

Role of Social Movements in the Evolution of Naga Society : An Analysis of the Movement for Identity*

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The Context

The evolution of Naga society is a story of countless efforts, trials and sacrifices. It is one of the society in the history of the world which has struggled and suffered a lot for maintaining the survival of its existence. It has experienced sweet and bitter taste of British imperialism, consequences of first and second world war, the rise of Indian independence, the creation of Naga statehood and now the latest developments occurring as a result of modernization. In this journey of struggle, Naga people have seen many shades of life.

The present Nagaland which we see now is the product of various social changes and movements. The various movements occurring on this land, from inside and outside have led to various types of question in the mind of intellectual. What has been the underlying causes for the emergence of these movements. What has been the impact of these movements on the social, cultural political and economic life of the Naga people ? To what extent these movements have been successful in creating a social order which can be said conducive to the growth and development of Naga society ? The present paper is an attempt to answer these questions.

Genesis of Social Movement in General

Before we answer the questions raised above it would be appropriate to throw some light on the genesis of social movements in general and for Nagaland in specific. Social movements can be defined as loosely organized but sustained campaign directed to achieve a social goal. They result from the more or less spontaneous coming together of the people whose relationship are not defined by rules and procedures who merely exist to promote changes in the existing social order but sometime they hope to preserve the status quo in case of threatened change. Scholarly definition of social movements reflect the notion that "Social movements are the product of social change". As a result of social changes, social circumstances are created that people feel discontent, frustration and alienation with the present state of affairs and this becomes sufficient cause for initiating a social movement. Thus we find that both, social movement and social change work as a cause and effect for each other. Both reflect the assumption that man can change the social order and affect the course of history.

The great changes in the social order of world which have occurred during the

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past two centuries are very largely the direct or indirect result of social movement. The revolt of Negroes against white domination constitutes a special chapter in the history of social movements since world war II. While racial tendencies have been part of nationalist movements in many African and Asian countries, such movements have been most striking in South Africa and United States where their goal has been greater equality rather than national separation. Thus we find that the goal of most of the social movements is to bring social changes in the society for achieving greater equality, justice and identity. This has been true for Naga society also.

Brief History of Social Movements in Nagaland before Independence

Looking to the Indian scene it is well known fact that there has been a number of such types of movements in different parts of the country where people have demanded greater equality and justice and safeguard for their identity. The history of movements in Nagaland towards this goal can be traced back to the period of British Imperialism in the mid of 19th century and early part of 20th century when people of Nagaland continuously resisted British control over their land. The formal beginning of first social movement in Nagaland was the creation of Naga club in 1918 at Kohima, which was formed by some Nagas who had returned from France after world war I. Thus, the formation of the Naga club laid the foundation of the future Naga movements. This club sought to solve the problems of Naga people with the British through talks and consultations. Naga club gave new direction to the social conditions during the Quit India Movement in 1942. In 1946, the Naga club was merged into

a new organization called Naga National Council (NNC). The birth of the NNC as the political forum of the Naga tribes could be considered as the origin of the Naga movement. It gave a sense of political unity to the Naga tribes and it introduced the concept of separate homeland for Nagas. The purpose of this council was to foster and nurture the welfare of the Naga people. It submitted a memorandum to the cabinet mission in 1946 demanding the local autonomy and the safeguards for the interest of the Nagas in a free India.

Then came the time of Indian independence when the Naga hills became the part of Assam under the Indian union in 1947. The event of Indian independence ushered in new era for the Naga people looking forward to fulfil their aspirations. Naga National Council further played a vital role in safeguarding the interest of Nagas under Indian Constitution when they submitted a ninepoint memorandum which was agreed and incorporated in the constitution of India as the sixth schedule where certain provision were laid down to preserve and protect the entity and individuality of Naga people.

Social Movements in Nagaland after Independence: A Movement for Identity:

When we got independence, people of India found that there are lot of problems which are to be solved one by one. There was lot of poverty, inequality and injustice all over the country. We were not self-sufficient even in the matter of food. This part of the country was no exception to these problems. Besides being in the remote areas, people of Naga hills had some added problems. Lack of transportation

communication and educational facilities deprived the people in under standing and grasping the rest of their country. From the other part also, the ignorance remained equal due to the same reasons. The country's administration could also not be effective on this part of the land for the same reasons. This led to the dissatisfaction among the Naga people, which is quite understandable. All these circumstances made enough ground for the Nagas to initiate a movement.

Everybody would like to maintain his identity and this is true for Nagas also. Throughout the history, Nagas were politically alive and they maintained their self identity. How much they struggled to maintain this, is evident in the inclusion of sixth schedule of Indian Constitution as mentioned earlier. But perhaps this was not enough. There was some dissatisfaction some where. There were two major factors associated with this dissatisfaction, namely socio-political and ethno-cultural. From socio-political point of view, there was doubt whether they will get greater equality and justice and from ethnic-cultural point of view there was apprehension of loosing their seperate ethnic identity. Thus, at the time of Indian independence, Nagas were not convinced that their socio-political aspirations will be fulfilled under the new administrative setup. This insecurity and fear in the mind of Nagas led them to launch a movement to safeguard their identity under the new system. This may be termed as identity movement.

It was the proress of rapid christiani-zation and the development of formal education in Naga hills which played important role in the formation of this movement. Though the movement was essentially an outcome of growing urge of Nagas for the

special recognition of Naga ethnic identity as also to safeguard their customary socio-economic rights against interference of the plains people of the country, however such feeling of insecurity and consequent urge for solidarity was not born just at the time of Indian independence but were growing for quite some time during British rule in Nagaland.

The movement for identity which started in 1947 developed through many phases. The Naga hill remained in turmoil for about more than a decade, but finally concluded peacefully resulting in the creation of a seperate state "Nagaland". The constitution (thirteenth) amendment Act of 1962 provided a special status for Nagaland according to which no Act of parliament in respect of the religious and social practices of the Nagas, Naga customary law and procedure would apply to the state of Nagaland unless the state assembly by a resoulution so decides. As one put it, it was a testament of super autonomy but to Nagas it was their achievement in the struggle for self identity. The significance of this achievement lies in combining all Naga groups in a single, stablized large society and giving them one larger ethnic identity.

Impact of Movement on the Development of Nagaland

The creation of a seperate state Nagaland opened a new chapter in the evolution of Naga society. This historical incidence had varying impact on the social, cultural, political economic and educational development of Nagaland.

(i) **Political :** The movement brought into existence the feeling of Naga sub-nationalism among the Nagas. They started feeling

that all the Nagas to whichever tribe they may belong are one. They are no longer disunited. Statehood provided them a democratic system of government which gave representation to all the areas and to all the tribes. They now have their own legislative assembly to decide various issues and take decision. Nagaland is also represented in central parliament and in the central cabinet to look after their interest. Thus the people of Nagaland joined the main stream of national life.

(ii) **Social** : There was a time when various tribes were isolated from each other which was one of the main obstacles in the path of mutual understanding and cooperation among various Naga tribes. In fact the various Naga tribes have not only distinguished by the separate languages and socio-economic and cultural diversities but they have also been subdivided in isolated village communities. Rapid social transformation took place among the different tribal societies of Nagaland after statehood. With the improvement of the communication and transport system, social interaction has become more dynamic.

(iii) **Cultural** : To bridge the gulf between them and advance communities, the provision of reservation of certain percentage of seats for Nagas in educational institution had a vital impact towards the national building. As a result now we find the number of Naga students are staying in various medical and engineering colleges spread all over the country. This has further helped in national unity and integration.

The constitutional act of 1962 provided Nagas some special provision for the area. It made provision for the religious and social practices of the Naga people according to their traditional and customary law and usage. It also made provisions for the pro-

tection of ownership of land and its resources. Thus cultural identity of Naga people is now protected.

(iv) **Economic** : For the economic development of Nagas there is now separate budget for Nagaland every year and for the five year plans. As a result of planning, agriculture is being modernized. There has been rapid expansion of the area under permanent cultivation and thus rapid increase in production.

There was no electricity in Nagaland before 1960. The present situation is that all the villages in Nagaland are now electrified. Before 1961, there was no industry in Nagaland. Now there is a sugar mill, a distillery, a paper and pulp factory, a plywood factory, a fruit preservation factory and many other small and cottage industries. These industrial undertakings provided employment opportunities to the local people.

Thus, we find that the establishment of democratic set up for the full political participation of the people, the modern system of education, growing means of transport and communication and various development activities have broken the isolation of the people to a great extent and thus facilitated the growth and development of Nagaland at a greater speed.

(v) **Educational** :-- Education is the key factor in the process of development. Ever since Nagaland became full fledged state in 1963, there has been a considerable expansion of education in the state. There is no village in Nagaland today without a government primary school. Literacy rate has gone up from 42.57% in 1981 to 61.30% in 1991 (as per the provisional figure of the census 1991) which is far above than

the average of 52% at national level. By 1988-89, Nagaland has 2531 educational institutions of various types at different level with enrollment of about 3.38 lakh students. Recently, a women polytechnic, a regional mining school and a study centre of Indira Gandhi National Open University has also started. A separate Central University for the state is also in offing. These developments in the field of education are providing ample opportunities for the youths for their education in a big way. With the increase of educational facilities, the people began rising above narrow concerns and have started thinking for the common good of Nagaland.

The present situation :— The early impact of the movement was quite significant as described earlier which created hope for the speedy development of the society. But the present situation is different than expected. Education & development has changed the living conditions of many in Naga society. Some have become more affluent and find life easier, others find themselves poorer than before. In the past there has been no class system in the Naga society but slowly and slowly the same is emerging in the social life of Nagas. Westernization in the name of modernization is spreading very fast and posing the danger to the indigenous cultural heritage of their past.

The struggle for identity fought by the Nagas was aimed to shape the destiny of the people. How far it has been able to do so is an open question now? The movement brought the people nearer to each

other but vested interests are dividing the people on tribal lines. Partly politics is destroying the harmony of Naga society and thus creating maximum constraints for the smooth process of development. Another problem, which society is facing is about the goal and direction. In a democratic setup, we have a liberty to have diverse opinion but we must reach some where. It seems as if there is a confusion about the main goal and lack of clear direction.

These trends provide us not a very happy picture of the present day Naga society. At this point of time, Naga citizens will have to exercise their control and influence on all those who are responsible for this state of affairs and question their responsiveness.

Conclusion :— The foregoing analysis of the social movements in Naga society reveals that in the past, the movement certainly had some positive impact in building the Naga society but the latest developments have generated certain problems which are coming in the way of further growth of the society. If these problems are not tackled now, it may do much harm for the future of the society. In conclusion, it would be pertinent here to say that Naga society must launch a movement against these problems in order to establish a social order which can work for the speedy growth and development of the society. After acquiring the identity, its a question of maintaining it.

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