

The Northeast Indian Naga Society: Some reflections on equity and justice

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ABSTRACT

The Naga society in overall reflects an agrarian society based on equality and equity, fairness and justice. There is no beggar or pauper in the Naga society. There is no uncared elderly either. There is no starvation except phenomenal scarcity of food caused by natural or man-made famine. There is rare cruelty meted to fellow Naga except on the practice of time-honoured headhunting. Nagas are known for their sincerity and honesty (J.H. Hutton and V.K. Nu). Every dispute or petty crime committed is settled in all fairness through local traditional judicial system. In the present day, insurgents addressing crime committed are speedier than Indian regular police who are corrupted and biased. The priority of individual right reflects our separateness, our lack of moral ties to one another. According to Hobbes, one consequence of this is that the state of nature is a “war of all against all”: human beings are naturally at war with one another. Individuals create societies and governments to escape this condition. Society is not natural to man, but is the product of a “social contract,” a contract to which each separate individual must consent. The sole purpose of the contract is to safeguard the rights of each citizen. This is the basic recipe for the political philosophy of liberalism—Locke’s philosophy. Locke speaks of a state of nature where men are free, equal, and independent. He champions the social contract and government by consent. He goes even farther than Hobbes in arguing that government must respect the rights of individuals. It was Locke’s formula for limited government, more than Hobbes’s, that inspired the American Founding Fathers. Applying this, to the analogous relook of Sixth Schedule of the Indian constitution which was purely American Red India concept adopted by DrAmbedkar for the Northeastern Indian Tribes. The framers of the Indian constitution knew very well that the Naga society is well-knitted into a fabric of oneness—where one thread coming out from the woven fabric can spoil the entire cloth. As such each and every Naga is considered worth living a dignified and civilized life through care and concern. The study will cover the entire phases of colonial Indian era i.e., from the various Charter Acts, specifically 1813 Charter Act permitting missionization in the Indian sub-continent as “to propagate useful knowledge” to the Indian incorporation of its constitution a provision for separate administration mechanism for Naga society in Nagaland-Manipur Naga area and beyond, inclusive of transnational and diasporic Naga communities across the globe. The study will discuss in-depth the impact of Christianity in Naga society and how far their influence adversely affected the otherwise peace loving people to militancy movement and insurgency activities in the 20th century till today. Finally it will address the issue of Indo-Naga Peace Treaty Framework and its ramifications for the future shape of the agreed framework for Alternative Arrangement. Justice and equity is the prima facie of the life to the existence of Naga society. Naga society from time

immemorial has a tradition of distributive justice and equity. There is a saying that the poor two brothers shared a grain of rice on the dog to feed themselves to survive. This literally implies scarcity time of food. At the same time even in such time there can be selfishness in the attitude towards the grain on the dog. But there remains this famous saying of the sharing of the grain on the dog. Meaning also, the two-brother-love for care in sharing the grain on the dog. There is sense of sensibility of care and sharing. Such sense is all the more cemented by the bond of joint family. Normally the Naga family practiced a joint family rather than nuclear family. However, with the process of modernization, the Naga family experiences the need for nuclear family life and privacy. Therefore, the need continues for separate quota for small family in the end of the 20th century. Economic system not far short of socialistic or communistic practice has gained a paradigm shift to capitalistic mode of economy. In a way the Naga life is now a replica of modern industrialized and capitalistic mode of economy in which private life and maximum amassment of wealth and honour is seen in all walks of life in Naga society. Still the landownership ranging from community, clan, and individual basis preserve the inter play of the social justice and welfarist economy of the Naga society. Despite continuum of old land ownership system in Naga society, there are other new practice being introduced, such as emergence of money lenders and real estate agents.

Key Words : Naga society, process of modernization, American Red India concept, social justice and welfarist economy of the Naga society

INTRODUCTION

The Naga society in overall reflects an agrarian society based on equality and equity, fairness and justice. There is no beggar or pauper in the Naga society. There is no uncared elderly either. There is no starvation except phenomenal scarcity of food caused by natural or man-made famine. There is rare cruelty meted to fellow Naga except on the practice of time-honoured headhunting. Nagas are known for their sincerity and honesty (J.H. Hutton; V.K. Nu). Every dispute or petty crime committed is settled in all fairness through local traditional judicial system. In the present day, insurgents addressing crime committed are speedier than Indian regular police who are corrupted and biased.

But a crime committed and ultimatum served to be redeemed by the clan/village, in its inability or refused to be taken responsibility is liable to be put to death. This means there is a system in which every man is connected to one's clan/village. This invalidated one characteristic of a rights theory that it takes man to be by nature a solitary and independent creature, as in Hobbes's "state of nature." In Hobbes's state of nature, men are free and independent, having a right to pursue their own self-interest, and no duties to one another. The moral logic is something like this: nature has made individuals independent; nature has left each individual to fend for himself; nature must therefore have granted each person a right to fend for himself. This right is the fundamental moral fact, rather than any duty individuals have to a law or to each other. The priority of individual right reflects our separateness, our lack of moral ties to one another. According to Hobbes, one consequence of this is that the state of nature is a "war of all against all": human beings are naturally at war with one another. Individuals create societies and governments to escape this condition. Society is not natural to man, but is the product of a "social contract," a contract to which each separate individual must consent. The sole purpose of the contract is to safeguard the rights of each citizen.

This is the basic recipe for the political philosophy of liberalism—Locke's philosophy. Locke speaks of a state of nature where men are free, equal, and independent. He champions the social

contract and government by consent. He goes even farther than Hobbes in arguing that government must respect the rights of individuals. It was Locke's formula for limited government, more than Hobbes's, that inspired the American Founding Fathers. Applying this, to the analogous relook of Sixth Schedule of the Indian constitution which was purely American Red India concept adopted by Dr. Ambedkar for the Northeastern Indian Tribes.

The framers of the Indian constitution knew very well that the Naga society is well-knitted into a fabric of oneness—where one thread coming out from the woven fabric can spoil the entire cloth. As such each and every Naga is considered worth living a dignified and civilized life through care and concern.

Significance of the theme :

Justice and equity is the prima facie of the life to the existence of Naga society. Justice is addressed through honesty and sincerity. Naga hates lies and insincerity. This can be manifested in the equity addressed through the sharing of the hunt of game. An animal hunted is distributed in accordance of the status as deemed fit to be accorded. The head of the hunt game always goes to the Chief of the village. The meat offered to deity/God consisted of the flesh from the back forming parallel to the upper part of the two sides of backbone. The rest is shared in feasting by the entire village. There is no poor or pauper as starving person is fed in the feast of merit. The one who inherited wealth and glory shares his accumulation of wealth through throwing the feast of merit. This implicitly and explicitly implies the distribution of wealth and glory by the rich to all who are poor. There is another practice in caring the have-nots and deprived, in which the person young or old, man or woman is cared by relatives—nearest kin, as such there is no pauper or begging in the Naga community in the street. Thus, the debt of the man or woman who is orphaned or widowed or any other deprived and excluded is cared by the next of the kin. The kingship and the kinship are sustained in all generations sacrosanct.

Delineation of the theme :

Naga society from time immemorial has a tradition of distributive justice and equity. There is a saying that the poor two brothers shared a grain of rice on the dog to feed themselves to survive. This literally implies scarcity time of food. At the same time even in such time there can be selfishness in the attitude towards the grain on the dog. But there remains this famous saying of the sharing of the grain on the dog. Meaning also, the two-brother-love for care in sharing the grain on the dog. There is sense of sensibility of care and sharing. Such sense is all the more cemented by the bond of joint family. Normally the Naga family practiced a joint family rather than nuclear family. However, with the process of modernization, the Naga family experiences the need for nuclear family life and privacy. Therefore, the need continues for separate quota for small family in the end of the 20th century.

Economic system not far short of socialistic or communistic practice has gained a paradigm shift to capitalistic mode of economy. In a way the Naga life is now a replica of modern industrialized and capitalistic mode of economy in which private life and maximum amassment of wealth and honour is seen in all walks of life in Naga society. Still the landownership ranging from community, clan, and individual basis preserve the inter play of the social justice and welfarist economy of the Naga society. Despite continuum of old land ownership system in Naga society, there are other new practice being introduced, such as emergence of money lenders and real estate agents. There has been cut-throat competition of trying to outdo at the cost of harming others. There is trend of

imposition from haves in buying capacity, at the loss of bargaining capacity of the have-nots. The rich without considering much the poor bargaining capacity introduce a trend where the section of business poor sellers fix commodities price irrespective of type of products. Therefore, there is a felt need to introduce standard weights and measures, minimum standard of fixing prices of the commodities. And the money laundering practice of charging exorbitant rate of interest arbitrarily is another practice of the ill of the Naga society. Barter system is no longer followed in vogue. Rather in a very scanty way. The lifestyle of the Naga is seen in the fashion in which he lives life quite superfluous and showy demonstration in all what he is in reality—dress, food, friendship he keeps, things he owns so on and so forth. This wealth displayed is seen in the buildings and wealth related possession of the militants and insurgents in the name of sovereignty movement in India. From the ecological view point, justice is a form of authentic and life-enhancing interdependence between man between society and its environment. Man-made disasters and the climate change is a major issue for the Nagas in Northeast India. The recent epicenter at Noney of the Naga inhabited region was a stern warning of its vulnerability. The seismic zone map of India 2002 indicates about 59 per cent of the land area of India is liable to seismic hazard damage. Zones of intensity are classified as zone V to zone II. Zone V is a very High Risk Zone area liable to shaking intensity IX and above. Northeast India falls under the zone V category. Earthquakes in India can bring harsh reality of unsafe buildings, as about 57 per cent of the land area of our country is susceptible to damages levels of seismic hazards. Such occurrences can be avoided in future earthquake damages through proper preparedness of safe building construction practices. Besides, Northeast India has international boundaries, mostly with Asian countries. Tibet is the source of ten major rivers in Asia, including the Brahmaputra river where massive dam construction and other activities, including exploitation of the water resources by affect the downstream countries which are speculated to bear the brunt of ecological crisis and political issues affecting Northeast India of Assam. An ecological sustainable earth is a necessary requirement for distributive justice. There is no possibility of justice in a world in which the rich exploit resources at the expenses of the poor and of other life (Charles Birch). The Brahmaputra originates from a glacier on Mount Kailash in Tibet, it is called Yarlung Tsangpo, where several hydropower projects on the river and further plans of Chinese government to divert water from rivers in Tibet shall affect the courses of river and international boundaries. Assam in Northeast India and even Bangladesh is green because of Brahmaputra.

Scope of the study :

The study will cover the entire phases of colonial Indian era *i.e.*, from the various Charter Acts, specifically 1813 Charter Act permitting missionization in the Indian sub-continent as “to propagate useful knowledge” to the Indian incorporation of its constitution a provision for separate administration mechanism for Naga society in Nagaland-Manipur Naga area and beyond, inclusive of transnational and diasporic Naga communities across the globe. The study will discuss in-depth the impact of Christianity in Naga society and how far their influence adversely affected the otherwise peace loving people to militancy movement and insurgency activities in the 20th century till today. Finally it will address the issue of Indo-Naga Peace Treaty Framework and its ramifications for the future shape of the agreed framework for Alternative Arrangement.

METHODOLOGY

Methodology adopted included primary and secondary sources available in the Universities

like Manipur University, ICSSR New Delhi, Nagaland University, etc.

It will also judiciously explore in visiting websites, internet related to the relevant subject of the study. Survey will also adopt 5 per cent households in Manipur and Nagaland, respectively. This will be done in random survey with interview scheduling and sample survey from community leaders, Church, women and youth societies etc. Visiting International Foreign American Baptist Mission Society in Pennsylvania (USA) to consult archival sources about mission role in Naga society in Manipur and Nagaland for short period may be necessary. Besides, keen pursuance of the legacy of A.Z. Phizo (and other factions), the founder of insurgency in partnership of Singaporean connect of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose is also necessitated.

Hypothesis :

1. Justice and equity in the Naga society is the hallmark of social welfarist Feast of Merit and equity in game hunt.
2. Naga society is male chauvinistic society where women play limited role.
3. There is prevalence of schism in continuum or transformist approach in Naga view of society.

Research questions :

1. How do the terms justice and equity came into practice in Naga society?
2. Did the practices of equality play a role in time-honour head-hunting in Naga society?
3. What are other practices prevalent related to addressing deprivations and exclusions in Naga society?
4. How far modern industrial society affected the traditionally rich Naga society in the 19th century colonial India (1830s setting of foothold of missionaries in Naga society and 1826 the Treaty of Zandabu)?
5. Does Independent India endorse the parochial approach of divide and rule for the Nagas of India's Northeast?
6. How far is the success of the signing of various accords between the government of India and the Naga society vis-à-vis recent Indo-Naga Peace Treaty Pan Naga Framework?

Review of literature :

Chiru (2007). American Baptist Mission: An Integrating Agent of the Nagas into Indian Union. Sunrise Publications, New Delhi gives elaborate explanation about the role the mission played on one hand and on the other hand he describes about the traditional religion of the Nagas including the practice of headhunting. He concluded in his book that he is in view of going along with many scholars like Henry Balfour, H.H. Hutton, Verrier Elwin, and scores of others who opposed imposition of foreign culture and religion on the unwilling and reluctant Nagas. The writer concludes in his equation about the study that had it not been there such civilizing mission in India's Naga areas certain ills of society's practices would have remain *i.e.*, notably the time-honoured head hunting etc. the mission did a yeoman service in healthcare and education of the Nagas which enlightened them to know of the global world unlike their misconception of alienated and excluded world of their own cut off from the rest of the world, facilitating human civilisations and universal brotherhood. He also discusses about the role leaders initiated for the cease fire signed between the Government of India and NSCN (I-M) leading to Pan Naga Peace Treaty Framework.

Hudson (1911). New Delhi gives an account of the Nagas in his book: "Naga tribes in Manipur,"

wherein he narrated all the life-style and characteristics of Nagas and other highlanders of Manipur. The book elaborately deals with social anthropological approach of the tribes. He opined that Marings borrowed curious fillet of the Chirus. The book deals extensively on the issue of Nagas in Manipur. His book gives detailed characteristic features of the many Naga tribes including tribe like Chiru, which resembles culturally the Nagas but linguistically the Kuki-Chin. The book makes distinctive dissimilarities of the Nagas and the Kukis. The conclusion may be random in his opinion of Chirus belonging to Naga community.

He further describes the geographical location of the Chirus in the hill ranges sandwiched between the plains and the hills. He called this “buffer zones.”

“Vision-2020”, Development of North East Region (DoNER). 2008 spells out the detailed plan and strategies for the development of Northeast India. The Look East Policy (Act East Policy) is well-research comprehensive document aimed at achieving the target as the name suggests by 2020 year.

Conclusion :

Naga society is, in all senses, an agrarian society with socialistic or communitarian concept of economy. There is no harm in putting the record of maximum male chauvinistic in administration or glorifying of paternal system of honour like any world society. However, it would be wrong to say that womenfolks are cared less by the society. This is known by the time honoured headhunting practice in which when attacked by the enemy, women and children are protected securely as objects of the victims and vulnerability to view to their weakness and as objects of attack for long hair for decorative hair for the enemy’s motif. Besides, Nagas protect members of their society in the event of victim of widowed or maleness/sonless members in the family. So is the case of widower or a family with less fortunate in wealth and legacy of poverty and disease. As Nagas are of joint family and all members are so knitted closed. This joint family system enables all members to be equally supported by whoever is bestowed with abundance of wealth and glory. No member of the Naga family male or female, is uncared or neglected. But rather a kind of socialistic justice of distribution of wealth—that mostly considered of land *i.e.*, individualistic, or clan-wise or community is distributed in fragmentation. Over all Naga society is strongly knitted one with all parochialism and maximum socialistic mode of justice and welfarist culture, albeit a communitarian/communistic with extreme sensitivity to clan and cleavages. However, the concept of clan cleavages and continuum of the practice is encouraging and promoting the clan linages and linkages. Nonetheless the ‘*khel* system’ *i.e.*, grouping of houses on clan lines during the head hunting stages was condemnable as there was lack of inter-clan interaction and mixing and mingling and thus leading to exchange of ideas and knowledge. But with the advent of Christianity, the practice of headhunting was and given up and the sense and sensibility of human global interdependence and integration of the world and borderless or trans-border human civilizational connection appeared all the more and thus emerging global Oneness, wherein the much hyped and publicized Samuel Huntington was dumped in the history of dustbin. And what the scholars would term the episode as the “Americanization.” Therefore, there is clash of this idea called as such. Ever since the coinage of the theory of constructivism the world seems to be inclined to one sided Western world, which the “grouping” or power blocks theory based on capitalists and communists groups are fast disappearing, particularly with the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and collapse of former Soviet Union in 1990s. The study would concentrate on the focus of communitarian theory that is extremely involved in the Greek world and later in communism. However, how far the Naga world howsoever small remains intact,

despite, the administration and the mission as in the case of Socialist Nagas. The Naga world was a male world *i.e.*, male chauvinistic or paternal or male dominated one. Some scholars like Nongbri strongly pitched male chauvinistic Christian tribes seen in the Northeast India. She argues that Christianity is male dominated society as Jews society is. However, the writer of this essay counter argues with Western world particularly with that of Europe and North America where woman played great role. To the extent of struggle for emancipation exerted by the women, Nongbri is justified in her argument. In India's case, compared to Western world, right from the inception of the republic of India in late 90s and early 50s of the 20th century granted women their right to vote etc. Still the writer argues that democracy is not only right to vote. As votes in India are swayed by middle men, so-called social workers or public leaders like a sheep to be slaughtered. No doubt, there has been, of course, women leaders in India like Rani Laxmibhai, Sarojini Naidu, Vijaya Laxmi Pandit, Sucheta Kripalani, Rani Gaidinliu etc. in the context of Naga society where the concept of equity and equality are addressed in this study includes the emancipation and inclusion in all spheres of life in the society. People may argue that the role Rani Gaidinliu role played was exceptional and not because of importance given to women in Naga society. Yes, exceptions are always there in any given society's emancipation of women in society can be seen in activities and social movement in Naga society. Naga Mothers' Association represents sole harbinger of social justice and equity. Women play eminent role in Naga society in all walks of life. In economy, the women contribute more than half of the Naga GDP. In politics women play a nominal role. In education Naga women imparts education at home. The child's education begins at home, where mothers mingle with children for almost all day in and day out. Therefore, girl child means double-dividend factor in society. If woman is educated, the woman educates her child/children at the kitchen. She contributes in servitude at home though in economics such activities of household chore is counted as non-economic activities. Many Naga girls contribute in child care and baby seating and are paid handsome wages, though there are hardly any incidences of rape and forced labour in the Naga economy. Women in Naga society are fairly treated in metro-cities exploitation is rampant. Such employment is in unorganized sector and no regulation of minimum wages. In Naga society, there are rare incidences of rape and forced labour in the Naga economy. Women in Naga society are fairly treated in terms of freedom and rights and duties. Women have their share in the family despite male dominated society. In Chiru Naga society, if there is no male child in the family, the girl child is given the share of the boy. When in marriage, if divorce takes place, then the immovable property is reverted back to the girl's family so that the family property is retained for generations. This is no harm.

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