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## **Social Life And Practices Of Naga People And Its Philosophical Implication**

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### **Abstract-**

Naga society is patriarchal in nature, in which man is the head of the family. Though Nagaland is the hometown for all the Nagas, but they are staying in different parts of India because of education, job and business. Naga society is casteless, classless society, unlike other Indian tribal societies. Though Nagas are patriarchal in nature, but women are not neglected unlike the ancient Hindu society. All the Nagas are hardworking, brave, kind, innocent, and nature lover. The social life of the Naga people is very unique. They love to live together and work together. So, this paper is an attempt to focus the social life of the Nagas and also to highlight the philosophical implication of their beliefs which are related with their social life.

**Key words-** Naga tribe, Morung System, Feast of Merit, Head Hunting, Horn Bill Festival.

### **Introduction-**

Nagaland is known as the Switzerland of the North East, because of its natural beauty. The Nagas are indigenous people of Nagaland who are the Mongolian race group. The word 'Naga' is originated from the word 'naka' which means 'the people with pierced ears'. Again according to others, it comes from the word 'Naga' which means 'mountain man'.

It is assumed that Nagas came from the South eastern part of Asia, based on the similarities between people of south Asia and the Nagas. Nagas migrated to the present region from different direction after crossing the rivers and mountain of south Asia. Now in India, Naga tribes are found in Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Tripura and Nagaland. But Nagaland is the native land of all Nagas. There are 17 major tribes in Nagaland. All the tribes have their own cultures, customs, tradition, languages and festivals. Every tribe celebrates a numbers of festivals in a year. There are many beliefs and practices which are related with their social lives from ancient times, of course some of the beliefs are not practiced by them after converting to Christianity.

### **Aims and Objectives—**

The main objectives of this paper are as follows—

1. To reflect the social life of Naga tribes.
2. To reflect the different practices of Naga tribes.
3. To analyse the philosophical values of these beliefs and practices.

### **Methodology—**

The study has adopted the qualitative method with the help of primary and secondary sources. The secondary sources of the study, the data are collected from books, journals, and thesis. And the primary sources, the data are collected through some interviews and questionnaires.

### **Social life of the Nagas-**

The social lives of the Nagas are very unique. They generally live on the top of the hill in order to save their lives from the enemies. In Naga society, there is no class and caste system. Socially one tribe is sub-divided into different clans. They strictly follow the exogamous marriage system. They always work together in group and there is no individual cultivation in Naga society. Agriculture is the main occupation of Nagaland and about 68% of Naga people are engaged in Agriculture.

### **Sources of Naga history-**

Naga history can be found through two sources—one is written and the other is unwritten. Written sources started after the arrival of American Missionaries and the British people. Therefore, there is not sufficient written materials in the Naga society.

But the history can be found with the help of unwritten sources also, which is through oral narratives. With the help of different folk songs, storytelling, the ancient knowledge of Naga society can be transmitted from one generation to another generation.

### **Culture of Nagaland-**

Nagaland has a very rich and beautiful culture. Every tribe has its own traditional attires, which shows their identity. Feathers of hornbill, ivory armlets, beads, shells, etc. are used for making different traditional ornaments, which was worn by them during festivals. Naga people are very expert in the art of wood carving, making of village gates, log drum etc. In ancient period, every tribe has its own village gate for security and log drums, in order to give emergency information. They are also very good in basket making, making of mats, utensil, etc. with the help of bamboo, since Nagaland is very rich in bamboo production.

All the 17 tribes of Nagaland have their own costume which differs from each other. Though all the tribes have similar types of clothing and ornaments, but on closer inspection no two tribes have identical items.

All Nagas wear colourful hand woven shawl. A full traditional costume would include a Head gear, sash worn across the torso, a loin cloth, leggings, armlets, wristlets, earrings and a good number of necklaces made of beads, shells and bones. Naga women wear a mekhela and a shawl. Today a lot of modern design can be seen in their dresses. Traditional mekhela and shawl would again be tribe specific in design, colour and pattern. Today we see Nagas in their full traditional costume only during festivals or cultural programmes.

### **Village administration-**

There are two types of administration in Nagaland- one is democratic republic and the other is chieftainship system. Among the different Nagas, Angami, Ao, Chakhesang and Zeliang tribes follow the democratic system. And the others follow the chieftainship system. Among them, some chiefs are very powerful and their words are like law. Konyak, Sumi and Kuki tribes followed this administration. But the chiefs of Rengma, Lotha, Pochury, Chang, Sangtam, Khiamniungan, Phom, and Yimchunger are not autocratic. They governed the village based on democratic principles.

### **The Morung system-**

Morung is the traditional informal education system of Naga society. It is an important part of traditional Naga people. All unmarried boys and in some tribes, girls also, became the members of the Morung, after entering a particular age. Morung is the place where they learned discipline, morality and skill based education. They could leave the morung, when they were ready to begin their family life. In dormitory, the boys learnt wood carving, bamboo making, preparation for head hunting and many moral education. And the girls learnt folk songs, folk dance, weaving, cooking, etc. Morungs were generally situated near the village gate and log drum was the important part of morung, through which they used to give the important information.

There was also a dormitory system among the unmarried girls. Like the boys dormitory system, young girls were also trained in different matters in dormitory such as cleaning, washing clothes, taking care of the children etc. The young girls were staying in the dormitory since them reaching on puberty till they reach the age of marriage.

But with the introduction of the Christianity and also the introduction of education, the dormitory system began to disappear.

### **Naga indigenous games-**

There are many games which are played by the different tribes of Nagaland. Games are the ways through which they celebrate their tradition cultural festivals. In ancient times, games are played not only for enjoyment, but also the means to train them for life skills. But now indigenous games are played for enjoyment, competition and preserving their cultural heritage. Some indigenous games are very common and it is played by all the tribes of Nagaland. But some are played by some tribes only. For example, bamboo poles

stilt walking is the indigenous game of Konyak tribe. Khaimniungam high jump is the indigenous game of Khiamniungam tribe. The object of this game is to make the people smart and brave. Kiti Do is an indigenous game of Sumi tribe. This is a practice of martial art, in which people can use only legs. Kebui Dok, a mithun chase game, is the indigenous game of Zeme tribe. Tenyimia wrestling is the indigenous game of Angami, Chakhesang and Zeliang tribes.

The main objectives of these games are to diffuse tension, to show courtesy, kindness, bravery etc. therefore, they play the game with full of enjoyment.

### **Gender status of Naga society-**

Nagas are patriarchal in nature and therefore men get the highest position in society. Naga women did not get equal status in administration, decision making, Head hunting, etc. Their activities were limited with child bearer and care taker. But after converting to Christianity, there is a change in the status of women. Now the status of women is almost same like men. Now they can participate in administration also. Now their work is not limited with baby bearer and care taker. Now like men, they also getting equal rights in education, business, jobs etc. Like men, they can also go outside their territory for higher education and job purposes.

### **Art and culture of the Nagas-**

Naga people are good in basket making, weaving of cloth, wood carving, jewellery making etc. they are colour lovers. Weaving of colourful shawls is a unique activity of Naga women. In the shawl, they make different types of design. Every tribe has its own design, which signifies their tribe's identity. The design of two tribes are not same. Even from the same tribe also, they have different types of shawls for men and women. Women never used male's shawl. Even they have different shawls for head hunter, feast giver, etc. which are worn only on festivals. These are considered as the prestigious shawls, which are cannot be worn by the ordinary people.

### **Marriages in Nagaland-**

The marriage systems and rituals of marriages of Nagaland are differ from tribe to tribe. But almost all tribes of Nagaland follow the exogamous marriage system that means people cannot marry from the same clan. But there is an exception in Konyak Chiefs, they can marry from the same clan.

Again, regarding the numbers of wives also Naga tribes are differ from one another. For example, Ao, Angami tribes follow the monogamous marriage system. But Semas, follow the polygamous system. They can marry as many girls as possible. Among them, one is considered as the head wife, of course she may not be the first wife. Chang tribe can marry four to six wives. So, the marriage system of Nagas are very interesting and unique.

### **Head hunting and the Nagas-**

Head hunting was an old and indigenous practice of collecting the heads of the enemies after killing. The Nagas are well known as the head hunters all over the world. Head hunting practice was a male activity. Female did not practice this activity. They collected the heads of the enemies, from other tribes or from the non-Nagas. But they never collected from the same tribe. Among the different tribes, Konyak tribe was famous for this head hunting practice. Among the different heads, the heads of the women and children were considered as most valuable. Therefore, Naga folk guarded their children and wives, when they went to the field for work.

The status of the people increased according to the numbers of heads they have collected. In ancient times, the Naga people did not get beautiful and good wives, if they could not collect a single head. In ancient times, the head hunters got high respect and prestige from the society. They had a different prestigious shawl, which showed their high status. But in 1960, the Indian government officially banned the practice of head hunting, but some tribes like Konyak, practiced after that also. Konyak people were the last head hunter of Naga society.

### **Feast of merit and the Nagas-**

Feast giving was another indigenous practice of Nagaland. Feast of merit provided the high social status in Naga society. It is a feast which is given by the wealthy and rich person from the village to the whole community. Feast of merit was a male activity and only married people can do this. This is not the activity of the bachelor. The wealthy married people can arrange feast as many times as possible in his life time. According to the numbers of feast the status of the Naga people increased in their society. It was practiced by the Naga people throughout the year. Feast of merit is practiced by the Naga people even today also but in a different way. Today, Naga people hosted the feast for their community during the Christmas time. The people, those who are staying outside of their villages, during Christmas time, they use to go to their village and arrange a feast for their community. So, this activity was practiced in order to increase their status in their community.

### **Festivals of Nagaland-**

Nagaland is best known as 'the land of festivals', because every tribe of Nagaland celebrates a numbers of festivals throughout the year. Most of the festivals are related with their indigenous culture and tradition. Some of the most famous festivals which are celebrated by the Nagas are Moatsu, Tsungremmong, Tuloni, Sekrenyi, etc. Of course some of the festivals which were celebrated by the Nagas in ancient periods, is not celebrated now. For example, the festival of Lijabamong of Ao tribe, is not celebrated by the Ao people at present. Most of the festivals are related with harvesting and sowing, because agriculture is the main occupation of Nagaland. They enjoy the festival with merry making, playing different games and wearing different colourful traditional clothes and ornaments.

### **Following are the main festivals of Nagaland-**

TRIBE NAME	FESTIVAL NAME	MONTH OF CELEBRATION
ANGAMI	SEKRENYI	FEBRUARY 25
AO	MOATSU/TSUNGREMMONG	1 <sup>ST</sup> WEEK OF MAY/1 <sup>ST</sup> WEEK OF AUGUST
CHAKHESANG	THSUKHENYIE/SUKRENYU	6 <sup>TH</sup> MAY/15 <sup>TH</sup> JANUARY
CHANG	NKANYULEM	JULY 13
KACHARI	BUSHU	JANUARY LAST WEEK
KHIAMNIUNGAM	MIU/TSUKUM	MAY 5/OCTOBER
KONYAK	AOLING	APRIL 13
KUKI	MIMKUT	JANUARY 17
LOTHA	TOKHU EMONG	NOVEMBER 7
PHOM	MONGYU/MOHA	APRIL 1 AND MAY
POCHURY	YEMSHE	OCTOBER 5
RENGMA	NGADA	NOVEMBER 27
RENGMEI	CHAKAANGAANNGAI	BETWEEN DECEMBER AND JANUARY
SANGTAM	MONGMONG	SEPTEMBER 3
SUMI	AHUNA/ TULUNI	NOVEMBER AND JULY 8
YIMCHUNGRU	METUMNIU/TSUNGKANIU	AUGUST 8 AND JANUARY
ZELIANG	MELEINYI/NGA-NGAI	MARCH 11 AND DECEMBER LAST WEEK

Though all the tribes of Nagaland have different festivals of their own, but they celebrate a common festival which is known as “Hornbill Festival”. It is celebrated from 1<sup>st</sup> December to 10<sup>th</sup> December, every year. It is celebrated in the Kisama village of Kohima. This is the common festival for all tribes. Through this festival, there is a unity in diversity. In this festival, they show their traditional cultures. It is one of the international festivals of Nagaland. In this festival. People use to come from all over the world.

### **Conclusion from philosophical point of views-**

From the above discussion it can be said that the social life system of the Naga people is one of the best systems in human life. They work in group, sleep in group, eat in group. There is no individual activity in Naga society. The Naga philosophy is that “in order to eat, you have to work”.

The traditional morung system, which was a part and parcel of Naga people, can be compared with Ashrama system of Hindu philosophy. Like the ashrama system, Naga people also stayed in morung or dormitory in order to learn many skill-based education. They also stayed their till they reached garhasthya stage. But the difference between ashrama and morung system is that this system was not only for the upper classes, since

there is no class system in Naga society. Again, women did not get any opportunity for ashrama life, it was only for the boys. But, in Naga society, in some tribe morung system was there for girls also. For example, in Ao tribe, there was girl's dormitory also, which was known as tzuki in ao dialect. So, we can say that the status of women was not so low unlike the ancient Hindu society.

The Naga village government is just like modern democratic government. In Naga society, there is no caste system. There is no distinction between upper caste and lower caste. All are equal before the law and all enjoy equal rights and opportunities.

In conclusion, we can say that the Naga society is really very unique. The Naga culture tells us about their lives, their habits, their beliefs and practices, their social and religious structures etc. Every tribe of Nagaland has their own village and their own society. They have their identity in their villages. But due to the changes of time and because of opportunities in cities and towns, many Nagas are shifting from their villages to town. Though they shifted from village to town, but they never forget their own actual identity. They shifted to urban areas because of opportunities in education, jobs, business, etc. But they always keep their relation with their own people. They never forget their originality. Though there are a lot of changes in Naga culture from animism to Christianity, but they follow their traditional culture even now also. They respect their indigenous culture in modern society also.

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