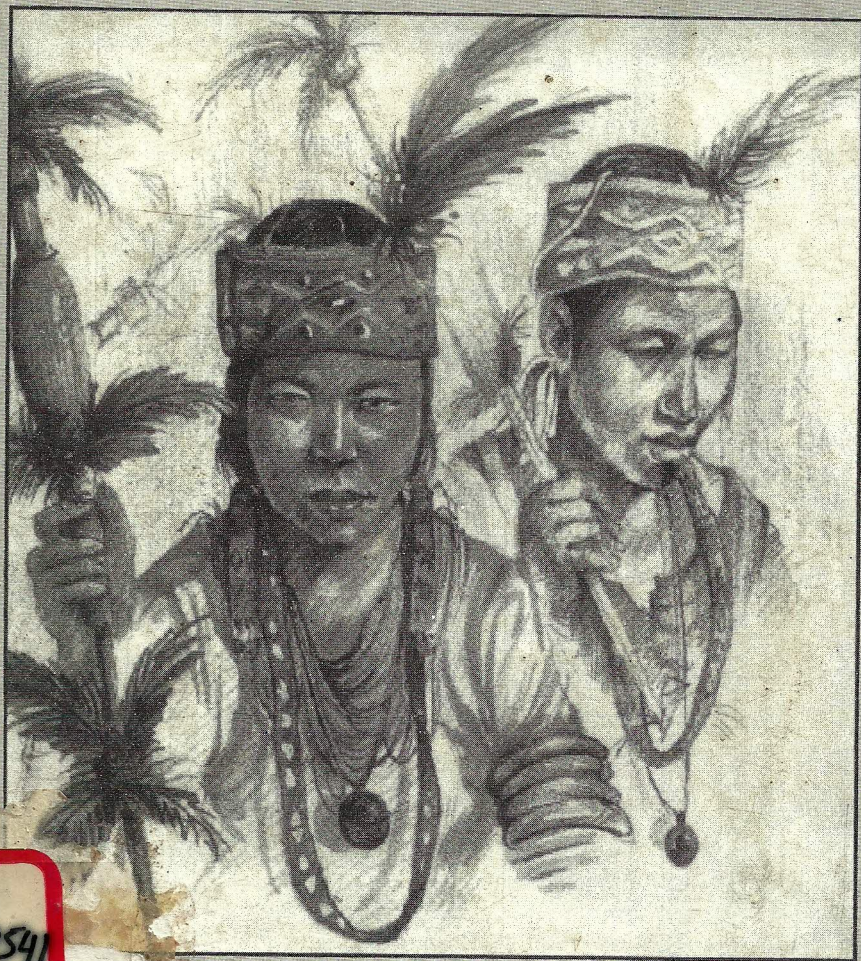


# WOMEN IN NAGA SOCIETY



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EDITOR  
DR. LUCY ZEHOL

# WOMEN IN NAGA SOCIETY



*Editor*

Dr. Lucy Zehol



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Dedicated  
to  
My Mother

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## Foreword

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The Naga people, perhaps because of the special dynamism which they possess, have over the years succeeded in attracting a good deal of scholarly attention and interest. Nevertheless, studies specifically focused on the status and position of Naga women have been very rare. It is my hope that the present volume will go some way towards helping to fill the gap.

Ever since the modern age had its genesis in the West several centuries ago, all peoples and parts of the globe have willy-nilly become drawn in towards the modernistic vertex. North-Eastern India, the tribal peoples settled there, and Naga society included could not and have not remained unaffected by these world-wide processes. As per the peculiar dynamics of modernism, the transition to modernity can be exasperatingly slow, painful and traumatic. The history of the recent decades makes more than evident that the Nagas have had their full share of this trauma and pain.

Modernity, at the same time, has very many benefits and advantages to confer. It is the task of the concerned social scientists to help guide the process of change so as to minimise the pain and maximise the advantages. All the twelve scholars contributing to this volume have endeavoured to place their study firmly in the context of this on-going adjustment between tradition and change.

The society of the Nagas is not a homogeneous one but is comprised, rather, of a number of tribal groups. The present volume has studies on the Tangkhul, Lotha, Mao, Zeliangrong, Sema, Angami, Chakhesang, Konyak, Rengma and Ao and can therefore claim to be a representative study of wide-based Naga society and culture.

समजात / शंकरराय

Phom  
Chang  
Tikhia  
Chinn  
Dikhin  
Mimi

I recommend *Women in Naga Society* to all those who wish to understand the Naga way of life better and also to those who can help ease its passage to a bright future.

Shillong  
22 October, 1997

**Prof. (Mrs.) K.S. Lyngdoh**  
Pro-Vice Chancellor  
N.E.H.U. Shillong

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## Introduction

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*Dr. (Mrs.) Lucy Zehol*

We find different opinions with regards to the position of women in the 'tribal societies'. Some would say that tribal societies generally assigned a high status to women while others opine that in 'primitive' societies women were no better than a mere sex object or a second sex or otherwise of an inferior sex.

Verrier Elwin remarks, "... tribal woman is in herself exactly the same as any other woman, with the same position, love and fears, the same devotion to the home, to husband and children, the same faults and the same virtues". While Haimendorf notes, "... many women in more civilized parts of India may well envy the women of the Naga Hills, their high status and their free and happy life and if you measure the cultural level of the people by the social position and personal freedom of its women you will think twice before looking down on the Nagas as savages". Is this observation a myth or a reality? It is indeed not an easy question to answer.

Early ethnographic materials suggest that studies have always been dominated by the male bias. This is perhaps because administrators turned scholars and the scholars have basically been males and therefore could not find easy access to the domains of women. It is now perhaps time to realise that a new perspective is needed so that women in society could be studied through the women's view point. And if this is developed in terms of methodology, we will be able to get a clearer picture of the human society where man and woman play an equally important role where one cannot do without the other. This

book is a collection of papers presented by both men and women and it is hoped that it will be a small beginning to this vision.

The papers also reflect that in order to understand the status of women among the various Naga tribes, there was a need to examine women from the traditional to the modern context. The basically patriarchal Naga society is reflected by notions such as the 'birth of a male child being auspicious, man as the bread winner and protector of the society and women being subordinate to their husbands'. However, progressive modernisation brought by the adoption of Christianity and spread of education have gradually altered the contemporary situation among the Naga women and they have begun participating in diverse modern activities.

The papers also highlight that women's organisations are playing significant and effective roles in fighting against alcoholism, drug abuses, immorality, army excesses and removing certain traditional social stigmas on women. Special mention may be made of the role of the Village Development Board —Women's Wing in Nagaland which has immensely boosted the poor condition of women. Today, Naga women are venturing out of homes and their awareness of oneself and society is increasing.

Women's studies have kindled interest all over the world due to increased public awareness and academic interest. However, from the bibliography listed in this book, we can observe that there is hardly any substantial work undertaken on the Naga Women.

Naga society following the patrilineal and patriarchal system, has the norms and attitudes of patriarchy which affects the status of women. Institution and tradition are inspired by the belief in male dominance and female inferiority. Hence, although patriarchy persists in all contemporary societies, its impact varies from tribe to tribe among the Naga society.

It is good to remember that in the traditional societies, the status of women was usually in relation to her family as a daughter, wife, sister and mother. In the new emerging situation, a woman's status is described more in terms of her achievements in education, career, position etc. in society. All the papers presented in this book reflect that the trend is from ascribed status to an achieved one. In fact, we can see that her

role is not limited to the home as was in the traditional society but also outside the home.

Anthropologists have been divided on the status of women in the so called tribal society. This opposite views has highlighted the need for more empirical data on the status of women in each society of the tribes found in India. This volume is a collection of papers presented in a seminar on the "Status of Women in the Naga Society", organised by the Naga Students' Union, Shillong under the auspices of the Indian Council of Social Science Research, Shillong. As only seven papers were presented on the status of women in the Naga society, it was felt it would not be able to provide a comprehensive view of the status of women in the Naga society. Hence, efforts have been made to include five additional papers highlighting the role and position of women in some of the major Naga tribes. The guidelines for the authors were given so that each paper may represent a comprehensive account of the status of women in the traditional system, as well as the emerging pattern, and also an analytical interpretation of the changes from tradition to emerging patterns. The guidelines were:

1. Each paper should make an attempt to refer to the major broad aspects of the theme — Status of Women in the Naga Society.
2. The broad aspects will have to be perceived in terms of
  - (a) the time frame, and
  - (b) facets of life of a woman.
3. In terms of time the paper should contain reference on status of women in
  - (a) the traditional society,
  - (b) the emerging, new situations.
4. In terms of the facets they were to include reference to the status of women with reference to:
  - (a) In economic matters
    - (i) property rights :
      - : to own property
      - : to manage property
      - : to sell property
      - : to inherit property

4 *Women in Naga Society*

## (ii) occupations and livelihood:

- : to work on salary
- : distribution of work in family.

## (b) In social matters :

- : marriage, divorce
- : family, inheritance
- : rules of inheritance

## (c) In religious :

- matters : participation in religious ceremonies
- : roles in festivals

## 5. Status and role as :

- : mother
- : daughter
- : sister
- : wife — a description of wife's cycle, ceremonies and rituals

6. The growth of women welfare organisation — the history and activity of the major ones.

7. The role of the Church in relation to women's welfare and status of women in general.

8. Education among women.

9. General analysis of male/female, rural/urban population.

10. Mention some of the illustrious women of your society, those in different professions/occupation (teachers, doctors, administrators etc).

11. Proverbs relating to women.

12. Please freely use local terms as far as possible, and in bracket kindly give the English equivalent.

I hope that this book will be a good beginning in understanding Naga women and also hope that it will help to raise the level of awareness and also stimulate creative thinking and action among Scholars and Activists to ponder into the various aspects of women's life in the Naga society.

I wish to thank all the contributors for making this book possible.

Thanks to my husband Kevin for the encouragement, love and faith in me and for the hours at the computer which means more than I can say.

Thanks to our son Khachiilo (3 yrs) who bravely bore the hours we stayed away from him.

And above all, I continue to express my gratitude to God Almighty for making me a woman.

Shillong

Date : 14.9.1997

Dr. (Mrs.) Lucy Zehol

# Women in Naga Society

Dr. Lucy Zehol (Ed.)

The book is a collection of the papers on women in some of the major Naga tribes, presented in a seminar organised by the Naga Students' Union, Shillong under the auspices of the North Eastern Regional Centre of Indian Council of Social Science Research, Shillong on 23rd November, 1988.

The papers look at the Naga Society from the traditional and modern scenario which provides vital information on the Naga women from both the men and women's point of view. It is hoped that this collection which is an exploratory study will be informative to anthropologists, scholars, social activists and others interested in the study of women.

The Editor, **Dr. (Mrs.) Lucy Zehol**, did her college and received her M.A., M.Phil. and Ph.D. from the North Eastern Hill University, Shillong, where she is now a Lecturer in the Deptt. of Anthropology. She has written a book on *Ethnicity in Manipur — Experiences, Issues and Perspectives*. Her interests are Anthropological Theories, Methodology, Ethnicity, and Women Studies.

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