

MODERNIZATION OF THE NAGA SOCIETY - PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

V. Venkata Rao

The term 'modernization' is a most popular term nowadays, used freely for anything and everything, but clearly imprecise, and very often unintelligible. Modernization, I believe, is a process by which a traditional society, is transformed just as a cabbage is transformed into a cauliflower by college education. A traditional society is static, non-economic, with no surplus production, methods of production primitive, and human beings being guided and controlled by habits, customs and conventions which are clearly unreasonable. A modern society, on the other hand, is dynamic and progressive. It proceeds dialectically from the less perfect to the most perfect, from particularism to universalism, from expediency to philosophy. A feudal society is a primitive society. It becomes suddenly a modern society if oil is discovered there. Discovery of oil brings into existence oil refineries, concentration of people, security arrangements, water supply, preventive and curative medicines and municipal administration. Before the discovery of oil, there was a panchayat. Since a panchayat cannot supply all the essential necessities of civilized life, it is transformed into a municipal board. Thus, the place is transformed into a modern society. It proceeds from primitive economy to capitalist economy.

Modernization is brought about by various factors: political, economic, social and technological. Let me take the first. The present Nagaland minus the Tuensang area was the creation of the British. For administrative convenience it was attached to Assam. For a century it was a part of Assam, as a Naga Hill District. In 1957, the Tuensang area was taken away from North Eastern Frontier Agency and attached to the Naga Hills District and

designated as Naga Hills District and Tuensang area, an uncouth designation. In 1963, the name was changed into Nagaland.

Before 1952, the Nagas had no right of vote, no right to represent and no right to office because the Naga Hills District under the Government of India Act, 1935, was declared as an excluded area. The excluded areas were not represented anywhere, neither in the central nor the provincial legislative assemblies. They were not considered fit for introduction of reforms. The representatives of the Naga Club, in their memorandum to the Simon Commission in 1930 represented that the Nagas did not want any reforms to be introduced in the Naga Hills district. It was only in 1952 that reforms were introduced in the Naga Hills district which was a part of Assam. It was assigned three seats in the Assam Legislative Assembly to be elected directly on the basis of adult franchise. The introduction of adult franchise and direct election to the Assembly was the first step in the process of modernization, and of immense significance in the sense that they brought into existence the Naga Society and Nagamism or Naga Nationalism. They were also the first step in the process of nation building. Before 1952, there were different tribes, with different names, customs and dialects, each independent of the other and constantly at war with each other. Some of the dominant tribes were imperialist in character, trying to dominate the minor tribes. But with the introduction of adult franchise and direct election, the spirit of domination was eliminated or mitigated and a sense of equality was brought into existence. The sense of equality in its turn brought into existence a sense of oneness, the foundation of Naga nationalism and Naga nation.

Another effect of adult franchise is that it established a sense of equality of sexes in decision making. There was social equality so far

both the sexes were concerned. But there was no political equality. Women were completely excluded from politics. Decision making was completely a male affair. Adult franchise, direct election and the right to representation enabled women to gain political equality. Male domination in politics is declining.

Statehood further modernized the Naga society politically. It brought into existence the parliamentary system of Government which gave representation to all the areas and to all the tribes inhabiting Nagaland. The representatives of all the tribes and of all the areas come together once in six months to discuss common problems. The representatives bring their experience and knowledge of their areas and thereby enable the legislature and the State Government to understand their difficulties, their doubts and fears and their aims and aspirations. The Government on its part tells the representatives of the different areas how far it would be able to accept their proposals. When the representatives of the different tribes sit together, mind meets mind. The mists of suspicion disappear like the morning mist before the rising sun. The representatives ascend the ladder from the particularism to universalism. A common consciousness of a common end emerges. In the Legislative Assembly, there is clash of personality, interchange of opinion and testing of views which are essential for common understanding. Parliamentary system of Government facilitates cooperation, conciliation, compromise, moderation and mediation. In the Committee room, the representatives of the people forget their party affiliation, local loyalties and think of the common good. This is the finest achievement of political modernization.

Political modernization does not lay emphasis on rule by brute majority. Minorities receive just treatment. Nagaland is not a homogeneous area. It

is heterogeneous. The problem of heterogeneity is solved to some extent by the establishment of regional councils. The Nagaland Act provides for the establishment of Regional Councils for the protection of the special interests of the Tuensang Area. In addition to the Regional Council, Tuensang is represented in the Nagaland Legislative Assembly and in the Council of Ministers. The establishment of a regional council is one of the means by which the backward areas are modernised. The Tuensang Regional Council consisting of elected representatives, administer the area. Its representative in the Council of Ministers looks after the Tuensang affairs. The laws passed by the Nagaland Legislative Assembly are not introduced into that area without the concurrence of the Tuensang Regional Council. Tuensang must be given representation in the Council of Ministers.

Political modernization of Nagaland generated the yearning in the Nagas, now living in different political units, to come under one political umbrella. Therefore, the Naga People's Convention demanded the unification of the Tuensang Area which was a part of NEFA with the Naga Hills District and forms one administrative unit. The Government of India agreed to this proposal. The Naga Hills District and the Tuensang Frontier Division of NEFA were combined into one single administrative unit known as the 'Naga Hills Tuensang Area', an uncouth name on 1 December 1957. The Nagas were unhappy with the designation given to the area. In 1961, the Naga Hills-Tuensang Area was renamed as 'Nagaland'. The term Nagaland modernised the outlook of the Nagas. Apart from the fact that the term contains plenty of music, it generated patriotism in the Nagas. The implications of the term Nagaland are far reaching. It implies that all the Nagas are one. They are no longer disunited distinct tribes. They are united and indivisible. They have a common consciousness commonly present in all of them. Although, there is peaceful co-existence of the tribal languages, they

have adopted English as the medium of instruction in the colleges and the University, and as the State language. The adoption of English as the State language furthered the modernization of Nagaland.

Political modernization did not stop there. It went further. It recognised that the Nagas are a distinct society and therefore should be governed by special laws. This was recognised by the Constitution thirteenth Amendment Act, 1962, Article 37, which made some special provision for the area. It says that notwithstanding anything in this Constitution, no Act of Parliament, in respect of religious and social aspects of the Nagas, Naga customary laws and procedures, the administration of justice, civil and criminal, involving decisions according to Naga Customary laws, ownership and transfer of land shall apply to the State of Nagaland, unless the Legislative Assembly of Nagaland by a resolution, so decides.

Another provision which furthered the modernization of the Naga society is the representation of Nagaland in both the Houses of Indian Parliament and in the Central Cabinet. The Nagas now sit on terms of equality with others in both the Houses of Parliament and in the Council of Ministers. One of the eminent Nagas has been appointed as a Governor of a State. Representation of the Nagas in Parliament and in the Council of Ministers aimed at two things at one and the same time. First, modernization of the Naga Society and second, at nation building.

Another measure of modernization is the reservation of seats in public services and in the army. Reservation ensures that the traditionally underprivileged and the exploited sections would improve their lot in Independent India. In addition, the Nagaland Government has been directed to prepare a list of backward classes and these classes were given

reservation in public services, in educational institutions, scholarships, and fee concessions to level up inequalities in the society.

The political structure of the Naga Society has been modernised by the establishment of the Village Councils and the Public Service Commission. The Village Councils are the training grounds for those who wish to devote their life for the promotion of common welfare. Without a strong system of local self-Government, democratic institutions may not thrive. In the village councils one learns the art of management of human affairs. The Village Development Board is intended to modernise the Naga Society in a planned way. The Public Service Commission is intended to put an end to the spoils system and organise and provide opportunities to the competent to serve the State. It brings into existence a permanent, professional and a non-political civil service. In the civil service, there is reservation of seats for the Scheduled Tribes and the Scheduled Castes so that services are not monopolised by the elite class. There can be a Government without politicians but there can be no Government without an efficient civil service. In order to secure impartial selection of candidates on the basis of merit, the Nagaland Government recruited an outsider as the Chairman of the Commission. The appointment of an outsider creates confidence in the Commission.

The Village Development Board is a modern device for the planned development of the society. The Planning Commission is a democratic institution. It consults all those who are affected by planning. It is based on the principle of Sarvodaya. A true modern society must promote the greatest happiness of all. With this end in view, the Fourth Five Year Plan which may be considered as the first five year plan so far as Nagaland is concerned was framed. Under the Third Plan, Rs.10.75 crores, under the

Fourth Plan, Rs.38.62 crores, under the Fifth Plan Rs. 83.62 crores, under the Sixth Plan Rs.163.30 crores, and for the Seventh Plan Rs.210 crores were allotted. The results of planning can be seen in modernization of agriculture. Permanent cultivation in the place of jhuming is taking place, resulting in increase of food production. The Government is making every effort to make Nagaland self-sufficient in food production.

The second effect of planning is the development of power. Modern civilization depends on power. Without power civilised life is not possible. There was no electricity in Nagaland till 1960, when Kohima was electrified. Since then more and more villages and urban areas have been electrified.

Before 1960, there was no industrial development. Since 1961, there has been industrial development. A number of industries have been started. These industries provide employment to the local people. For the development of handloom and handicrafts, a corporation was set up in 1978. Some small scale industries have also been started.

Development of primitive societies depend on the development of communications. In 1947, there were only 176 kms of roads in Nagaland. By the end of 1981, it was 5,126 kms. Again, certain bus routes were nationalised. By 1981, 149 bus routes covered 4,338 km.

In the field of education, Nagaland has almost achieved universal primary education. Particular attention was paid to girls' education. The progress of education from 1947 to 1981 was as follows. Primary schools increased from 101 to 1,109, Middle schools from 3 to 205, High schools from 1 to 95 and there were no colleges in 1974 but by 1981 there were 8 colleges. Now the North-Eastern Hill University has a campus in Nagaland. Within three years Nagaland is expected to have a university of its own.

Health is more important than wealth. A creative mind must be housed in a healthy frame. If the frame is diseased, the mind does not function properly. The Nagaland Government is making every effort to modernise health services. The first step in that direction lies in the provision of adequate maternity and child welfare services. This is yet to be achieved. Still, progress has been made in this direction. Let us look at the figures. The progress made during the last four decades was as follows. In 1947, there were only three ill equipped hospitals. This number increased to 30 in 1982; the number of beds increased from 40 to 1,286, and dispensaries from 6 to 148. In 1947, no village had protected water supply. People depended upon ground water. Women had to walk long distances with bamboo cans to fetch water for cooking purposes. The situation has changed considerably after 1947. By the end of 1982, as many as 543 villages were provided with piped water. The NEC is taking measures to cover more villages with piped water.

Overview

Modernization has produced good and bad results. We should not lay the blame for bad results on western education. An educated person claims the right to think for himself and develop his personality in his own way, that is, he develops a critical mental outlook and begins to question the validity of some of the traditional institutions and traditional beliefs. It was this critical mental outlook that induced him to question head hunting, morang, slavery, bride price. Parents realised their responsibility in bringing up their children. This realization induced them to abolish the bachelors dormitory. Again, an educated individual questions the traditional myths and legends because they are not able to explain the complexities of modern life or provide guidelines to meet critical situations.

Again, parental authority is being questioned and undermined.

Conquest of communicable diseases, the provision of essential commodities at controlled rates, increased span of life, reduced death rate and increased birth rate. During 1941-51, the percentage of gross increase of population was 8.60. During the following decade it increased to 39.88. The death rate was 9.3 in 1974. It decreased to 5.6 per 1000 population in 1978. If this trend continues, there will be a decline in the per capita area of land under cultivation. The solution lies in the effective education of women since birth rate among the educated women is much less.

Modernization has brought about the abolition of slavery. Slavery existed on a large scale among the powerful tribes. But Christianity taught the equality of man and the dignity of the individual. The British took measures to abolish slavery.

Modernization again was responsible for the abolition of head hunting. Head hunting was based on certain beliefs, but enlightenment dispelled this belief. Before 1947, a beautiful girl would marry only a head hunter. Today she would like to marry a boy with a car, a good dining table and a luxurious drawing room.

Finally, modernization has brought into existence a new elite class. Development activity has resulted in the creation of the new rich. The emergence of the new rich has brought about a split in the Naga society, the haves and the have nots.