



PROPERTIES OF UNMARRIED ANGAMI NAGA WOMEN

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Abstract: Properties are possessions, assets and holdings of both movable and immovable which are been passed down through an ancestral line of inheritance or acquired through agreement, exchange, gift, lease or purchase. It refers to things which are owned or possessed by an individual or group or community through inheritance or self-purchase that can be bought or sold. Property inheritance among the Angami Naga community takes place through the male bloodline where women have little or no rights with regard to the inheritance of their parent's property. The present study tries to reveal the different types of properties of the unmarried Angami women in the past, prior to the introduction of formal education system. With this argument, the present paper tries to locate the properties of unmarried women in the past and also focused on the different types of properties that unmarried women possess today.

Index Terms - Past, unmarried women, Angami Nagas and property.

I. BRIEF PROFILE OF THE ANGAMI NAGA COMMUNITY

The Angami Nagas are one of the communities of Nagaland inhabiting the regions in and around Kohima and Dimapur districts. Zetsuvi (2014) also maintained that the Angamis are concentrated in the central and southern parts of Kohima district and some parts of Dimapur (Zetsuvi, 2014: p. 7). In the Pre-colonial period, the Angami community consisted of not only the present Angamis but also the Chakhesangs (Yano and Pande, 2012: p. 69). It is believed that the Angami Nagas came through the southeast via the east and north of Manipur and then to Khezhakenoma village along with the Lothas and the Sumi Nagas. Today the Angami Nagas are divided into four regions. They are the Northern Angami Region, Southern Angami Region, Western Angami Region and Chakhro Angami Region. The Angamis are experts in constructing terraced fields and irrigation systems (Fürer-Haimendorf, 2016: p. 11). Elwin (1916) was of the opinion that the Naga method of raising food-crops has always been shifting cultivation although the Angamis and some other tribes who have come under their influence have excellent terraces (Elwin 1961: p. 97). The Angami Naga community being an Agriculturalist society in the past, land was regarded as the most valuable of all other properties.

II. OVERVIEW OF THE CONCEPT OF PROPERTY AMONG THE ANGAMI NAGA COMMUNITY

The concept of property among the Angami Nagas can be broadly divided into movable and immovable properties which is basically anything that a person owns which he or she has gained through self-purchase, exchange, gifts or by law of inheritance and has absolute right over it. The concept of property started ever since men set foot on land. The notion of private property came into being among the Angami Naga community along with the conquest of another village or vacant land. The concept of property widely came into being when people started to settle down and own lands. Since unrecorded times, the concept of property was already there when settlement started in the village and the earliest settlers of various villages of the Angami Naga community claimed parts of the land of their choice as property to begin culture and society. With the establishment of villages and the growth of families to clans and sub-clans there arose the need of owing things such as land and house. Hence, these owned things became properties.

According to Koseno (2018) the cultivation of land was settled either by a system of consent in which a man goes and set a mark on the land of his choice provided no one else has been there before and also that he has not attempted to get so much land as to deprive the other members. According to her, both private and community land existed side by side in all the Angami villages where community lands are owned by clans or khels and sometimes even by the entire village community (Koseno, 2018: p. 67).

Therefore, with the passage of time and growth of population the lands that were occupied and cultivated by the people eventually became the private property of these individuals, lineages and clans. While those lands which were uncultivated, vacant or reserved became the communal property of the village.

III. UNMARRIED WOMEN AND SHAVED HEADS

In the past, all the unmarried women of the Angami Naga community had shaved heads before their marriage. All the women folk accept for the married women had shaved heads. Women from their childhood had shaved heads which was a part of the traditional practices of the Angami Naga community as it was mandatory for all unmarried women including children to have shaved heads. During the head-hunting times, women were required to have shaved heads until they reach the marriageable age which was part of the cultural practices of the Angami Naga community.

It was a taboo for the unmarried women folk to grow their hair before the marriage proposal comes to them and if at all a woman was to remain unmarried it was required of her to take the permission of the village elders so that she would be allowed to grow her hair though she was not married. If a girl was to grow her hair without the permission of the village elders or marriage proposal, the village elders would announce in the village that there was a particular girl with '*Methuo tha*' (literally means meaningless hair) and she was tabooed by the villagers. Similarly, Roy (2004) also argue that growing of hair prior to marriage was referred to as 'meaningless'. She further maintains that those women who had long hair before marriage was ostracized (Roy, 2004: p. 36).

Shaved heads indicated that women were unmarried and that the marriage proposals were yet to come to them. Unmarried women had shaved heads until the marriage proposals come to them and only then they were allowed to grow their hair. As for the women who did not receive any marriage proposal, they had to remain with heads shaved throughout their life time but such cases were very rare for the Angami Naga women. Today, Angami Naga women, whether married or unmarried are allowed to have any type of hairstyle be it long or short as per the preference of the individual.

IV. PROPERTIES OF UNMARRIED WOMEN

In the past, the properties of unmarried women comprised of both their personal belongings and the properties of their parents. Although, women had absolute inheritance right over their personal belonging such as the movable properties, they had no inheritance right over the immovable land properties of their parents. The personal properties of women in the past consisted of household goods, potteries, valuable traditional attire (shawls and mekhalas, necklace, bangles, armllets, earrings), different types of baskets, weaving tools, agricultural tools, domestic animals, etc. Of all the personal properties, the traditional necklace and basket was considered as the most valuable personal property of the unmarried Angami Naga women.

A daughter remained under the care of her parents and enjoyed all the benefits of her parents property be it movable or immovable properties till her marriage. However, the day she gets married, such rights and privileges ceases as she joins her husband's family through marriage and the properties of her husband becomes her property as well. As long as a daughter remains unmarried she had the right to utilize and cultivate her parent's lands during her lifetime. Jamir (2017) argues that, as long a woman remains unmarried she could gain access to the use of land through a male relative, generally her father and she could work her father's land, but she could not claim proprietary rights over it (Jamir, 2017: p. 139). In the past, unmarried women continued to live with their parents and the properties of their parents continues to be the properties of the unmarried women as well. As long as a daughter remains unmarried she continues to live with her parents in her parental house and she gets to enjoy all the benefits of their parent's properties. Though women get to enjoy the benefits over the immovable land properties they cannot sell or claim individual ownership rights over the immovable land properties of their parents.

Today, there are certain unmarried women who tend to move out of their parental house and live in separate house of their own or even in rental homes. Unmarried women are not only in possession of private movable properties of their own but also own individual immovable properties such as lands and houses which have not only been gifted to them by their parents but they have acquired on their own. In the present era, the personal properties of an unmarried woman consist of both immovable and movable properties ranging from land, house, automobiles, domestic animals and personal belongings. An unmarried woman can make use of her personal property that she has acquired on her own as she may see fit be it movable or immovable properties. However, as for the immovable land properties of her parents, though she is allowed to utilize or cultivate the land she can neither claim private ownership rights over such land nor can she sell the lands. Shikhu (2016) in his study of the Naga cultural values says that the unmarried daughter has a right to a share of the property of her parents. Nevertheless, the share of the property that belongs to an unmarried sister usually goes to her brother after her death (Shikhu, 2016: p. 32). Therefore, unmarried women usually reside with their parents in their parental home and enjoy the property of their parents in their lifetime as long as they do not get married. An unmarried woman gets to enjoy the benefits of her private properties during her lifetime but after her demise, the properties are inherited or passed on to the male bloodline and as such, her personal property becomes the property of her brothers and their children.

V. CONCLUSION

Therefore, the concept of property for the Angami Naga community consists of both movable and immovable properties which are usually passed down through the male bloodline. Hence, an unmarried woman remain in the care of parents and brother by remaining in the parental house and gets to enjoy both her personal private properties as well as the properties of her parents during her lifetime but after her demise, the properties that she owns which has been gifted by her parents or the properties she has acquired on her own are inherited by the nearest male members who are her brothers.

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