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Editorial Note

Research is a crucial component in our lives that permeates through the realms of higher education. It aids in the advancement of knowledge, improved pedagogy, the enhancement of institutional reputation, and promotes funding which are crucial to the overall growth of an institution. Within the experience of empirical studies, the researcher, be it student or teacher, finds better scope to hone a wide spectrum of skills. The immense benefits of a consistent and vibrant research environment are the impetus behind the publication of the annual multidisciplinary Dimapur Government College Journal.

Providing a wide platform for the avid scholar, this issue contains twelve papers ranging from topics as diverse as food crops, pre-colonial Naga society, issues of identity, midwives, gender, role of media, different aspects of literature, sexual health of students and the implementation of the NEP 2020 and FYUGP. They have been written by writers across academia. We are confident that readers will find these papers relevant, thought-provoking and practical.

The papers have been thoroughly assessed by qualified reviewers for whose contributions the editorial board remains grateful.

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4. Pre-Colonial Society of Nagas: The Socio-Economic, Cultural and Political Uniqueness

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Abstract

The pre-colonial society of Nagas was a 'Village State'. It is a cluster of independent clans with distinct territories which were subdivided into khels (sector), subject to a chieftainship or based on actual descent from a common ancestor. The central feature of a Naga village was the 'morung', where bachelors learned different skills and important decisions relating to war or peace. Each village was self-governing and had its own independent administration that reflects their outstanding bearing. They practiced swidden cultivation of rice, which was labor-efficient and resulted in large grain surpluses. A person's status in Naga culture is determined by their ornaments and clothes they wear. They celebrate festivals, each with its own significance and purpose.

The traditional system of political unit that stresses the virtue of a democratic outlook, being equal and caste less society. Though there are tribes with hereditary chiefs, the chief must act according to the wishes and the advice of the people. The British colonial intervention had an

impact on the independence of the region which was previously defended by the Naga warriors. It is worth noting that the customs, norms, and traditions of the Nagas are truly unique. It is therefore important for the present generation of Nagas to uphold and preserve the distinctiveness of customs, norms and traditions that they are passed on from one generation to the next.

Key Words: Village State, Casteless Society, Morung, Patriarchal Society, Animism, Swidden Cultivation and Self-governing.

INTRODUCTION

The Naga tribes, situated in the northeastern region of India, particularly in the state of Nagaland, upheld a unique identity. Naga society was structured into different tribes, each possessing its own unique identity, language, and traditions (Kumar & Kumāra, 2005). The pre-colonial Naga society was characterized by self-sufficient villages, each operating as an independent social and political entity. These villages had individual systems of governance, customary laws, and administrative frameworks to manage their affairs and address internal disputes (Hutton, 1965). The socio-economic structure of pre-colonial Naga society was distinguished by its tribal organization, social traditions, and economic customs. The governance of the region was decentralized, with villages serving as the main political entities, each operating independently without a central governing body. Economically, the Naga society was predominantly

based on agriculture, particularly through the practice of swidden cultivation, which involved clearing forested areas for cultivation, rotating to new areas after a few years.

The traditional political structure of Nagas featured a republican set up. The Naga tribes were further segmented into sub groups known as clans, with a strict emphasis on exogamy. Inhabiting geographically distinct territories, villages were collective assemblies of autonomous clans. It is noteworthy that the Naga society had a distinctive social structure that diverged from prevalent class or caste systems in other societies. Recognized for their remarkable feats of merit, series of rituals, and revered warriors known for their practice of headhunting, Naga society demonstrated a unique cultural landscape (Kumar & Kumāra, 2005). In this society, patriarchy emphasized paternal lineage, making men the central figures in political, economic, and cultural matters. This distinctiveness attests to the resilience and adaptability of the Naga people in preserving their way of life amidst the challenges presented by their environment (Odyuo, 2013).

Meaning and Definition

Social Structure

The term "social structure" pertains to the organized framework of social relationships and institutions that collectively form a society. It denotes the organized social arrangements in a society, which shaped by individual

behaviors. Similarly, it is understood that society is comprised of interconnected groups or systems of roles, each serving distinct functions, carrying specific meanings, and serving particular purposes **(Maines, 1977).**

Economic Structure

The economic framework that enables a country or region to efficiently produce goods, services, and resources of exchange value (Lin, 2011)**.** During the Pre-Colonial Society of Nagas the economy was self sufficiency and everything produced in the society meant for self consumption only not for sale. Hence, the economy was very limited.

Cultural Structure

The concept of 'cultural structures' plays a pivotal role in shaping the functioning and progress of a society. The fundamental elements and patterns influence the operation and development of human life. These structures form the basis upon which the norms, beliefs, traditions, and behaviors that define a specific society are established (White, L. A. (1959).

Political Structure

The concept of Political Structure encompasses the various institutions, groups, and their interrelations within political systems. It also includes the regulations, laws, and norms that shape the political landscape and

entity (Rothstein, 1996). The Pre-Colonial Society of Nagas political structure was different from the present one, every village had enjoyed sovereignty.

Theoretical Understanding

The literature review offers a detailed analysis of the socio-economic, cultural, and political landscape of pre-colonial Naga society. The Naga people are ethnically affiliated with the Mongoloid race, the tribes of Nagaland exist within a casteless social structure (Hutton, 1965). The scholarly work of Longkumer (2018) examines the beliefs, practices, and nationalist sentiments of the Nagas, shedding light on their cultural and social dynamics. Meanwhile, the research by Baruah, (2003) delves into the complex issues of identity conflicts and traditional warfare within the Naga community. Thong's (2012) provide insights into the political institutions and village administration of Nagas and its westernization impacts. Shimray & Ezung (2023) delve into an analysis of the colonial influences on Naga polity. Additionally, investigate colonial influences on Naga polity and also explored the impact of colonialism on Naga society and governance. Vashum (2000) conduct a thorough examination of the impact of domestic regulations on the rights of self-determination. Longkumer (2015, 2021) delves into the complex dynamics of cultural representation and colonial encounters. Furthermore, Behera (2021) work, offers a fresh perspective on the intricate relationships between tribes and the British during historical periods. Additionally, Zhimo (2021) conducted a detailed study

that delved into the institutional strategies employed by the Nagas in village administration. In Additionally, Das (2011) thoroughly scrutinized and analyzed the cultural dimensions, challenges of nationalism, and the intricate societal frameworks. Thong (2016) delved deeply into the multifaceted nature of power dynamics, varying worldviews, and territoriality, aiming to unravel their complexities. Additionally, Das (2014) conducted extensive research to explore the interconnectedness of power dynamics, diverse worldviews, and territorial behavior, providing important insights into these critical concepts. Meanwhile, Küchle (2019, 2016) elucidated the nuanced interconnections between kinship, class formation, and social inequality, providing valuable insights into their multifaceted relationships. Sema's (2018) work depicted these themes in a nuanced manner, contributing valuable insights into the political and social frameworks of the era. Hence, the current study reexamines the distinctive socio-economic, cultural, and political structures of pre-colonial Naga society in a sequential manner. Cheerangal (2016), also warrant significant recognition, as they offered insightful perspectives on the crucial aspects of governance and societal structures in pre-colonial Naga society.

The combined findings of these studies shed light on the intricate fabric of Naga society's historical background. The current study reexamines the distinctive socio-economic, cultural, and political structures of pre-colonial Naga society in a sequential manner.

Objective of the Study

Given the survey of literature and scope, the following objective is considered for the study is:

[1] To investigate the uniqueness of Socio-economic, Cultural, and Political Structure of pre-colonial Naga society.

Methodology

This is a qualitative study. Descriptive method is employed to analyze non-numeric data in order to comprehend scholars' experiences, beliefs, attitudes, behaviors, and interactions within a specific thematic or research interest area. Qualitative data is interpretation-based, language-focused, and provide insight into the underlying reasons for certain behaviors. A qualitative inquiry into the socio-economic, cultural, and political structures of pre-colonial Naga society has been undertaken.

Result and Discussions

[A] Social Structure of pre-colonial Naga society

It is noteworthy that Naga society did not have a class or caste system and had well-organized social institutions during the pre-colonial period (Kumar & Kumāra, 2005). Despite the diverse patterns of land ownership within the tribe, the prevalent clan and community ownership of land stands out as a defining characteristic of Naga land relations, consistent with traditional tribal societies. In Naga society, the community is organized into

subdivisions known as clans, which adhere to the practice of strict exogamy. A Naga village could be described as a collection of autonomous clans residing within their respective clan territories (Shimray & Ezung, 2023). The pre-colonial Naga society exhibited a structured social order, encompassing family units, morungs (learning centers), religious beliefs, and autonomous governance of each village. These elements were instrumental in shaping the behaviors of individuals and their interactions within the society. In traditional societies, individuals connected by blood relations worked together under a headman for common interests, which distinguished their society from others. The headman held a significant status within the community and played crucial roles for the benefit of the village members (Thong, 2012). Social norms are the unwritten rules that guide the behavior of individuals within a society. They dictate how people should act in specific situations (Kelkar et al, 2017). In pre – colonial Naga societies is characterized by shared common beliefs, values, practices, and artifacts that members of a society use to interact and coexist with one another. These shared elements form the basis of social interaction and define the way individuals within the society relate to each other (Vashum, 2000). The morung, a traditional youth dormitory, was a crucial institution in every Naga village. It served as a place for the socialization and education of young boys and girls, imparting cultural, social, artistic, and practical skills, in addition to nurturing and transmitting important cultural values and norms. Furthermore, the morung also functioned as a meeting place for unmarried individuals in the village,

providing a platform for discussions on village affairs and the imparting of essential skills required for village life. Additionally, during historical conflict periods, the morung played a significant role in strategizing for both offense and defense, embodying an essential aspect of the village community (Shimray & Ezung, 2023).

In Naga society, status is the social position that determines an individual's rights, privileges, and prestige. Traditionally, Naga society is casteless and classless, and women have enjoyed a high social positioning and independence. However, it is also a patriarchal society, where family names are carried forward through male who also inherit family land. Despite women's diligent contributions to domestic and agricultural work, their status remained lower than that of men due to the patriarchal nature of the society. Additionally, they were instructed on how to be good mothers and serve their families and the village community (Metha and Ozukum, 2022).

[B] Economic Structure of pre-colonial Naga society

The pre-colonial Naga society was characterized by self-sufficient economy and independent. The agriculture was the cornerstone, with shifting cultivation, known as swidden cultivation. This practice involved clearing forest patches for cultivation, using them for several years, and then relocating to a new area (Shimray & Ezung, 2023). Land ownership was generally communal, managed by the village or clan, while individual families had specific

rights to cultivate particular plots. Land ownership was a symbol of high status and prestige. Individuals with substantial land holdings were highly respected (Sema, 2018). Thus, regardless of their size, families needed to possess land, either individually or as part of the clan. Land was restricted to clan members, which could be inherited, acquired, and sold privately. Cultivable land was further divided into wet terrace fields, dry terrace fields, jhum land, agro-forestry plots, and kitchen gardens. In addition to farming, the Nagas engaged in blacksmithing, brewing local drinks, weaving, pottery, basketry, carving, woodwork, creating musical instruments, hunting, fishing, animal domestication, and salt making (Hutton, 1921).

Within the patriarchal Naga culture, women's involvement was mainly confined to household tasks and agricultural work. Women had autonomy over agricultural practices, but men dominated the selling of produce and the appropriation of the income. Women supported men in trade and business but their roles were largely limited to hosting and entertaining guests (Metha and Ozukum, 2022). A distinctive feature of Naga agrarian life is the Peli system, a group-based activity where members worked in each other's fields in rotation. This system facilitated social interaction among peers and allowed youth to socialize within socially approved bounds. The Naga villages operated a subsistence economy primarily based on barter system. Later, a form of currency made of iron and conch shells was used in trade (Hutton, 1921).

[C] Cultural Structure of pre-colonial Naga society

Nagaland, famously referred to as the Land of Festivals, showcases a vibrant culture where festivals hold a central place. These celebrations are intricately linked to the agricultural cycles, victories in war and other significant milestones in Naga society. Integral components of these festivals include traditional dances, music, and feasts, which foster social cohesion through elaborate rituals **(Thornton et al., 2012).**

Historically, knowledge, history, and traditions in Naga society were preserved through oral storytelling, songs, and folklore due to the absence of a written language until recent times. The Naga tribes are distinguished by their impressive demeanor and elaborate dress and ornaments, which signify their social status. A wide variety of attire is worn depending on the occasion, with the shawl being the most significant garment. These shawls come in various styles, each with its unique meaning and purpose. Men's attire often includes decorative items such as ivory armlets, leggings, headgears, earrings, ornamented belts, and embroidered cross-straps. In contrast, women typically wear Mekhalas (shawl-skirts), knotted sleeves of shawls, necklaces, and brass earrings. Naga society has a rich tradition of music and folktales, often performed simultaneously, especially during festivals that narrate stories of traditions, heroic acts, or love tales. The Nagas is also renowned for their craftsmanship; these crafts are prominently displayed on village gates and Morung. **(Shimray & Ezung, 2023).**

Architecturally, Naga houses were typically constructed

from locally sourced materials like bamboo and wood. While the designs varied among tribes, they generally included spacious, communal houses with intricate carvings. Gender roles in Naga society were distinct but complementary; men were mainly responsible for hunting, warfare, and leadership, whereas women managed household and crafts. Thus, pre-colonial Naga society was a complex and dynamic tapestry of interwoven traditions, practices, and beliefs, deeply rooted in their land, community, and heritage **(Thornton et al., 2012).**

The Naga people practiced animism, with a strong belief in spirits and deities associated with nature. They conducted rituals and sacrifices to appease these spirits and ensure the well-being of their community (Shimray & Ezung, 2023). These practices were part of their efforts to mitigate potential distresses caused by malevolent spirits. Oral traditions played a crucial role in preserving their history, myths, and laws. Each tribe's distinctive traditional attire, often colorful and adorned with beads, shells, and feathers, was symbolic of social status and achievements.

[D] Political Structure of pre-colonial Naga society

The Naga villages were considered to be autonomous village states. They maintained their independence from foreign rule, and their social structure resembled that of the republics in Ancient Greece. Each Naga tribe occupied a specific territory and was made up of several villages. The village, rather than the tribe, was the most important social and political institution for the Naga people, serving as the fundamental political and social

unit. Each village was self-governing and had its own administration, which oversaw all aspects of community life, including politics, society, economy, and religion. Disputes were resolved based on customary laws, and each village had its own institutional system. The council of elders, representing each clan, governed the villages, and their decisions held the authority of law for the villagers. Additionally, the council had the power to engage in diplomatic matters with other villages, declare war, and make peace **(Shimray & Ezung, 2023).**

In the pre-colonial era, each village had a chief who led the administration in conjunction with a council or an assembly of elders, known as the Goan Buras in contemporary Naga society. The Eastern Naga communities still maintain the institution of the village chieftain, known as Angh, where polygamy is permitted for the chief or king ***(Ibid,* 2023*)***. While most of Naga villages operated democratically, there were exceptions, with some following hereditary kingship, especially the Konyak Naga and Sumi naga tribes still maintain the institution of the village chieftain, known as 'Angh' and 'Akukau' respectively,

The structure of a Naga village consists of khels, and the number of khels is determined by the village's population. Each khel had specific powers and responsibilities for managing its affairs. Representatives from each khel were selected to represent their interests in the village council. The village chief, usually elected from the members of the khels, held the most influential position in the village. Every Naga was expected to contribute to the well-being

of their village, instilled with a sense of duty from a young age ***(Ibid,* 2023).**

Limitations

The analysis primarily relied on reviewing existing literature focusing on the socio-economic, cultural, and political structures of pre-colonial Naga society, which may have limited the scope of findings.

Conclusion

The continuity of the Naga tribal traditions and laws has played a vital role in governing the Naga society, providing a framework to address various challenges stemming from modernity, including tribalism and ethnic conflicts. The social, economic, cultural, and political uniqueness of the Naga society reflects a rich tapestry of traditions that have been meticulously preserved over time. The Naga society prides itself on its classless social structure, well-organized social institutions, and unique economic practices, particularly in agriculture. Additionally, the community's engagement in various crafts and economic activities speaks to their diverse skill set and cultural heritage. Festivals in the Naga society hold profound significance, serving as a link to agricultural cycles, historical victories, and other milestones, and fostering a strong sense of unity through intricate rituals and traditions. The spiritual beliefs of the Naga people, rooted in animism and a deep reverence for nature, contribute to their unique cultural identity, reflected in their rituals and sacrifices dedicated to the well-being of

their community. Furthermore, the distinctive political structure of the Naga society, centered on autonomous village states with their own governance and dispute resolution mechanisms, underscores the strength of their community life and the commitment to preserving their cultural heritage for future generations.

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