

CULTURE CHANGE AMONG THE ANGAMI NAGA

ABSTRACT

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ABSTRACT

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM:

Anthropologists like Tylor, Morgan and Frazer studied man and his culture. Attempts by these anthropologists to explain the origins of culture they had studied represented very simplistic attempts to understand change. The 19th century anthropologists believed that these societies had already experienced dramatic changes in the recorded past. In reaction against the tendency to interpret existing institutions as meaningless survivals of previous conditions for which there is no evidence, Malinowski insisted on looking at culture (as he called it) as a 'going concern' in which every usage has a meaning here and now.

Malinowski writes of social change. Stating that change is created primarily due to external pressure of colonial rule. He talked of the interdependence of institutions. He urged anthropologists to investigate primitive tribes as units actually functioning under present day condition and not as reflections of their own past history. Malinowski's main theoretical contribution was a functional analysis of culture into a series of interrelated aspects, and this scheme he later adapted to form the basis of a more dynamic type of study of culture contact by which it would follow the introduction into a primitive society of programmes of change.

An anthropologist must be concerned with culture. The question is – are they to stop there or go further and deal with society? It is necessary that they should describe the miscellaneous ways of behaviour and attempt to discover the resulting sets of social relationships, and thus outline the structure of the society. Radcliffe-Brown provided an answer to this when he wrote:

By any culture a certain number, larger or smaller of human being are united together into more or less complex system of social groups by which the social relations of individuals to one another are determined. In any given culture we denote this system of social grouping as the social structure (Radcliffe-Brown, 1930: 269).

Redfield dealt with the increasing scale of social relationships. He introduces his theme 'Folk – Urban Continuum' by considering social relationships of increasing scale. The unit of smallest scale is the folk society, the face to face community. With the extension of relationships of the folk society, it becomes a peasant society, consisting of the people close to hand whose labours make the city possible.

When a social anthropologist describes a social system he tries to represent as it is called how the social system works. The anthropologist tries to create a model of the social reality. Leach has studied the change in the power structure. According to Leach:

The description of a social system provides us with an idealized model which state the correct status relations existing between groups with the total social system and between the social persons who make up the particular groups... when we refer to structural change we have to consider not merely change in the position of individual,

but change in the ideal structure itself changes, that is power structure (Leach, 1954: 6).

British social anthropologists seem to have been more concerned with the social consequences of change, in terms of structural adjustment, functional realignment i.e., the relationships and institutions. American anthropologists, on the other hand, were more busy with the process and agents of change. The first term to be used was perhaps, acculturation to describe what happens when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first hand contact with subsequent changes in the original culture pattern of either or both groups (Herskovits, 1948). While the British were primarily concerned with the problems of culture change due to colonial rule and trade, the Americans were involved in the study of change as an outcome of better communication and economic development. Anthropologists began to adopt new techniques suited to the investigation of changing communities. They in the first instance studied the contrast conditions before and after the European contact, or to search as Mair had described it, 'for a zero point' from which to reckon such changes. They illustrated changing norms by selecting sample communities which had been more or less in contact with civilization. They began to use statistical method to estimate the variations in behaviour of groups and individual which are bound to be characteristic of a change situation.

Herskovits, Redfield and others have differentiated between the process of acculturation that takes place between two peoples. It has recently been argued that anthropologists should concern themselves with

primitive and peasant peoples all over the world and that they should abandon the term 'culture contact' for the wider concept 'culture change'.

According to Spindler, one of the liveliest problem areas in contemporary anthropology is that of culture change, it is rivaled only by interest in social structure. Mead made a break by studying the problems of mental health arising due to economic aid and the consequent technological change.

Culture change has remained to be an area in which historical, functional, materialist, structural and cognitive-symbolic approaches struggle for convincing explanations of innovation and stability, growth and decline. Internal and external causes, material and psychological factors may ultimately be seen to complement rather than to contradict one another, and a synthetic theory of change may some day be achieved. Until then it is essential to keep in mind the economic and historical processes that have led to the present unstable world situation, in which cultural change rather than stability is to be expected.

The term 'culture change' has now assumed a very broad based scope. It is the conceptual formulation that refers to 'culture process' such as growth, integration and acculturation. Briefly defined, culture change is any modification in the way of life of a people, material and non-material, whether consequent of innovation, invention and acculturation. The concept of culture is central to anthropology. It refers to the patterns of social organization, economy and belief that are learned and shared by members of a social group. Culture is traditional knowledge that is passed down from one generation to the next.

In India, the anthropologists have since late shown increasing interest in studies of culture change. The reason is obvious. Prior to the arrival of the British and Christian missionaries in state like Nagaland, the Nagas in general and the Angamis in particular lived a simple life as their forefathers lived in their respective villages, which were more or less like village republics. However, it was during the year 1832 the British made their first entry into the Naga Hills. The entry of the British administration brought along the Christian missionaries. The British intervened with the traditional political institution and also introduced change in the subsistence activities of the people. The missionaries on the other hand brought change in the indigenous religious beliefs and practices and many other aspects of their life.

After Independence, that is 1947, India has embarked on programmes of directed change, which in its own way has necessitated the improvement of communication channels and greater utilization of resources. In the rural areas the community development programmes were introduced. Programmes of planned development was introduced in the tribal areas also. All these provided paradise for anthropologist for field study.

BRIEF REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Ethnographic Overview

There is a paucity of reliable ethnographic literature about the Nagas in general, and the Angami Nagas in particular, in the North-east India. As in other parts of India, the work of the ethnographic study of various communities of this region had started around the beginning of the twentieth century at the hands of British administrators, military

officers and occasionally, Christian missionaries. The British administrators undertook such studies to enable the rulers to take stock of their charge (H. H. Risley and E. A. Gait 1903: 2). The purpose was to acquaint the government officials and private persons with classified description about the communities in India with a view to ensuring effective colonial administration and concern with the extension and consolidation of the British administration.

Hence, the first anthropological accounts were motivated by the British colonial quest, e.g., J. Johnstone (1896); T.C. Hodson (1911); J. H. Hutton (1921, 1921); J. P. Mills (1922, 1926, 1937).

Those written by the Europeans in the couple of decades after India's Independence in 1947, (e.g., V. Elwin 1960, C.V. Furer Haimendorf 1969) tend to adopt the paternalistic tone of their predecessors. The Nagas are represented alternately as savage headhunters in need of morality and control, and as child-like quaint being who belong to the past and who are in need of 'protection'. The Nagas are regarded as cruel, treacherous, vindictive, wild and uncivilized tribe (V. Elwin, 1960: 284), also blood thirsty and revengeful (V. Elwin, 1960: 55). According to Haimendorf, the Konyak tribes were still the 'Naked Nagas' (Von Furer-Haimendorf, 1969: 31).

The European ethnographers have at times exhibited a tendency of racial superiority complex and undermining the culture and lifestyle of the Nagas categorizing as inferior to them.

Contemporary versions tend to constitute part of Indian neo-colonialism and consistently refer to the 'Naga problem' while

disregarding the impact of colonialism on the lives of indigenous peoples, e.g., V. K. Anand (1980); K. R. Singh (1987); Ashikho Daili (1992); S. M. Channa (1992); D'Souza (1992).

Other ethnographies are based on extremely brief field work and the writers who attempt scientific objectivity deliver mechanical accounts of societal 'structures' and 'customs' but bringing us no closer to understanding Naga experience (S. M. Channa 1992; D'Souza 1992). Furthermore, most ethnographic descriptions of Naga ways of life are drawn from the earlier sources listed above.

One account (Jacobs et al. 1991) provides perhaps the most comprehensive account of Naga history and culture. But the authors did not undertake ethnographic accounts nor provide the kind of detail and culture change perspective that I wish to describe, while all the above publications are useful to an extent, it is apparent that there is a need for fresh study as contemporary study has no ethnographic perspective on culture change. Very few studies deal with culture change among the Angami in a contemporary situation and hence the relevant of the study.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

J. H. Hutton in his monograph on the 'Angami Nagas' particularly in his preface to the second edition observes: 'This account of the Angami Nagas was completed by the year 1915, though on account of the war it could not be published for seven years. It is therefore out of data now by more than fifty years, and that a period of rapid change such as humanity has probably never before experienced. The account here given on the 'Angami Naga' tribe must therefore be regarded in the light

of an historical document then a contemporary survey ... the account here given cannot be rendered valueless by the mere passage of time ... of its fault and shortcoming, I am too conscious. I had little knowledge of Anthropology at that time.... The defects of this volume therefore, is left to those trained in a discipline of social anthropology...?.

Hence, the objective of the present study is an attempt to understand the process of culture change among the Angami Nagas by taking the classic monograph of Hutton as the benchmark/baseline for the study.

The present study seeks to limit itself to three primary aspects of the Angamis. They are: social organization (family, marriage and kinship), economy and religion. Though these three aspects do not fully exhaust the contents of the book by Hutton, other diachronic studies show that it is not essential to touch upon each and every aspect in doing a re-study. The principal aim here is to see:

- (i) What changes have taken place over the last eighty eight years or so?
- (ii) What factors are responsible for the same?

METHODS

The present study is a re-study on the Angami Nagas of Nagaland based on field work which is conducted in a purposively selected Khonoma village under Kohima district of Nagaland. The purpose of selecting this village are:

1. Hutton based his classic monograph 'The Angami Nagas' on data collected substantially from Khonoma village, and since my work is a re-study I have also based on the same village.
2. Hutton chose Khonoma for being a typical Angami village, and also stated that, even before the coming of *Sarkar* no Angamis enjoyed such prestige or levied such widespread tribute as Khonoma (Hutton, 1921: 11). It was also the most powerful and warlike village which was a centre of activities, during pre-colonial period, colonial period and post-colonial period.

Prior to starting the main work, a survey was made on the village, meeting the village council chairman, pastors, priest (*Zhevo*), elders, women leaders, youth leaders, student leaders etc. in order to get preliminary information and preliminary contacts were made.

After that an in-depth study was made, by collecting the entire village household census. Participant observation and informal interview were employed. My visits were of the duration of one month or less at times depending on the occasion. The data so collected were supplemented with case study, geneology and also biographical notes of 'who is who' was made. Besides, secondary data were collected from available literature in book, journal and research reports.

My first visit to Khonoma village took place in 1998. I made several trips to the village between 1998 and 2000. As regard language, I had no problem as I can use the local language in my talks with the villagers, participate in their daily life, seasonal and other activities and as far as possible gather information in the course of such participation.

MAJOR FINDINGS

The change in Angami culture has come about as a result of factors such as colonialism, Christianity, education and modernization. Changes in both material and non-material culture have taken place. However, in aspects of non-material culture, change is not very tangible, whereas in material culture, changes are more apparent. These changes are so phenomenal that it would strike any visitor if he/she revisited this village after such a long duration, eighty-eight years, for Khonoma is certainly not the same village today as was studied by Hutton. Some of the changes that have come about in Khonoma village are:

1. Horses used for transportation purpose have been replaced by buses, trucks, small vehicles etc. A very remarkable road lay out with the use of only stone slabs around the village, reflects their innovative and inventive ability.

2. Another striking change that has taken place in Khonoma village is the emergence of shops, schools, primary health centre, community hall, rice mills, churches, regular water supply, electricity, playground, societies such as V.D.B., women society, Khonoma *Rüffino* etc.

3. As far as the settlement pattern of the village is concerned the most remarkable change is that the villagers have started living in a more spacious areas. The main reason for this is, they want more privacy, freedom and a clean surrounding.

4. Today drastic change has taken place in their food habit. People have adopted the modern ways of cooking, frying etc. Many people like

to prepare Indian dish, Chinese dish and western delicacies like cakes, pudding, custard etc. The time consuming traditional methods of brewing *Zutho* (rice beer) has been replaced by tea, fruit juices and various types of drinks locally prepared which has a market demand today.

5. It was indeed a big leap from the traditional to modern medicines which was due to advancement in science and medicine where the traditional medicines and methods of treatment have been relegated to the back seat because modern medicines can fight various sicknesses and diseases more efficaciously. However, the traditional medicines and methods have its own place even today when it comes to treating bone fractures.

6. There is a significant shift from consumption oriented crops to cash crop such as tea, coffee, elachi and passion fruit, to improve their economy. The present farmers have been benefited by using good seedlings, chemical fertilizers, tractors and other modern implements.

7. With the advent of the British, money as currency was introduced. Hence, the Angami barter system has been transformed to the monetization form.

Changes in non-material aspect of Angami culture are less tangible as compared to the material aspect.

1. According to Hutton, a typical Angami family is nuclear type, patriarchal, patrilocal and patrilineal in form (Hutton, 1921: 5, 398). The present study reveals that the family structure remains the same while the

role of a father, mother and children have undergone changes with the spread of Christianity, education and the changing economy.

2. The rule of clan exogamy, monogamy and incest taboo are strictly adhered by all. Divorce and remarriage are allowed from the past till present. Again, in earlier times wedding was a simple affair. Today there is a great preoccupation with physical arrangement which tend towards extravagance involving lots of money and the slaughtering of a large number of animals for feasting.

3. As far as kinship is concerned there is more of continuity than change. It appears that kinship is really the core of the Angami social organization, because changes seem to have almost failed to affect.

4. The greatest reason for people converting to Christianity was the assurance and hope of salvation which Christianity taught them. Also adopting Christianity carried them away from ritualistic demands of the *Nanyü* involving unprofitable expenditure. Today, wealth is invested mostly for children's education.

The emergence of modern RCC houses, household articles, change in food habit, drinks, dress and ornaments, the shift in cultivation methods with improved techniques, improvement in animal husbandry etc.; all these changes testify to the fact that changes in material culture are more apparent and noticeable.

Whereas changes in non-material aspects of culture such as family, marriage and kinship are less phenomenal and less tangible. However, greater degree of change has taken place in their belief systems.

The change in Angami society has veered both into a positive and negative directions. However, when all the changes are taken together the direction is towards the positive.

In conclusion, we can say that the culture of Angami Nagas shows the dynamics of the society and the capacity of adaptation to a new way of life. These culture changes are the resultant of its cultural contact with the outside world in the early part of the 20th century. With the advent of Colonialism, Christianity, education and modernization many changes have occurred. New ideas have began to sweep the society and the culture of the Angamis particularly their material culture are affected. These cultural changes have made life more comfortable and good for the Angamis in general and the individual man, woman and children in particular.

CHAPTERIZATION

Chapter I deals with the statement of the problem, review of literature, objectives, methods and chapterization.

Chapter II deals with the land and people.

Chapter III deals with the Angami traditional culture (material and non-material culture).

Chapter IV deals with the changing Angami culture (material and non-material culture).

Chapter V deals with factors responsible for culture change.

Chapter VI deals with major findings and conclusion.

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