



Impact of Westernization on the Naga Society

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Abstract: This study has been undertaken to understand the impact of westernization in the Naga society and how it has indirectly affected the social structure of the society but also their culture, tradition and belief system. The advent of Christianity plays a prominent role at ushering changes into the Naga society. With the coming of Christianity, modern education was introduced, followed by modernism and all these brought massive changes to the overall structure of the Naga society.

Index Terms – Political History, Culture, Tradition, Christianity, Modern Education

I. INTRODUCTION

Nagaland also known as the land of nature and hilly beauty is a state located in the Eastern side of Northeast India. Geographically, Nagaland shares international boundary with Myanmar on the east. It is surrounded by Assam in the West, Manipur in the South, and Arunachal Pradesh and parts of Assam on the North. Nagaland is one of the smallest states in India covering an area of 16,578 sq. Kms. The population of Nagaland in 2021/2022 according to the Aadhar statistics is 2,189,297. The capital of Nagaland is Kohima with Dimapur being the centre of commercial hub. There are sixteen administrative districts in Nagaland namely, Kohima, Phek, Mokokchung, Wokha, Zunheboto, Tuensang, Mon, Peren, Longleng, Kiphiri, Dimapur, Noklak, Tseminyu, Niuland, Shamator and Chümoukedima. The population in Nagaland comprising seventeen different tribes Ao, Angami, Sumi, Lotha, Chang, Konyak, Chakesang, Khiamningam, Phom, Rengma, Sangtam, Yimchunger, Zeliang, Pochury, Kuki, Rongmei and Bodo-Kachari and some other sub-tribes inhabiting this hill state. The people residing in Nagaland are broadly known as Nagas and they form one large ethnic community. Each of the tribes has a vernacular term for itself. The Angamis and some other allied tribes call themselves as the *Tenyimia*, the Ao as *Aos*, the Lothas are known as *Kyong*, and the Semas are called as *Sumi*, etc. The tribes have been distributed in different geographical areas of the state and nearby areas for example, Kohima is the home of the Angamis, Rengmas and some other tribes. The Chakesang, Pochury and the group of the Sangtam occupy Phek. Zunheboto is inhabited by the Semas and Wokha is home to the Lothas. Longleng is of the Phoms. The Zeliang, Liangmei and Kuki inhabit Peren with the Sangtam, Yimchunger, Khiamningam and the Chang residing in Tuensang.

Formerly a district of the state of Assam organized during the British rule, Nagaland attained statehood on the first of December, 1963 with Dr. Sarvepalli Radha Krishnan, the then President of India formally inaugurating it as the 16th state of the Indian Union. The Nagas are known to possess a rich cultural heritage which have been preserved and passed down in the forms of oral traditions. All the communities in the state though possess a distinct language and an oral history of their own, and adopted Roman script for all expressive purposes since the area came under the British rule. Similar is the process of beginning of writing history of the people in the modern sense of the term. A myth goes that the history of the Nagas was actually recorded on an animal skin which was unfortunately eaten by a dog and that was how they started preserving it in their memories and passed down from person to person in the form of folktales, folksongs, and traditional community rites.

For most people of the rest of India and the world at large, the Nagas are either unknown or known for the wrong reasons, labeled as warlike head-hunting people, naked, bizarre, backward, poor, barbaric and rebellious.” (Yonuo, vii)

The unpleasant description of the Nagas however does not hinder the fact that the Nagas are the proudest possessing distinctive culture and tradition forming a part of north-eastern India. The origin and migration of the Nagas still remain shrouded in mystery. Many theories have been put forward in regard to the origin and migration of the Nagas based on their folklores, material culture and their way of life. It has often been presumed that they closely resemble the Sino-mongoloid and Tibeto-Burman. The origin of the word ‘Naga’ itself remains obscure. This generic term has been ascribed to a group of tribes who inhabit the hills on both sides of the international border between India and Myanmar. Though various explanations of the word ‘Naga’ has been given, the name itself contains no significance or carries any meaning in any of the Naga folklores.

The name was not in general use among the Nagas until recently. It was given to them by people of the plains and in the last century was used indiscriminately for the Abors and Daflas as well as for the Nagas themselves. Even as late as 1954, I found the people of Tuensang rarely speaking of themselves as Nagas but as Konyaks, Changs, Phoms and so on. Gradually, however as the Nagas became more united, they began to use name for themselves until today it has become widely popular. (Elwin 4)

For this study secondary data has been collected. From the website of KSE the monthly stock prices for the sample firms are obtained from Jan 2010 to Dec 2014. And from the website of SBP the data for the macroeconomic variables are collected for the period of five years. The time series monthly data is collected on stock prices for sample firms and relative macroeconomic variables for the period of 5 years. The data collection period is ranging from January 2010 to Dec 2014. Monthly prices of KSE - 100 Index is taken from yahoo finance.

II. Political History

Ever since the beginning of an independent form of rule revolved around the village, troubles brewed in the hills of the Nagas. To begin with, the Nagas were self governed before the interference came from the Ahom kings who entered from Burma during the 13th century. The Ahom-Naga relation reveals sporadic clashes for one reason or the other. The Nagas always tried to fend off the Ahom kings whenever they made expeditions into the territory of the Nagas. The Nagas continued to remain in isolation, preserving their land and traditions until the early 18th century when the British broke into the Naga territory.

The British advent into the hills of the Nagas began with the explorations of finding out a way for communication with Manipur through the hills. In 1832, Captain F Jenkins and Captain R.B Pemberton led the first expedition to the Naga Hills. The purpose of this expedition was to find a route from Manipur to Assam via the Naga country so that their subjects in Manipur and Assam could be protected from any further Burmese Invasion. Their entry was welcomed with a strong resistance put up by the Naga warriors. They rolled down rocks at them but were overcome by modern weapons.

In 1844, Khonoma warriors attacked and destroyed the outpost at Lanka, leading to a punitive attack led by Captain E.L Wood against the village in early 1845. This was the first Khonoma war. In 1849 and 1850, there was animosity because the villagers had killed a police officer of British India for burning their village, followed by a mortar attack on Khonoma and an expedition by the infantry led by Lieutenant Vincent and Lieutenant Campbell. The British government implemented a policy of non-intervention policy in 1857 and troops were recalled before which there were persistent clashes between the British forces and Naga villagers. The Naga Hills district was formed in 1866 with Samaguting, i.e. the present Chumukedima as the headquarters. In 1874, Assam became a province and the Angami Naga territories came under British administration.

On 14th November 1878, the British occupied Kohima and its headquarters was established. Mokokchung had a full fledged divisional office and Wokha served as another outpost of the British administration in the Naga Hills and GH Damant was appointed as the first political agent at the new headquarter there. The conflict between the hostile Naga villagers and the British continued until a treaty was enacted on 27th March 1880 between the British government representatives and Khonoma elders which concluded the conflict.

Two of the most prominent battles fought in Nagaland are the Battle of Khonoma and the Battle of Kohima. The cause of the Battle of Khonoma has varied reasons which are complex. One reason was that the Nagas continued raids on British subjects in Assam by the warriors of Khonoma. Though the Nagas viewed headhunting as a means of showing their bravery and courage, the British could never really understand it and they looked at it as barbaric and inhuman and there was a need to stop the practice. On the other hand, the British system of collecting taxes became a burden for the Nagas since this system of tax collection was completely new to them. The British also faced resistance in some areas and the only option for them was to burn the village warning all the other villagers about the consequences of disobeying the new system.

During 1879, a report came from the Kohima headquarters that the villagers of Khonoma were preparing themselves for war with the British by procuring weapons. This idea of putting up a resistance against the British occurred after a certain man named Pfüchasa Chase killed a tiger. There is a ritual following the killing of a tiger where the men of the village would fire their guns in the air. This ritual of firing gunpowder inspired them to make an attempt at overthrowing the British rule. To add to the matter, some of the villagers who were serving under Damant began to rebel and turned away from performing their duties. GH Damant, on receiving the news from the headquarter about the villagers preparing for war, immediately prepared a force of twenty one military and sixty-five people troops and charged against Khonoma. On 14th October, they attacked Khonoma where thirty-five men were killed and nineteen were wounded in the attack.

On October 16th, the warriors of Angami launched an attack on the Kohima garrison. The attack was unsuccessful and the British attacked Khonoma after carefully planning it out. The attack was led by Brigadier General Nation and forces were brought in from Assam, Manipur and Shillong. The troops were dispersed in the neighbouring villages of Khonoma like Jotsoma, Mezoma and Sechüma which blocked all route of exits and entry. There was a fierce fighting between the British and the Khonoma village where two hundred men from the British side died on the first day, marking it as one of the most ferocious battles fought in Nagaland. The Battle of Khonoma ended after a treaty was signed on 27th March 1880 between her majesty's Government and the elders of Khonoma. With the end of the war and the fighting, the American Baptist mission began converting the Nagas into Christians receiving help and support from the British Government. The first Angami to be converted to Christianity was Nisier of Khonoma village.

The next prominent battle was the Battle of Kohima or the Japanese Invasion. During the 1930's and 1940's, Kohima served as an outpost of the British, consisting of government offices and a few residential buildings. There were only two schools, an Assamese school and the Mission school during that period. The Battle of Kohima came to be called as the 'Forgotten Battle' and its veterans as the 'Forgotten Heroes.' The Battle of Kohima was fought from 4th April to 22 June 1944. This was the first war where the Nagas witnessed aircraft and the depth of modern warfare. On March 1944, people in southern Angami villages began to trace evidences of the Japanese entry into their land. The fiercest fighting took place during the siege of Kohima which began on 6th April 1944 and lasted until the arrival of reinforcements. The Kohima Garrison were highly outnumbered and received help from the local Nagas who acted as scouts, spies, stretcher-bearers and ammunition carriers to assist the allied troops in uprooting the Japanese invasion. The Battle of Kohima had both positive and negative effects on the Nagas. The Nagas had to go through a lot of adversity during and after the battle. After the battle, Nagas did long for a separate State for their own people for which Zhapu Phizo who played an important role in Naga Politics began to take up the cause. This freedom movement led to the genesis and rise of the Naga insurgency. For the Nagas, the Battle of Kohima remained a landmark event in their history and transformed the Naga society to embrace changes in their social, political, and economic lives.

After the British left the Naga Hills, the Nagas felt the need to form a body for which the Naga Club was formed in 1918. In 1929, the Naga Club drafted a memorandum that came to be known as the Simon Commission and submitted it to the British government. It is the first representation of the Naga people to the Indian Statutory Commission and took place in Kohima on 10th January 1929. The Simon Commission demanded that the Nagas should be under the control of the British and be excluded from

proposed changes to the Indian Constitution. After six years, the Government of India Act 1935 was passed which paid heed to the Simon Commission and stated that the Naga Hills district was to be treated as 'excluded areas' and no act of the Assam Legislature was to apply to the Naga areas. This act came into effect on 1937. After the Second World War, at the initiative of CR Pawsey, the British Deputy Commissioner of Naga Hills District, the Naga Hills District Tribal Council (NHDT) was formed in April 1945 to facilitate better understanding among the Nagas. It was converted into Naga National Council on 14th April 1946 at Wokha with the aim to carry out social and political upliftment of the Nagas.

The first president of the NNC was Aliba Imti and T Sakhrie became its first general secretary. The policy of the NNC was to establish a sovereign independent Naga country and to develop it according to the genius of Naga democratic customs and culture. In June 1947, Sir Akbar Hydari visited Kohima and a nine point agreement also known as the Hydari Agreement was made between the governor of Assam and the Naga leaders. The Nagas declared their independence on 14th August 1947. AZ Phizo became the head of the NNC in 1949 and pushed forward an aggressive campaign for independence. In 1951, the NNC decided to hold another plebiscite to show that the demand for Nagas Independence was not the voice of the few but the voice of the majority. Owing to this, a non-corporation movement was launched all over Nagaland. This movement boycotted even the first general election which was held in 1952. After this, conflicts followed in between the Indian Army and the Nagas invoking unwanted incidents and blood were spilled due to their independence. The most violent conflict lasted from 1954 to 1964.

III. Westernization and its influence on the Naga society

It is necessary to take a look at the backdrop of Christianity in Nagaland before making an assessment on the traditional society of the Nagas. The Naga tribes remained isolated and secluded until their first encounter with the Ahom kings of Assam in the 13th century. Though there were constant clashes and fighting between them, the real interference was when the British colonial power broke the resistance of the Nagas and came onto the scene in the 19th century. With the advent of the British, a new chapter began in the history of the Nagas.

The British government introduced much change at various levels. One of the major changes was in the area of administrative system. Though the British government was unable to administer the whole territory, they introduced new policies such as law and order, the justice system, and tax and revenue. (Shikhu 57)

Beside these they also introduced two types of native administrative agency village chiefs and Gaon Buras. The Deobashi also became the official interpreter for the British and the local people. Another important factor responsible for the transition of the Naga society was the advent of Christianity. When Christianity came, modern education was introduced. As stated by K.S Singh in his book *Tribal Situation in India*,

If one responsible dynamic factor were singled out for an overall change in the life of the Nagas, it would undoubtedly be the introduction of Christianity. (266)

Nagas first encounter with Christianity began as early as 1836 with the American Baptist missionaries. The primitive Nagas were unaware or did not have access to any kind of formal education. Therefore, the western education was introduced by the British with the help of the Christian missionaries. As a matter of fact, it was aimed at training the natives for the service of colonial administration, to pacify them and to alter their mindset towards the so-called modernity. The establishment of educational institution was a leap in the transformation of the Nagas.

With the advent of Christianity, many cultural practices which were deemed inhuman before the eyes of the Britishers were abolished. The westerners brought an end to all kinds of practices which did not fall in line with the thinking of a modern man. The practice of headhunting which was looked upon as cultural tradition was brought to an end by the British. It is said that credit should be given to the missionaries for cleaning the Naga society. The evidence of the disappearance of the old religion can be seen in today's festival celebrations. Most of the festivals have gone out of practice. In the course of abandoning the festivals, the act of socializing and learning to sing folksongs is hampered. Since folksongs are only revived during festivals, the preservation of these songs and culture are not able to find place in the modern context as songs are rarely sung. The modern generation has given more importance to western and Indian cultures in terms of music and lifestyle. This poses a threat of overlapping the rich music, tradition and culture of the Nagas.

The Naga society today is flooded with the western standard of lifestyles and fashion. The youngsters on the streets in towns are influenced by K-Pop and other modern western celebrities. With the advancement in technology, even the most remote villages in Nagaland are gaining access to the knowledge of the modern world. This in turn had affected the society at large especially in terms of preserving one's own culture and tradition. Also the accessibility of improvised communications and markets has led to the import of goods ranging from the latest cosmetics to the latest fashion in the market. In matters of clothes and dressings, the western culture has dominated the society. Traditional attires are worn only during festivals and important events or celebrations.

The destruction or disappearance of *Morung* or *Thehuba* forms the main contributor towards the decline of the oral tradition. With the decline of the oral tradition, the transmission of traditional and cultural knowledge has been affected. Educational institutions and churches have taken up the place of the *Morung* and *Thehuba*. The youngsters no longer spend time in the dormitories to learn about the skills for survival or songs and tales of old. Instead we see everyone, not just the youngsters absorbed in the world of technology i.e smart phones. The picture is clearly seen everywhere in programs held or activities conducted in churches. For instance, after Easter or Christmas celebration the church usually hosts a gathering at night where bonfires are made and there is merry making. Even in such gatherings, the participation has become extremely poor. Not to judge but the picture of the participants in the merry making itself, has become a disappointment where we see almost everyone engrossed and deeply immersed in the bright screen of their smart phones. This technique of being present bodily but absent in mind hampered the social interaction in small and big ways. The institution of *morung* symbolise a place of learning and ritual centre but with the introduction of Christianity and education, the *morung* has turned into a thing of the past. The youngsters no longer gather in the evening to learn about folksongs and folktales. Not only this but the oral tradition through which cultural heritage was passed on from one generation to the next, almost has come down Dr. Lanungsang in his book *Working System of Arijju in Traditional Ao Society* remarks that the golden Age of the Ao civilization came to an end with the close of the *Arijju* (Morung) institution.

Holding the church responsible for it as well, he added that it failed to organize the institution in the form of Christian hostels at different levels. It was excellent towards making a total human being. The *Ariju* was the centre of value education too. (30-31)

The disappearance of the *morung* adversely affected not only the society but the youngster at large. The church in its worship failed to incorporate traditional songs and dances but replaced it with western and Indian songs.

There is a great deterioration in discipline and orderliness particularly among the young. That is why maximum number of dropout youth occurs in their society today. Many young men and women are found loitering in every village aimlessly. When night falls, they find no proper shelter with proper guardian. During the daytime, they spend most valuable hours doing hardly anything. These are the results of the downfall of *Ariju* the system of the society. (Lanunungsangs 86)

The attitude of the Christian missionaries towards the cultural and traditional practices of the Nagas, were mostly negative. The missionaries thought that the *morung* was the devil's altar and associated it with different reasons which ultimately brought an end to the institution of *morung*. The church and the educational institutions took up the place of the *morung* and we can rightly say that the disappearance of such important institution in a society brought an end to the oral tradition. The younger generation lost touch with their culture and the older generation kept the knowledge to themselves until it was enquired upon. So this lack of narration or lack of regular telling of stories and songs led to the forgetting of valuable traditional knowledge. This hindered the oral tradition followed by the Nagas. The festival of merit which was abolished by the Christian missionaries considering it to be unsuitable for Christian followers deprived tribal life of its traditional vigour and gave way to individualism.

The Christianity encourages individualistic attitude whereas the Nagas were accustomed to community living. J.P. Mills very correctly observed 'An animist puts his village before himself. A Baptist puts himself before his village.' (Maitra 153)

Beside the *morung*, most festivals which form an important aspect in the Naga cultural life were abandoned. And it is only during festivals that folksongs, folkdances, rituals and ceremonies are revived. Though some of the important festivals are still being celebrated, this has not proved sufficient to retain the cultural and traditional knowledge. When we look upon the present Angami society, we can observe that the one or two tribal festival like *sekrenyi* and *khoupfunyi* have been reduced to singing few traditional songs and wearing traditional attires. The festivals have lost its essence, its meaning, significance and value. The traditional attires which forms a part of their identity, indicates their status in the society is replaced by the western concept of fashion. The Naga society in the process of becoming modernized has put their culture and tradition at a risk of extinction. The performance of traditional songs and dances have been forbidden and replaced by Christian hymns. According to T. Ngakang, in his article 'Musical Culture of the Nagas', he describe the Europeans missionaries view on the music of the Nagas as

The European missionaries considered the music of the Nagas simply as the manifestation of savage heathenism and therefore as antagonistic to the 'true faith'.

Though there were accounts of the first Christians facing discrimination at the hands of their own villagers, later on, as the number of converts increased their new found faith in Christianity began to erase most of the traditional values and beliefs. Rather than acting as a unifying force, Christianity has failed to rid the society of imbalances, loss of traditional and Christian values etc. Among the many principles of the traditional teachings, respect towards the parents and village elders carry great importance. With the decline of the *thehuba* (*morung*) and gazing upon the present modern Angami society, respect towards parents and village elders have considerably lessened. According to the customs of the Angamis, it is considered *Kenyü* for an elder to wish a younger man or woman first. It is the duty of the young people to wish the elder first. But the present generation has failed to preserve the valuable traditional custom and teachings of the society. Another important factor responsible for failure in preserving the folksongs is language. The Angamis speaks in *tenyidie* language which is the native dialect. It was recorded in the book *Ura Academy Dze* that the Christian missionary CD King and his wife established a school in Kohima known as the mission school in 1882 and introduced *Tenyidie* as a subject in 1884. As mentioned in the chapter of the thesis, though a number of tribes come under the umbrella term of *Tenyimia*, they have their own dialects. Even though *Tenyidie* has become a subject of the academic syllabus under NBSE (Nagaland Board of School Education) for a long period of time, the educational institutions emphasises on using English as the medium of education. Beside the English language, *Nagamese* which is considered as the 'language of the street' poses a threat to the native dialect. *Nagamese* is considered to be the broken version of Assamese, Bengali and Hindi. The *Nagamese* language has made it easier for the Nagas belonging to different tribes to communicate and understand each other. Despite its usefulness, there is a danger in the over use of the *Nagamese* dialect. Families living in towns often use *Nagamese* dialect even for family conversations. The encouragement of using one's own dialect for communication with one's own people is often not seen in most families. The youngster of today's generation takes pride in adopting *Nagamese* dialect for interaction. Many a times, we can take note of how the students in high schools and higher secondary institutions interact mostly in *Nagamese* at a very young age. The use of one's own native dialect is not much emphasized and this has led to the loss of understanding one's own dialect.

According to the article "UNESCO says Nagaland's Tenyidie language is endangered. What's next?" by Medolenuo Ambrocia, she quotes Professor Kuolie, who has written seventeen books in *Tenyidie* dialect that

Our Naga intellectuals or the educated class have become illiterate to their mother tongue. It is not their fault. It is the fault of the situation and the progress of the society.

The loss in understanding one's own dialect indirectly hampers the preservation and transmission of folksongs. Folksongs nowadays are mostly sung only during major festivals like the *Sekrenyi* festivals or some big important event in towns or villages. Not every participant in the folksong possesses knowledge of the song. In most cases, the singers are selectively picked and then taught with sessions of practices for the important event. An elder is appointed to teach folksongs to the young singers and in this manner it is transmitted or passed onto a group. The individual memory of the song is passed onto the collective memory with the help of social interaction. Most of the time, the folksongs are learned without understanding the meaning and depth of the lyrics.

This forms another reason as to why the young people are uninterested in learning folksongs. Many young people do not remember any folktales or understand the meaning behind the design and colours of their traditional attires. The assimilation of other culture due to mass media diluting the essence of their beautiful culture is on the rise. As Amenla Jamir says,

There is nothing wrong in it, but believing wearing western clothes makes one modern is a flawed ideology.” (4)

Despite all of these shortcomings, several attempts have been made to preserve the traditional knowledge. The textbook of Nagaland Heritage Studies for high school students as part of the academic syllabus has gradually enhanced the cultural and traditional knowledge among the young learners. Over the recent years efforts have been made in preserving the oral tradition of the Nagas using different platforms. One such examples of promoting oral tradition is the Nagaland folktale storytelling competition recently held in the year 2021 where high school students actively participated in the event and uploaded videos on Youtube. Nevertheless in the area of folksongs, not much research has been done and not much effort has been given in preserving it. Folksongs are not taught in any educational institutions but there are music academies to learn vocals and play western musical instruments. It is time for the Nagas to wake up and realize that the loss of folksongs is the loss of one’s own culture and tradition.

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