thought processes behind it are:

- The Naga society is inclusive of women and girl child and the wellbeing of the family. However, the females do not have any say in the decision making process of the society.
- The Nagas, being patriarchal 'Head Hunters', believe that women are a weaker sex, who needs to be confined to the limits of family boundaries and not to be exposed or involved in any outside matters.
- Patriarchy is embedded in all spheres of Naga society starting from Khel, village, tribe and influenced right up till the State Legislative Assembly.
- As per Nagas, the role of the woman is only confined to help in households, farming, rearing of livestock i.e. pigs, fowl, chickens etc., giving birth to children and rearing them. In modern times, Naga women supports the society by being part of Naga Mothers Association and fought for liquor and drugs ban and protested against AFSPA and security forces.

- Today, the literacy rate of women is at par with men and you can see Naga women as entrepreneurs, bureaucrats, academicians and even in insurgent groups and armed forces, thus their status has improved.
- The effect of Christianity has liberalised the view about women and given them limited freedom.
- The women are given equal rights to vote and to be elected except for reservations.

Age-old Naga Customs and Traditions have not kept pace with the times and may be an underlying factor towards lack of development in Nagaland. Even though the world has long ago shed feudal practices, the Nagas have resisted any evolution in their customary practices. This poses a hurdle in introduction of new laws in sync with the changing times. Article 371A prohibits the Indian Parliament from making laws that meddle with the Naga customary laws and practices without the permission of the Nagaland State Assembly.

The range of exceptions is so wide that most laws of the land, that are applicable to the rest of the citizens of India, are exceptions for the Nagas. For example, the Nagas can hunt and savour deer meat but any other Indian citizen may be jailed for doing the same. Any perceived infringement of Article 371A is met with extreme resistance, and exploited by local / tribal leaders in the name of maintaining the 'unique status and identity' of Nagas and Nagaland. The land is protected under Article 371A, hence the Government finds it very difficult to acquire land for any development purpose like road widening, constructions etc. and any such initiatives are met with lot of resistance.

The customs and traditions are not codified, and varies from tribe to tribe, thus making them vulnerable to differing interpretations. Some of the rules that were not applied, for instance, those regarding Income Tax and Registration of Land; such exceptions still continues today, there being no Income Tax in Nagaland and all land belongs to the village/ tribe and rather than the state. Effects of such exemptions are visible even today. When the demonetisation took effect in November 2016, many people made a bee-line for Nagaland to turn in their unaccounted wealth. It was done through Naga locals and friends who did not have to

disclose their source of income, or who could not be penalised for not having declared it earlier.

Another case in point is the reservation of 33 percent seats for women in local body elections as required by law.¹² Naga local leaders led by the Naga Hoho argued that this amounted to interference in social practices of Naga Society and organised a boycott and violent protests in February 2017, which ultimately led to revoking of the provision in the Nagaland Assembly. The point to note is that Nagaland has never elected a women legislator to the Assembly since it gained Statehood in 1963. In the 2018 Assembly elections, out of 195 candidates in the fray, only five were women and none was elected. A forward looking, enabling and empowering law that is in keeping with modern times was thus scuttled.¹³ Naga society is patriarchal in nature and the Nagas neglected women and was non- women inclusive so far. However, now with the changing time, the status of women is improving. Recently, Smt Phangnon Konyak was elected as woman MP to Rajya Sabha's only seat from Nagaland. Nowadays women enjoys certain rights and privileges and also can actively participate in the proceedings of the house.

Can preservation of Naga 'Uniqueness' and 'Development' go hand-in-hand? The Nagas have always claimed that they have a unique history and culture. The uniqueness of age-old Naga customs and traditions has already been talked about. Officially, there are 17 Naga Tribes and each tribe takes great pride in their unique identity. Infact, all these tribes are so well woven by their respective culture and traditions that it is almost impossible to unite them for a common cause. Nagaland with seventeen different tribes, each with unique dialect and cultural practices, reflects 'societies within a society'. While others may perceive Naga society as one, in actuality it is a story of mistrust, ruptures and rifts between different tribes. Naga tribes lack tribal unity and they are known to fight amongst themselves. Inter-tribal perception differences and prejudices are a major barrier in their development process.

The Convergence and Divergence of Interests

There are various common aspects which confer Nagas their unique identity. The range of these aspects is very wide —it starts right from village dwellings on hill tops/ top most ranges of mountains, peculiar designs of houses, cooking and dressing habits, possession of similar

weapons like daos and spears, institutions like Morung, and more minor customs and traditions like match-making to death ceremonies. The aspects which are binding them together and are responsible for conferring them the unique identity as Nagas, needs to be nurtured further. The aspects that are peculiar to a tribe and leads to divisiveness in the society, needs to be harmonised well so as to make it an asset for the Naga society. Some of the uncommon or dividing aspects are Christianity, modern education system, spread of politics, customs and traditions necessitating adaptation.

Conclusion

North East India and resultantly Nagaland came under British administration, post the Treaty of Yandabo and with the advent of Christianity the Nagas following 'animism' got 'civilised'. The Nagas were given ample freedom to run the State as per their age-old customs and traditions and special status was accorded for this purpose through various provisions like 'Excluded and Partially Excluded Areas, Hydari Agreement and Article 371A. However, this had an adverse effect on Nagas and they started believing that they are a separate entity from the Union of India and the seeds of 'Nagalism' were sown. The Naga nationalist feeling gave birth to the NNC and subsequently it transformed into numerous insurgent outfits viz. NNC, NSCN (IM), NSCN (KK) etc. with differing ideologies. The Naga Peace Accord (NPA) is in its final stage and now it has been made more inclusive by participation of almost all the stakeholders like NNPGs, Legislative Forum, NGOs etc. There are numerous factors that confer the Nagas an unique identity. There is a dire necessity to weave together the common factors amongst the tribes starting from customs, traditions and institutions, festivals, right upto administrative arrangements. The converging factors need to be harmonised and differences resolved, maybe by keeping them aside as variations. The Naga customs, traditions and institutions need to evolve with time and its harmonising will definitely contribute to peace and development in the region.

To conclude, we all are hopeful that this will contribute in a way to bring Peace and Unity amongst various Tribes in Nagaland and make the Nagas strike a balance between their age-old customs and traditions and the changing times. The Nagas need to learn lessons from the rest of India and the world wherein many customs and traditions have been suitably

modified to remain relevant in current times, be it banning the ritual of animal sacrifice in religious places in India or lifting the prohibition on women to drive in Saudi Arabia. In times to come, the Nagas will also become firm believers of 'Unity in Diversity' of federal India and become part of the mainstream.

End Notes

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