

## The Interface between Tradition and Modernity in Naga Society: A Critique from Gender Perspective

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**ABSTRACT** This paper questions to what extent do modern beliefs have an impact on the traditional values concerning the status of Naga women. Nagaland entered the modern era owing to the contact with the British administrators, Christian missionaries and the attainment of statehood. It was believed that the ushering of the modern era would uplift Naga women, however the traditional values were kept much intact, which hinders the opportunities promised by modernity. The interface of tradition and modernity is examined to highlight the incorporation of traditional practices, which hinders Naga women to exploit their potentials. A detailed enquiry through the prevailing customary laws and case studies conducted on the experiences of women provides an interesting account as to why Naga women are yet to achieve a status as par with Naga man. Such constraints can be traced to the ideologies, which glorified the Naga man and thereby occupy a secondary position to males till today.

### INTRODUCTION

An important phenomenon considered to be a decisive factor for all round development is modernity. The term modernity in this paper is used in the post enlightenment term that provides possibilities and alternatives for the welfare of the individual. Modernity provides access to uniformity that assures equality for all citizens. To understand the meaning of modernity, the analysis given by Gupta (2000) will be followed, who sees modernity as an attitude that comes to play in a social relationship and demands a baseline of similarities to avail equal opportunities. While the experience of modernity differs from one society to another, less is known concerning the experiences of women who are bound by tradition. To understand what tradition is, in many literatures, it has been conceptualised as opposite to modernity. What must be understood is that, tradition is a way of life of the people legitimated and rationalised over the years and passed through generations. Inherent in the tradition lays the tendency to extract loyalties among its members to abide by it. Similarly, Ao (2019) in her studies reaffirms how tradition has regulated the life patterns, which is a source of people's literature, customs, religion and history. It does impose responsibility among the community members to revere and live by the ethics. Taking this background of modernity and tradition into consideration, a shift will be

taken towards Naga society experience of this interface. Such a critical study will bring to the arena Naga women lives and experiences in a society marked by a system of privileges accorded on the basis of gender. What is known about Naga society is that, Nagas came into contact with the modern culture during the colonial rule and over the years has experienced a conflict of modern values with the traditional practices. The overlooking of this phenomenon will help to understand the contemporary Naga society and the experiences of the women folks in a better way.

The presence of modernity is reflected by the indicators such that, Nagaland recorded the lowest crime rate against women in 2016 according to the National Crime Records Bureau, Government of India. In addition to this, Nagaland's sex ratio stands at 965 per one thousand males, which is the second highest in the country after Arunachal Pradesh according to the 2018 report on vital statistics of India based on the civil registration system. Such indicators do highlight that Naga women are on a high pedestal as compared to the women in the rest of the country. However, such indicators cannot be considered to paint a high position of Naga women. While there are many unreported violence incidents, women faced hardship in asserting her individuality owing to the strong presence of cultural tradition. Beauvior (1949) also rightly affirms how violence does not always mean physical vio-

lence, but it does include the social customs and the traditional practices, which prevent women their full expression. Although, a range of possibilities and alternatives has been provided by modernity, the continuity of traditional cultural practices makes the incorporation difficult. The strong presence of unequal social relations between the genders is seen in the various role expectations and role-playing. In one of the field experiences that the researchers have encountered, the researchers were told by a respondent how Naga women status is far superior to the mainland Indian women, whereby, the practice of dowry system, female infanticide was unknown. The respondent thus concluded that since such practices were not to be found, the status of Naga women were better. However, the respondent did not assert that Naga men and women have the same social standing. What disadvantaged women was in matters of inheritance of property and the denial of women's entry in the village council, which is the sole administration in every Naga village. Such existing ushering inequalities can be traced to the customs and conventions rooted in the traditional structure and many at times, these practices positioned women as a subordinate, negating equal opportunities for development. Taking the experiences of Naga women into consideration, women are unable to access the opportunities provided by modern values and find a low social status. The traditional cultural setting and the kinship structures restrict mobility. It has been observed that, status has been defined as a phenomenon, which emerges from social organisation through a process of differentiation rather than as an outgrowth of any intrinsic or natural characteristic of person (Badal 2009:17). Traditional structures appear to be one of the most powerful in determining a person's status such that women's subordination is sustained through the kinship structure.

### Objectives of the Study

This paper attempts to understand:

- a. The experiences of Naga women as a result of interface between tradition and modernity in Naga society is to be examined thoroughly.

- b. To analyse the various cultural traditions and ideologies as to why Naga women cannot exploit their potentialities is discussed.

### Conceptual Framework

Before discussing the various interfaces, it is important to understand what tradition and modernity is. A flood of literature on the discussion of tradition and modernity emerged among various academicians and scholars with diverse viewpoints. However, the main central theme is that modernity represents an attitude that governs social relationships. Such attributes that guide a social relationship include universality, accountability, rationality and commitment to a scientific worldview. It demands a line that people live with equality and dignity (Gupta 2000: 2). Traditions are the various socio-cultural practices rooted in customs and conventions. A tradition is particularistic and internal to a society and differs for various communities and groups. On this account, the researchers differentiate tradition from modernity, the former being particularistic, and discriminatory, which stands against the latter, that calls for equality.

An analysis of the contemporary society reveals that both tradition and modernity are in continuity and old tradition and beliefs have not been completely displaced by modernisation. Such findings are recorded in the work of Singh (1986), who stated that modernity, in case of the Indian society, is an adaptive process rather than structural, and many traditional institutions got reinforced. Rudolph and Rudolph (1967) also stated that modernity entered into the Indian character through assimilation and not replacement of traditional institutions. For Giddens (1991) modernity represents a break from traditional order and creates greater choice than that of traditional culture. As tradition loses hold, daily life is reconstituted and individuals are forced to negotiate lifestyle choices. Elwin (1961) who made an analysis of the social life of the Nagas, finds the continuation of the traditional customary laws, which are rationalised in the modern legal system, thereby, settle disputes according to the customary laws.

According to the feminist liberal theory by Baehr (2018), equal participation is the goal of women in society and she traced the barrier of

women's integration to the existing male domination of cultural, political and economic values and the patriarchal traditions. Modernity seems to enhance status and self-respect and gives women a sense of achievement and opportunities. However, the backwardness of women, which is still present, is traced to the continuity of the irrelevant traditional practices whereby, the traditional values positioned women as homemakers and reproducers.

Thus, one finds contradictions, as there occurs a dualism between traditions and modernity. As far as the questions of women are concerned, such interface presents a dual character of circumscribing to the traditional values and expectation while carrying out their aspiration. Modernity, on one hand, rejects the strict cultural tradition. However, one finds enforcement and continuation of old age practices. What can be seen in the experience of Indian women and Naga women in particular is that, exposure to modernity deviates from the modern paradigm.

#### **Literature Review on Interface of Tradition and Modernity**

According to the various literature surveys being carried out, it has been observed that, a number of academicians have discussed and debated on the issue of tradition, modernity and women. One such can be found in the works of Tiwari (2002) who analysed the role played by tradition in the modern era in determining the status of women. Tradition implies a sense of continuity and changelessness, modernity means the state of being modern equated with development and progress, depicting a set of binary opposite between the two. In her analysis, it was found how modernity at the structural level created scope and avenues of job opportunities, however, at the attitudinal level it failed especially in addressing the problems of gender roles and identities. A few other studies highlight the women and their experiences. Findings of Ghadially (1998) also throws light on the issues of tradition and modernity whereby, the low status of women has been traced to the pattern of development, which has been superimposed on a pre-existing system where social structures disfavour women. Women live in social and legal reality and though progress has

been made in the legal structure, yet, the social realities such as myths, customs, and values shaping the perceptions towards women are fossilised for any significant change in transforming women's lives.

#### **Literature Review on Women**

In the findings of Goswami (1981) it is stated that, women are judged by the total output of her contribution in agriculture. The domains of man in political arenas depicting strong patriarchal tradition was discussed by Imchen (1993), who also found out that the continuing cultural practices could not be disturbed by the introduction of modern education and agriculture. Horam (1988) also discussed the introduction of new trends among them. However, traditional practices are still kept intact and unwritten code plays an important role. The Naga family depicts a strict organisation of patriarchal family where the subordination of the young and females followed. Ovung (2012) in his studies finds the continuity of tribal code fashioned with modern administrative system, which are assisted by village council on the basis of customary law and practice. Mepfhu-o (2019) also discusses how the societal construction of masculine qualities like confidence, toughness, and strength encourage the power of one over the other contributing to the subjugation of women. For Nongbri (2003) she highlighted how the subjugation of women is legitimised and reinforced by the community and the state, which reinforces male power. While Xaxa (2004) saw how in spite of the changes brought by the adoption of Christianity, inequalities were much inherent in the Christian churches and discrimination continued. The exercise of patriarchal values being exercised and supported by matriarch is a theme that flows in the narration of Kire's (2007) novel.

#### **Objectives**

The major objectives of this study focus to understand:

- a. The position of Naga women by examining the various cultural tradition and ideologies.
- b. The experiences of women as a result of interface between tradition and modernity in Naga society is examined thoroughly.

## METHODOLOGY

This study is mainly a descriptive analysis of the data available gathered from primary sources and secondary sources. The primary data, which was gathered during the fieldwork conducted in November 2019, which includes unstructured interview method and case studies, which were primarily used to draw the experiences of women in particular. The questions that were kept in mind while conducting the interview ranged from the past experiences, their aspirations, and the various obstacles those women faced in their daily lives. Keeping in mind of the unwritten customary laws and tradition, knowledge on this field was gathered through oral history from man folks whose merit has high in the traditional knowledge. Apart from this, the secondary data was gathered from books, journals and the Nagaland government report on the status of women were included.

## RESULTS

### Naga Society

Keeping in mind the objectives, the researchers briefly look into the issues of the Nagas and their social organisation. Nagas belong to Mongolian race that forms an important segment of the tribal society of the north eastern part of India, found mostly in the state of Nagaland, and also in the neighbouring states of Assam, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh. Since the authors are familiar with the Nagas of Nagaland, the study upon which it is based is basically drawn from the tribes of Nagaland. There are more than 16 tribes inhabiting the state of Nagaland, each with a distinct language, customs, culture and tradition. Though less is known of their migration inhabiting the present area, each Naga tribes has its own myth regarding the origin, which forms an important segment of indigenous knowledge system. For instance, the *Ao's* of Nagaland believed to have originated from six stones in *chungliyimti*, whereas, the *Angami* tribe traced their origins from the bowels of the earth. The term Naga is not a nomenclature known to these tribes inhabiting the hills during the early period. Rather, it was the people outside who gave this term. The idea of Naga soci-

ety emerged as a result of colonial intervention whereby tribes started to identify themselves as Nagas. The unification of these different tribal communities under one administrative unit and the various ongoing political movements undertaken by different groups are responsible for the formation of Naga identity among these tribal communities. It is also important to mention that Nagas belong to different tribes in Nagaland, Manipur, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, and each tribe has its own customary laws, and while some of the laws are similar and others are not, the common fact is that, the traditional structure of Naga society is patriarchal and exhibits a patrilineal nature of inheritance. The experiences of women in Naga society more or less exhibits similarities in the sense that, none could have access to inheritance, and also, the entry in the village affairs is also denied. An account of the social life reveals that, men are placed at the highest pedestal and have much say in decision making. Superiority of men over women cannot be challenged by any authority. The desired ideal behaviour and role of Naga women on the other hand, is her engagement in subsistence economy, and domestic household, and exclusion in participation in political sphere. Thus, in Naga society, one finds a neat division of role among men and women to the extent of restriction of women's freedom.

### Modernity in Naga Society and the Interface with Traditional Practices

The modern period in Naga society is said to have begun during the British colonisation as early as in 1832 when the British captains travelled through the *Angami* territory, and later, after much resentment from the *Angami* village, the British decided to annex the Naga areas to their empire as early as in 1866, when a new district known as Naga hills was formed. The advent of modernity in Naga society thus took place owing to the colonial intervention, which paved way for the Christian missionaries to spread the new religion. As early as in 1839, Miles Bronson was the first missionary to the Nagas, also, the arrival of the American Baptist missionary E.W. Clark and his wife, Mary Mead Clark established the first school. Rev C.D King, Dr Rivenberg, Rev Dr. Witter were the other Chris-

tian missionaries who worked among the Nagas. The Nagas were also recruited as labour corps in France during the First World War, which inhibited a strong socio-political foundation, thereby on returning established the Naga Club in 1918. Such development towards identity consciousness draws the Nagas towards a modern era. On examining the historical background of the Nagas, one finds that, many of the traditional practices and beliefs were abolished concerning around the old traditional religion. The animistic religion of the Nagas were replaced by Christianity and gave up head hunting practices, the institution of *Morung*, which was a bachelor dormitory, where by young men were imparted with different skills were replaced with the introduction of modern education. The occupational pattern also changed from cultivators with the introduction of modern administration.

Before the advent of modern institutions and the spread of Christianity in the hill areas, when Nagas practiced head hunting, the social organisation was such that, gender roles were well defined. Women folks were required to attain to the various household activities, and took greater care of the young ones, keeping them out of the political governance of the village, which was under the domains of the male folks. At the village level, the social, cultural and legal authorities continued to be handled by the male folks according to the customary laws. During the time of village feud, it was observed that men were regarded to be the protector of the village, women and children. The head of women was considered to be more valued and applauded if any man chopped down the head of women of their enemies owing to the ability of women for reproducing heir as well as a defeat to the men who protected these women. Thus, the reducing of women could lead to the end of a family genealogy according to the patriarchal tradition. The interference in the political administration by the British administrators played an important role in checking the head hunting practices, which was approved by the customary laws. Ao (2014) also described how the continuance of this practice was not because the Nagas could not distinguish right and wrong but because it had social sanction until the advent of British into the Naga territories. Smith also observed that the practice of taking the head of the

enemy was associated with high prestige and honour for men and was easier for young men to win a fair maiden (Smith 2009: 72). Further, the work of missionaries in the spread of Christianity, coupled with the spread of education led to a significant change whereby, the Nagas gave up head hunting practices, and started engaging in the modern institutions, which brought them near to a modern society.

The state of women during the headhunting days was a petty affair bound within the family. Women do not go to the field alone. Men with spears and *daos* accompany women, whereby, women work in the field and men guard them from being attacked by their enemies. Men were regarded as the protector and thus played an important role in providing defence of the village, while women duties were towards families and work in the field. Naga women thus remained closely associated with their reproduction role that neither had the opportunity in the male affairs. Prevalent in the olden days before the arrival of the Christian missionaries, who established formal educational system, there was the institution called *Morung*, which was prevalent among all Naga tribes. Among the *Ao Nagas*, it is known by the name *Ariju*, while the *Lotha Nagas* called them *Chumbo*. This institution of *Morung* was a bachelor's dormitory, which was not only a sleeping house for young men, but it was a learning institution whereby they learn the art of warfare and were imparted with different skills. Also, this institution plays an important role in developing leadership qualities among men. Women were kept out of the institution of *Morung*. There were also women's dormitories. It was not a separate dormitory like that of *Morung*, however, it was hosted in homes of widows who belong to the same clan. In this, a woman from the same clan gather in the respective homes and learnt diversified skills and activities relating to socio-cultural activities, domestic chores and cultural tradition. The bachelors from the *Morung* would visit the place often, which served as a ground of courtship and bring women with gifts such as handicraft. The importance of *Morung* was that, the young men were prepared for protection of the village in case of sudden raids by the enemies. Further, the young bachelors were taught leadership, thereby preparing them with the skills that would

be required in governance of the tribal administration. Women on the other hand were kept out of the *Morung* and were taught skills associated with feminine roles. Though in the present day such institutions are not to be found and have now been replaced by the formal education system however the different roles and responsibilities accorded by the cultural tradition upon the Nagas, continued to the present day.

### **The Cultural Practices of the Nagas**

While examining the organising principle of the Naga society, which is based upon patriarchy, one sees a strong patriarchal feature, which is strengthened by strong customary laws and traditions, which govern the life of every tribal man and woman.

In social matters, women's primary role has been family oriented in a patrilineal kinship structure. An important principle of the patriarchal tradition of the Nagas as in any patriarchal family is that, men have always been regarded as the protector and the bread earner of the family, whereas, women have generally been associated with the child bearing activities, that is, the giver of the heir for the continuance of the lineage. When one looks at the occupation and livelihood, a woman's duty was regarded as to work and not to earn, thereby, economically depending upon the male members. Men are considered to be the head of the household, and the wife exercises a great deal of control in family matters. Marriages in the past were usually arranged by the families concerned and importance was given to clan exogamy to protect the lineage. In political spheres that govern the village, the major decision-making body consists of the village council, which consists of only male folk. A male from each clan is selected in the governing body, and exercise power and authority in the overall interest of the village. Though some women bodies and organisation are there in the village, they do not stand in the same relation as men, especially concerning power.

A clan consists of many nuclear families and it is through these clans that men derive their identity, inheritance rights, social obligations and responsibilities, and thereby, social recognition is gained. Descent is always traced strict-

ly in the male line, as the females are married off to the other sibs adhering to the rules of exogamy. In tracing such descent, all the male members have the advantage of claiming lands owned by ancestors and commonly owned, and any benefits from the common land are shared by the members of the descent. Such a rule of descent is traced unilaterally, through the father, to the neglect of the mother.

### **Customary Law of the Nagas**

The point of enquiry will cover the aspects of customary laws in relation to property, marriage, divorce and inheritance rights. It is important to explore in order to understand the organising principles prevailing in Naga society. An interesting feature of the customary law is its survival over the years and a strong tendency in regulation of the affairs. On examining the various tribes, in spite of the various differences in the patterns of origin, dialect and cultural differences, there is a line of similarities when it comes to the customary laws, which govern the people.

#### ***Inheritance***

Nagas have distinct laws to inherit moveable and immovable assets. All landed property exclusively belongs to male members. In terms of division of land property among the clansmen, it belongs to the male members of the clan and all decisions relating to lands are taken by the male members collectively. In the inheritance of father's property, the rule is such that, the property is equally divided among the male sons. Here, it is important to note that, in choosing such property by the sons, the eldest son is given the first priority in the selection of such property. The precedence thus, goes from the eldest male member to the youngest son.

#### ***Property***

When one looks into the moveable property, there also are traditional artefacts such as tusks of animals, spears, armlet, weapons of wars exclusively to be used by the male members only. These are passed down from the ancestors and are commonly owned by the clan members.

These are preserved by the oldest surviving male member of the clan, and after his death, these will further be handed to the next surviving oldest member who is in charge of keeping the artefacts. There also are certain moveable property of the females, such as traditional necklaces, and other costly jewellery items. On her death, such are given to the daughters generally. However, the actual traditional rule is that, such property of the females exclusively belongs to her kin members, and is inherited by the brothers and the sons.

### *Marriage and Divorce*

Some of the Naga tribes practice bride price during marriage, whereby, if women are known to have had intrigued, her price is lower. A man may also divorce his wife in case of incapability of temper, or minor faults or inability to reproduce children. Women could seek divorce from her husband's anytime, but in cases, she will not get her ornaments without her husband's consent. Also the rule is that bride price is not returned in case divorce takes place. If a woman commits adultery, she is asked to leave the house only with her clothing. In case of the man committing adultery, his wife can live in his house, however, if she remarries, only the household things will belong to her. There are no complicated customary laws regarding the guardianship of children in cases of divorce. In whatever condition the divorce takes place, the male children belong to the husband.

### *Succession*

Succession refers to the order and the condition of transfer of a particular office and titles. The succession of titles is basically on the male line, so also in terms of power and authority. The father is regarded as the manager of the family, and all activities are under the control of the father. When his sons get married, and establish new homes, the father becomes the common ancestor and the property acquired by him is considered the common property of his descendants. The power and authority as the head of the family and his descendants continues to be exercised till his death. Although a wife is consulted in all matters relating the family af-

fairs, a husband's decision in any matter is final and binding. With relating to succession, the first preference is the son, then, it will be followed by brother, nephews and cousins. In case of succession of a childless man, the man's brother, uncles and kinsmen are preferred. The choice of heir preferred among the kinsmen is the descendant of ancestor's eldest son.

### **Case Study**

The case studies have been undertaken keeping in mind of the objectives stated above. Much emphasis was upon women lives having to confront to the various norms. The result has been quite interesting, which will be discussed in the following section.

A woman (Lina named changed) was in her 80's. She was unmarried and was dependent economically on her brother who was living in the village. In her narration, she stated that, during her teenage days, she went to Shillong to pursue her studies. However, she had to return back to the village without continuing her education as strict laws were made by the village council that everyone should return to the village. The reason was to restrict the intermarriage with others except with their own native villagers. In this way, she had to return to the village leaving her studies, and she stated that, her position would have been enhanced if the village authorities had not made any strict laws.

According to a case study done by the researchers, the respondent is a married working woman engaged in a government job and has achieved upward social mobility through education and is in her early 30s. The respondent is married for the past five years and has two children. The respondent is well adjusting with her role of taking care of family and also pursuing her careers. However, her husband and her in-laws want her to give up her job to take care of the family needs. It was thus observed that, modern opportunities available to them are a difficult task owing to the patriarchal ideologies and there is a pattern of giving up their professional career, to satisfy family wants and needs.

In another study, the respondent is a woman aspiring to join the political arena. In the past years, when the state government decided to conduct the municipal elections with thirty-three

percent reservation for women, the respondent filed her nomination, however, faced massive protest and resentment. Further, the respondent was forced to withdraw her nomination as she faced threats from various tribal bodies to the extent of excommunicating from the village. It was thus observed through the study that there was a strong patriarchal tradition, which plays a dominant role in the modern society, which hinders the women's right to a large extent. Thus, through the narratives, it comes to light that women mostly abstain themselves from political participation and remain marginalised in the bargain for power. Though a modern constitution of India gives equal political right to men and woman, because of the local customary practices, women are not allowed to participate in politics.

In another case study, the respondent is in her early 20's. She happens to be the only girl child among the five siblings. She has completed her graduation degree and wishes to continue her postgraduate studies. She applied and got admission in a university. However, she did not get herself admitted due to the pressure of her parents whose thinking was that, completing graduation was enough for a girl child and pursuing higher studies was not approved, as she will be married off to another family. Thus, her parents were reluctant to spend on her higher education. On the other hand, her brothers were allowed to continue professional courses after completing their graduation degree. Further, it was also told that she had to stay at home, and do the household chores without getting any involvement from her male siblings and was burdensome with the household works. On asking her opinions relating marriage, the respondent stated how she was in a relationship with a man from another community. On learning about this by her brothers and relatives, she was asked to stop contacting him and her phone was seized. Her parents and brothers' opinions were to marry her to a man chosen by them and not by her. Through her narrative, it depicts a lack of choice in decision-making concerning personal life, and finds a strong hold of traditional notions, which gives priority to males over females.

Another respondent who is now in her 40's, is a divorcee and living in a metropolitan city outside north east India. On discussing about her life experiences, she stated that, she got

married at the age of 28, however, her husband divorced her after five years of marriage due to her inability to bear children. Her husband is now married and has a child. While asking about her educational status and her job prospects, she stated that, she had a theological degree and was working as a women leader in the church before getting married. However, after getting married, she was asked to give up her work by her husband and her in-laws as her husband was posted in the military force outside the state. Therefore, she had to withdraw her engagement in the church to stay with her husband. After the divorce, she wanted to continue her service towards the church, however, she could not as the society has a stigma towards a divorcee. Thus, she left the state and is now working as a clerk in a theological college. In the light of these narratives, it has been observed how the failure of the biological system of reproduction affects the social life of women and degrades her status in the society. Such hindrance is rooted in the strong patriarchal ideologies, which give high priority to reproduce children and especially a male child to carry out the genealogical line of the father.

Another case study is the experiences of a woman named Senti (named changed), who is in her late 30's. She is a married woman and has three daughters. Her husband is a clerk by profession. The respondent got married at the age of 25, which was arranged by her parents. She has a degree in bachelor of nursing and was working as a nurse in a private hospital. However, after marriage, she had to leave her job and move with her husband to Kohima where her husband's job was posted. In her narratives, before her marriage, she was financially independent however, her married life made her dependent on her husband. She thought of re-joining her professional career after her daughter completed primary schooling, however, she could not join owing to the work pressure at home. Further, her husband does not support her to venture into professional careers, as the family affairs will be neglected. Also, the respondent feels that, it is her duty to sacrifice for her family, which is more valuable. Her husband had hardly any involvement in the household affairs, while on the other hand, she is burdened with taking care of her household works and her chil-



dren as well. With regards to the financial matters, all the needs and essentials needed to purchase are taken care of by her husband only and does not entrust upon her. The respondent's husband feels that his wife is extravagant and thus she is not allowed to handle the finances. Thereby, the respondent has not much authority regarding financial expenses.

### Results of the Case Study

From the above narratives, it reveals the experiences of a woman, who could have had the opportunity to improve their status however the ability to take control over one's life is left to be decided by the strong authorities whose decision seems to benefit the welfare of all. During the earlier period, what seems to be a common trend were the people who were termed as outsiders who would marry Naga women and acquired land for business and later would run away with the benefits to their homeland and reunite with their family. To avoid all these, rules were enforced strictly on intermarriage and were much vigilant upon a women's personal life. There also are cases of women who had the opportunity to climb the social ladder experiences conflict to adjust to the dual roles, especially when there is a growing tendency among the social circle to see that, traditional roles of a good wife and a mother are expected to be priority rather than one's ambition and careers. The patriarchal values cannot be said to be exercised by man only. It is supported by the matriarch too, who holds authority and has say in the family matter and contributes towards the exercise of traditional values. A male child is urged to attain education and to be independent so to look after the needs on the family. From the very beginning, the responsibilities for a male are much inflicted upon male than a female. All these have a great impact on achievement status in the long run. Another theme that reveals is that the values that a man is the provider does play a dominant role and thereby given opportunities than a female child who is socialised into the roles to be a good wife.

There is also tendency among women to choose to sacrifice for her family at the cost of her professional career. It has been in her experiences that the professional path, which will give

her opportunity to gain independence in financial matters, has been obstructed due to the strong values attached in looking after her family needs. Thus, in spite of the attainment of education, the bargaining power of women is minimised as greater prestige is attached to the traditional role of a mother and wife. From the above analysis of the experiences it can also be observed that a large number of highly educated women would remain unemployed voluntarily, as they devote their role towards the domestic sphere. The freedom of income earning activities is related to the ability to hold over one's resources and rights over one space, which seems to be absent in the respondent's case. In the above narratives, the experiences of lack of negotiating power are seen on the part of the respondent, who could have had economic independence had her parents felt the need of investing in education. The choice available to women owing to the conservative stereotypes does effect the question of women's livelihood, especially concerning the opportunities in regard to income earning activities. The bargaining power to direct over one's life and control resources depends to a large extent upon the long-term investment in education, which could have been beneficial.

### Lives of Women

The study undertaken has provided an insight to glance at the lives of women as a result of the interface of tradition and modernity. Naga women in the traditional society were not able to get the recognition when compared with the male counterparts due to the fact that women were never a part of the warfare activities, which was solely a man activity. Further, the old age practices was such that, it was the man who held important affairs be it in village formation, whereby, the activities concerning the establishment from searching the location to the ritual conducted was solely a male prerogative. Thereby, women were never included in the village governance. The continuance of these ideologies that man as the provider and protector and assuming the leadership role continued to the present day. Through the case studies conducted it comes to light the women's secondary position that is not able to assert their individuali-

ty even in the present modern era where massive opportunities were being open especially with the introduction of formal education and the growing ventures in different social economic and political field. Many at times, the cultural practices and ideologies, which govern the social relationship, are justified rational and such continuance is seen to uphold the Naga identity. The persistence of these strong ideologies hinders the process of women emancipation be it in the family, at work and most importantly personal life. Taking the case of Naga society, modern attributes have not been incorporated in the social relations that are shared among individual and groups. It is essential to note that though scientific advances and technological innovations, which are considered the products of modernity have been embraced in the Naga society, while examining the social, political, cultural and economic spheres it is yet to be embraced, more so, it has been rejected. Women face challenges in adjusting to the demands made by traditional expectations and the modern demands of individualism. In case of Naga women, such a compromise is offered by minimising her aspirations while fulfilling the traditional expectations. The Naga women's ability to control resources is determined to a large extent by the cultural practices. Taking account of the traditional structure of Naga society, modernity failed to uplift the women's position on account of its rigid structure.

### DISCUSSION

Naga society experiences changed and developed through different stages. The stages known is the headhunting stage, whereby only oral history is used to reconstruct the past. Then came the changes initiated under colonialism and the work of the American Baptist missionaries. Apart from installing the new religion, which was widely accepted, the gift to the Nagas was the ability to read and write. Then, the major development of Naga identity took place after the participation in the First World War that formed the Naga Club. Further the Naga Nationalism came into the light, and one sees the incorporation of paper 371 A into the Indian constitution with the attainment of statehood. The recognition of customary laws, religious and social prac-

tices was legitimated under it. The question is what impact does it have upon women's lives. In the process of safeguarding the Naga identity, more restriction was being initiated especially upon women lives in terms of choosing marriage partners. The fact that Naga society being patrilineal, children born of Naga women with a non Naga cannot avail the benefits provided by the government. There is denial of women rights in the name of convention and traditional norms. The problem faced by Naga women cannot only be linked with the issue of male domination. Rather there are social, political and economic factors, which contribute to the subordinate position. Through the experiences of the respondent, it comes to light the principle ideologies which are at work to secure their dependent position. The ideologies at work are legitimated and have been passed through generations, and are supported by the religion too. No doubt, the religion of Christianity played a vital role in initiating the modernisation process, which facilitated the spread of education. However, the very inherent ideologies such that, man is the head of the family, and the wife is to be submissive to their husband, also that Eve was created from the ribs of Adam. All this speculation has portrayed the woman as the weaker sex, which stands in a way of women's emancipation. The ability of women to utilise the opportunities is at disadvantage due to the prevailing conservative traditional ideologies. The respondent has also experienced professional independence. However, it seems difficult to strike a balance, as they do not escape from traditional feminine world. Further, an analysis, which can be drawn is that, women are brought up in an atmosphere of male superiority, and thereby the sacrificial tendency comes to play and considers their individual pursuits secondary. The interface between tradition and modernity assumes a central place in understanding the situation of women. Major challenges are faced by women in addressing the issue of conflicting demands of tradition and modernity. The imposition of traditional convention upon women lives are seen whereby, her choice of making a career is restricted by the administrative authority in her village that comprise of a body of elected male members. Such was the case in the olden days when the Naga inhabited areas was declared a

state, drawing towards a modern line. However, in spite of the changes that were brought about with the attainment of statehood, traditionally assigned gender roles and expectations continued to the present day and posed a clash against the modern ideologies. In the modern day, the control of women by the cultural tradition is much prevalent as in the olden days. One will find denial of higher education on daughters as compared with her brothers whose parents emphasise on their sons' education. Also, the effort to take up leadership in the political sphere on the part of women however, faces massive resentment from the patriarchal ideologies, which emphasised on the male as the sole proprietor of power and decision-making.

A selective process of modernity is seen, whether it is in the form of ideologies or the usage of modern means of institution. With the attainment of statehood, there were massive opportunities that paved way to participate in the modern institution. One such case was the political participation. It is a matter of concern how in the span of 66 years of statehood and despite the fact that there are 60 seats in the State Legislative assembly, women failed to secure even a single seat over the years. It needs a deep enquiry. The question is whether Naga women in particular are not competent to participate in the decision-making process. Such non participation and denial amongst women to avail these opportunities need to be traced to the customs and traditional practices of the past, which seems to be highly imprinted on many till today. In such a process, Naga women folks though availed equal opportunities in education, employment and achieve heights in establishing careers for themselves, however still continued to be considered subordinated.

While tradition is not only the element for positioning women subordinate, there are various stereotypical forces at work, in the way a family function where man is considered to be the head of the family according to the biblical theology, and thereby much respect and honour is attributed to the head who is considered as the bread earner for the family, there are also tendencies to look upon women confined only to the traditional role of a wife and mother, and a woman is judged on the basis of whether these roles are performed well. If one were to trace the

roots of different power relation among the Naga men and women and glance into the village formation among the Nagas, only the founding male members were acknowledged and such founders of the village are recorded and their generations are held in high esteem by the village community till today. However, it is to be noted that those women folks who accompanied them are mentioned poorly in the record books. The founding clan members had the honour to play an important role in the administration of the village. Though women rulers are less known in the Ao country during the ancient days, one does find women rulers, which is recorded by Mills (1926:8) in his historical work on the Ao Nagas providing details of two women rulers, one was *Sangtem-la* and the other laid the foundation of *Kubza* village in *Mokokchung* district of Nagaland. Though their rule did not last long, however, in the present customs of these villages, women representatives are recognised as the who states arguments before the village council when her sex was involved. However, she is not recognised as a member of the council. What has been observed in these continuous traditional practices is that, the denial of leadership amongst women has been very much supported and accepted widely in the Naga society.

Among various practices such as divorce issue, land dispute, division of property, or matters concerning the administration, are decided according to the old age practices privileging men over women (Zehol 1998:49). Although progress has been made in the legislative sphere, assuring the rights of individual, however, on examining the social life, one finds a strong hold of tradition. Political administration is considered to be the domains of men folks in Naga society.

Thus, "women were excluded from men's culturally assigned occupations because it was assumed that women lack 'capabilities'" (Channa 1992: 160). Women till date, stand nowhere in the political administration be it in village, or modern legislation, where a women legislature is yet to be elected, to the rigid customary practices where women cannot inherit landed property, though she may be given a share of mother's possession such as jewellery. A recent trend, which emerged is that women and daughters are given landed property, however such are not

ancestral land or clan land, and rather these are purchased by parents. Thus, there is a lack of control over ownership and resource owing to the rigid customary system (Longkumer and Jamir 2012). Many women organisations evolved in the modern period, which plays an important role however, many at times, such organisations have been overshadowed and are made to abide by various norms issued by the male organisations.

The researchers thus, find an emergence of conflict between a women's right and the legitimacy of the cultural practices. In the recent headlines that captured the attention of the mass was in matters of legislation concerning women's thirty-three percent reservation in municipal elections. Such has been opposed fiercely and has never been implemented. The demand to provide equitable representation for women saw a strong protest, tensions and conflict in the society. Chaudhuri in her analysis of gender (Chaudhuri 2003: 363) argued that, if one looks at the cultural traditions, patriarchal force plays an important role in choosing the cultural practices of community. Women became the site of defining what tradition is. In the social construction of men and women one finds a totality of meaning attached to sexes imposed upon by the cultural system. Such plays a decisive role in influencing the individual choices. Kramer also noted that, in all cultures, sex and gender play a central role in deciding how the world is and should be (Kramer 2004: 26). One finds a sharp distinction of roles, position and status in the cultural practices and such modes of thought and action revolve around the community life and influence the behaviour of members and groups to a large extent.

The question of women's call for equity needs to be understood from a modern perspective. The case of equality in Naga society was never simple. Women are being cast as homemakers, housewives and bearers of cultural tradition to the extent of negation of political and economic right. The tradition is beyond questioning and also has the support of scriptural sanctions. One important question as to whether modern values could not influence and uplift women's position was that, modernity was imposed on pre-existing systems, with the structures of the society disfavoured women. At such a juncture, in the journeys towards moder-

nity, when the issues of women are addressed, women in Naga society are inflicted an inferior position in the name of tradition.

Further, paradox is found in the country's modern legislation where on one hand, it upholds equality and on the other, it recognises customary law of the Nagas under paper 371 A of the Indian constitution, which kept the customary practices intact. This special provision also recognised the special status of the Nagas, however, the fact cannot be denied that, the customary practices stand in the way of women participation in political space, denial of inheritance rights. Such is accountable for low position of women. At such a juncture, instead of reconstruction of a new social order, there has been reaffirmation of old age discriminatory practices. Women pursuits in the political affairs were unacceptable and her role at home was the central focus. Thus, modernity in Naga society could not replace the old age tradition. Women are placed at a juncture of conflict and contradictions as they compromise between tradition and modernity.

#### **Reports of Government on Status of Women**

The Nagaland state commission for women in 2015 undertook various researches on the status of women, which throws light on the ground realities. The major findings were that the continued subordination of Naga women is traced to the customary practices for ages, which has denied women many of the rights in the name of convention and traditional norms. Further, there is not only a strong dominance of the patriarchal mind-set and behaviour, but there also has been an acceptance of traditional practices by both men and women. The present status of women is that, there is a massive participation of women in business, administration, education sector and armed forces, however, there is an undeniable fact that, they occupy an institutionally secondary position to men.

#### **CONCLUSION**

From the above analysis, what is seen in the context of Naga women's inferior position to man is rationalised on the ground of safeguarding the traditional practices. Also, while one asserts

that Naga identity is a modern feature it has also affected women's lives especially concerning the issues surrounding marriage, economic and political gains. The ushering of modernity in Naga society has never been able to eliminate the traditional expectation of women. Naga society, like any patriarchal society, its cultural tradition yields massive belief of the expectations of female behaviour. The proper mode of conduct is reinforced by the social structure. The process of modernisation in Naga society highlights that, though the modern values have been acknowledged however, it is yet to influence the social relationship especially the division of power among men and women. Women too respond to modernity however not at the compromise of cultural traditions. A woman offers a compromise however, only by minimising her aspirations and ambitions and continued to emphasise on household related activities. The response to the process of modernisation produces conflict, as it was considered a threat to one's cultural identity.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

The authors believes that there should be more avenues for equal participation of women in different aspects of social life. Traditional old age practices are acceptable as long as they do not hinder the growth of new ideas that could lead to the empowerment of women. From the researchers' point of view, it would be affective to address the stereotypical expectation of wife and motherhood. While these are important, the over emphasising has led women grounded towards these duties and thereby the leadership role is being lessened, which could provide opportunities in socio cultural and economic growth and more importantly towards mastery over one's lives.

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