



FAZL ALI COLLEGE
MOKOKCHUNG

FAZL ALI COLLEGE *Journal*

A PEER-REVIEWED MULTIDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL



20
24

VOLUME: 12 (2024)

ISSN: 2319-6769

FAZL ALI COLLEGE JOURNAL

A Peer-Reviewed Multidisciplinary Journal



**Fazl Ali College, Mokokchung
Nagaland: 798601**

Volume 12 (2024)

ISSN: 2319-6769

The Fazl Ali College Journal: A Multidisciplinary and Peer Reviewed Journal is an annual publication of the Fazl Ali College, Mokokchung, Nagaland.

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Price: ₹700/-

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A Peer-Reviewed Multidisciplinary Journal

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FOREWORD

It gives me immense pleasure to present this edition of our Fazl Ali College Multidisciplinary Journal, a platform that reflects the academic vigor, curiosity, and creative spirit of our institution. In an age marked by rapid advancements and complex global challenges, the importance of multidisciplinary research has never been more pronounced. This journal stands as a testament to our commitment to fostering critical thinking, scholarly enquiry, and collaborative learning across diverse fields of study.

The range of topics explored in this volume, from the sciences and social sciences to humanities, education, and beyond, highlights the vibrant academic culture we strive to cultivate at Fazl Ali College. Each article represents the dedication of our faculty, and researchers to contribute meaningfully to their respective disciplines, while also engaging with broader questions that impact our society and environment.

I extend my sincere appreciation to the Editorial Board, contributors, peer reviewers, and all those who have worked tirelessly to make this publication a success. Your work not only enriches our academic community but also inspires a culture of research and lifelong learning.

I hope that this journal serves as both a source of knowledge and a stimulus for future research endeavors. May it continue to grow as a beacon of academic excellence for years to come.

Warm regards,



Dr. I. Wati Imchen
Principal
Fazl Ali College

EDITORIAL

In the much expanding landscape of knowledge, the value of multidisciplinary research has become increasingly evident. This journal stands as a confluence of diverse academic streams, each flowing from different origins, yet converging toward a shared goal: the pursuit of truth, understanding, and meaningful impact. It is in this spirit that we humbly present the latest volume of our multidisciplinary research journal.

At the heart of every article lies not only academic enquiry, but also an unwavering sense of discipline and commitment. Behind each page are hours of reading, analysis, experimentation, and reflection — proof that research is as much about process as it is about product. The contributors featured in this edition exemplify what it means to approach their subjects with intellectual rigor and ethical responsibility, regardless of field or specialization.

What makes a multidisciplinary journal unique is its ability to draw connections across seemingly unrelated disciplines — history speaking to science, education complementing economics, literature intersecting with sociology, and so on. This blend fosters innovation, challenges assumptions, and encourages a more holistic understanding of the world around us.

We extend our deepest appreciation to the scholars, and faculty whose work fills these pages. Your dedication is not only evident in your findings, but in your willingness to share your knowledge with the broader academic community. We also acknowledge the support and meticulous efforts of the editorial and review teams, whose work ensures the quality and integrity of this publication.

As you read through this journal, may you encounter fresh perspectives, and thought-provoking questions. In every discipline, and in every article, may you find a shared thread: the enduring human drive to understand, to question, and to contribute.

Socio-Political Association of Taro as a food crop with Bura Namsang Village Nagaland, India

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Abstract

Agricultural development has been a major breakthrough in human civilization as such the development and inculcation of different cultivars species introduced to mankind, and in the process has immense impact in socio-political and economic life from a hunter-gatherer to a settled life. The introduction of taro farming was game changing for many societies around the globe, and as such the population of Bura Namsang in Longleng district of Nagaland India shares close affinity with taro farming in their socio-political and economic life which needs worth discussion in this paper through the lenses of cultivation, marriage, death, tribute and economic ties garnered around their life.

Keywords: Taro, bura namsang, *Ahom tong*, *Ung*, cultivate

Introduction

The birth of human civilization and its association with food culture has been a continuing practice since the hunter-gatherer times and is a record breaking testimony of agricultural development. Archaeological evidences indicated agricultural development around 10,000 BP or more though it is difficult to pin down the genesis. Yet it did develop at multiple times in multiple places before the invention of writing. Research has revealed crops such as wheat, barley, peas, lentils, chicken pea as one of the earliest crop associated with human society. Besides the mentioned ones, taro (*Colocasia esculenta sp.*)

belonging to a member of the Araceae family, is one of the important tuber crops which has been grown by farmers and is regarded as a widely distributed cultivable root crop and used as vegetable for their corm, petioles and leaves (Mezhii et al., 2017). It appears to be a liable and one of the oldest food crops for man's subsistence pattern due to its nutritional capacity.

The history of this crop as per linguistic research done over the years reveal the mention of name *Arum*, *Kolokasia* in ancient literatures of Greek and Latin belonging to 3rd Century BC or

earlier. This tuberous crop is associated with civilization of Australia, Southeast Asia and Papua New Guinea, (Grimaldi et al., 2018). The presence of taro in ancient Chinese text dates to 200 BC and Pliny's *Naturalis Historia* 1st c. AD (Grimaldi et al., 2018), while the earliest evidences of taro in man's subsistence pattern historically documented thus far comes from an archaeological excavation at Solomon Island in Kilu cave site dating to 28,000 BP and 20,000 BP at Kuk swamp Archaeological site in West Highland provinces of Papua New Guinea (PNG); uncovered prehistoric stone tools on which likely taro starch grains and calcium oxalate crystals were observed, suggested taro as the main candidate for early use and cultivation, thus supporting the view that taro played an important part in early stages of agricultural development. It is difficult to trace the genesis of taro but recent research have attempted to discuss on its origin and dispersal around the globe through chloroplast DNA analysis, karyological investigation and linguistic research drawing that distinctive gene pools have been identified in Nepal, Southeast Asia and the Pacific based on the research conducted on vernacular names applied to taro in Indo-pacific (Grimaldi, 2016). On the other, hand, identification of starch

grains from taro and yams in dental calculus and food processing tools from the Dingsishan sites of Huiyaotian and Liyupo in southern East Asia dating to c. 9030–6741 BP concluded that the harvesting and processing of these dietary staples supported an Early Holocene population increase in southern East Asia, before the spread of rice and millet farming (Wang et al., 2024). Taro was not only regarded as a stable crop for cultures associated with it such as the Polynesian Island, South East Asian but played an important role towards its historical and social set up. For instance in Hawaii, taro / *kalo* sp. such as *Lehua* and *Pi'i ali'i* were reserved to be eaten only by the chiefs (*ali'i*) (Cho et al., 2007). In Austral Island of East Polynesia, there are evidence of wars fought between people of Rurutu, Tubuai and Rapa for acquisition of land for taro cultivation as one of the main duty of chiefs was to provide the entire population with surplus food. In India, taro research is scanty and at the same time qualitative evaluation on local consumption of taro species as well as the genetic studies have been conducted that has led to realization of taro as a super-crop consumed by locals of Eastern and Southern India but on the contrary, taro is less favored in contrast to rice, wheat, maize and potato and that there is an

immediate need to develop taro as a commercial cultivar (Sikdar et al., 2015). Northeast India serves as a home to many tribal communities with rich cultural and traditional knowledge system. Here taro attains a superior position among its inhabitants, cultivated in most part of the region as a mixed crop or mono crop. Considered as a staple food after rice, it is a very old crop cultivated generation after generation and hence becoming a part of the people's life (Thirugnanavel et al., 2015).

The state of Nagaland covering an area of 16527 km² is home to many Naga tribal communities and rich in biodiversity. Being rich in non-traditional and underutilized horticultural crops, farmers can meet their household needs like food, nutrition, medicine and general livelihood balancing. Among such crops, colocasia sp or taro is one of the important crops grown by farmers and considered as an important crop after rice (Mezhii et al., 2017).

Area of study

The village of Bura Namsang which falls under the district of Longleng formed in 2004 and a neighbour of Mon District in Nagaland, India where the population exhibits tattoos on their bodies except faces,

where *jhum* cultivation is in vogue like the rest of the other tribes of Nagaland and taro cultivation holds a very important place all over the Phom area. Akin to the Konyaks, the Phoms also practise a village polity where the *Ung* is considered as the head of the village with shared powers between the *Ung* and the council. *Namchung* as it was known earlier, had been derived after the first settlers who sowed first sesame seeds to ward-off evil spirits, as the name *Nam* in their native tongue means sesame, and *Chung* would mean place or site. So the name *Namchung* was used until years later, when it came to be known as Bura Namsang. The village of Bura Namsang which shares a boundary with Upper Assam state region shares very old socio-economic and political ties with *Ahoms* as oral narratives speaks of Gadadhar Singha once stayed in Bura Namsang Village. The village was governed through the *Ung* and his council of advisors for village administration, but the modern system of village administration has taken over the old system and *Ung* no longer exists.

Method of acquiring data

Since Nagas in common do not have a written script so much of data collection for this working paper was done on:

- a) In-depth interviews for sayings, folksongs, oral narratives in association to taro which was conducted personally with different individuals, families and groups.
- b) Observation on the process of harvest and storage for the understanding of taro and its centric values among the population of the said village. However the names of the interviewees are kept in silence due to ethical reasons.
- c) Secondary data collected through literary works in the form of journal articles and paper publications related to taro studies from around the globe.

Cultivation and harvest

Taro among Bura Namsang villagers has been their lifeline since time immemorial, and till now the people cannot recollect when they initially got associated with the crop and there is no trace of its origin except in their lullaby and seed sowing songs where it is mentioned. These days, it is most sought after by all the families in the community. The association of this crop is seen in a bigger prospect as we can find in their relation with Ahoms as well as in ritual practices leading to its cultivation; though, after the arrival of Christianity, the ritual practices associated with taro cultivation have stopped. But till date, the people follow in some manner when it comes to planting, cultivation and

harvesting. It serves as a food security when other crops fails.

Jhum cultivation being the main kind, with mixed cropping pattern, the village is surrounded by cultivable lands where it will be cultivated on a rotational basis as a particular plot of land will be cultivated for two years as far as the farmers knowledge was concern, and took twelve years to complete a rotation. Taro was sowed first after clearing and burning of cultivable track of land in the month of February and March in the entire site followed by ginger, chillies, rice and the likes. Taro planting was done by the first seed sower, who after sacrificing a rooster in the path leading to the *Jhum* field sites, had observed *genna*. No one was allowed to plant taro before the first seed sower.

The sowing / planting of taro was associated with peer group and relatives helping out where melodious chanting of songs in relation to crop was sang which stated, "*let the blessing be like the sands of rivers around the village and harvest be rich so much so that we can feed the people in the plains.*" In the months leading to clearing of weeds, the workers in the field of both able gender would sing a competitive song which runs "*our hands are strong enough to remove*

these naughty weeds today itself” with tools such as scrappers, hoe and a machete by those who can afford but mostly cleared by bare hands with proper work distribution. At harvest, starting from the months of November the same song cited above was sang and chanted to ensure a rich harvest, and then the biggest corm from every household was given to the *Ung*, who in turn would appoint a priest in the village

to perform a ritual to the stone god situated at the apex of *Ayapang* Morung for thanksgiving ritual. After this, the entire village will start consuming its corm.

The table below represents different cultivar species of taro cultivated at Bura Namsang for reference with local names (Table 1, page number 5):

Sl. No.	Local Name	Area of Planting
1	Adi Tong	Entire cultivable land with other crops
2	Ahom Tong	Entire cultivable land with other crops
3	Aphak Tong	Entire cultivable land with other crops
4	Aüshi Tong	Surrounding, as a boundary marker and for protection of the field.
5	Aüshi Shitem Tong	Entire cultivable land with other crops
6	Mükshang Tong	Entire cultivable land with other crops
7	Mongmjn Tong	Entire cultivable land with other crops
8	Mihnyü Tong	Entire cultivable land with other crops
9	Nyüta Lokjang Tong	Entire cultivable land with other crops
10	Shok Tong	Entire cultivable land with other crops
11	Tongnyak	Entire cultivable land with other crops
12	Zemok Tong	Entire cultivable land with other crops

Table 1

Socio-political context

Socially, Bura Namsang villagers followed a patriarchal society with strict *Morung* system consisting of four in number viz. *Ayah Bang*, *Ahyu Bang*, *Monyiu Bang* and *Lanching Bang*. Each of these *Morungs* were made up of three or four clans and the young adult males starting from 14 years and above mostly spend their time at the *Morung* consisting of age groups in the *Morung* set up with elders from the clans and slept there until he got married. Irrespective of their clan, age group was a significant marker for work distribution and learning of life's ways as *Morungs* were considered to be the only learning institution back then all over Naga Hills. On the contrary, girls would help their mothers in the household chores which formed the basis of learning. The population till date consists of a mixture of two branches of migrants namely those coming from *Yingyishang* (the place of birth / origin of Phom tribe as oral narratives speak) called as the *Ying* and those coming from *Long* also addressed as *Long*.

Bura Namsang people do share a close association with taro as it brought closeness in terms of seedling sharing, exchange of corms between the families in the village and beyond, as this process of exchange today, has led to the

of a particular cultivar species popularly known in Phom area as *B Namsang* species although the population of Bura Namsang villagers calls it *Ahom tong*. Being closer to Assam, Namsang population since Gadadhar Singha and even before have been going down to places like Geleki and Nazira in Sivasagar District of Assam today, for trade where informants from Geleki speaks about how people of Bura Namsang village would come down to the plains with Ginger, Chilli, Pumpkin and *Piperaceae* (*Tamol Pata* as the locals uses for the term) for trade and would go back buying dry fish and salt along with other essentials. It was through this interaction that the oral narratives speak about *Ahom Tong* (Figure 1, page number 7) natively called by the Bura Namsang population, and was given as a gift for cultivation by the Assamese saying that the particular species would be appropriate for their cultivation after which the species *Ahom Tong* came to be cultivated among the people on a wider perspective. The crop, taro has become closely associated with the village that it finds place in a lullaby entitled *Naü* where a father would carry his son on his back and sing, “*My son is strong and tough like the pumpkin but other's children are like the steamed taro petiole so soft and and slim.*”

It was also the duty of a father to at least send off his daughter with few taro seedlings after marriage to be planted at the new family along with other gifts such as carry basket, machete, hoe, scrapper and ornaments which were a must.



Figure 1: *Ahom tong*

Taro and Death

Taro cuisine prepared would be served to a deceased man's skull brought home from the grave yard before its final burial where it was placed at the base of the main post, big in size, inside the house after thorough cleaning and decoration circled by small pebbles and a bamboo makeshift pitcher-like item with two narrow ended openings; which was a belief among the people that the spirit of the deceased man would carry it to the land of death and while passing the gates, would offer water to the guards in the said bamboo

makeshift pitcher-like item and when the guardians are confused of how to drink the water, and figuring out the technique, the deceased spirit would slip through the gates and enter the land of death without any difficulties. As for the families they would keep feeding the skull in the living world with taro corm curry known as *tong hao* for about a month after which the eldest lady of the clan would carry the skull on a carry basket with procession in the village from one end to the other and will dispose the skull in a rock curved cemetery to be covered by a stone slab or lid made of stone material. Today the cemetery no longer exists due to arrival of Christianity and the people have done away with such burial practices.

Politics

On the other Bura Namsang population never exchanged or shared taro for seedlings or consumption with any warring villages around their periphery or in the distance, and never did they go to such villages to buy or borrow taro or anything essential to life, and never did they maintain any marriage alliance. To the people, taro corms served as a source of paying tribute to the *Ung* accompanied by administrative boards. Politically, it had played a role for peace and safeguarding the

village as oral narratives speak about a distant village (*Name of the opposing village will not be mentioned due to ethical reasons*) giving up their plans to attack Bura Namsang village when a leader of the opposing village told the gatherings to swallow *Ahom Tong* at one go which became impossible leading to abandoning the plan of invading Bura Namsang.

Discussion

Taro was an essential item of social bond as it led to working gangs in the form of families and relatives along with peers to come together, especially in times of planting, weed clearing and harvest which was a social obligation among the people. It was also a crop of getting to know the strength and valour of a young man who could be vying and looking for a marriageable partner for life while working together in peer groups in the field. The display of strength and valour by a man in singing and clearing of weeds and harvest would be enough to convince the owners who sought to find a suitable man for their daughters of marriageable age. This would then bring together two distant families as one through marriage alliance. As for economical aspects, the villagers went down to the plains of its neighbours like Assam and Naganimora area for trade. This is how *Ahom Tong* and

other species of taro have dispersed to nearby Konyak areas and also made a livelihood for the Namsang population. Rich harvest of taro would mean wealth as its exchange bought rice, tools and other basic needs. It had religious importance as rooster would be sacrificed before planting, and after harvest, the biggest corm would be offered to their god, after which the entire population would start consuming in their homes making taro corm as a potent item for offering in post harvest period and a source of feeding the dead before its secondary burial. It was a potent source of protection for the villagers to prevent invasion as just the name of the particular species, *Ahom tong* prevented invasion of the village. Planting *Aüshi Tong* surrounding cultivable land holds certain belief among the society as it was generally believed that this species would protect the crops from wild boar as the morphology of leaves was rough and would cause itching to the animals upon contact.

It is difficult to pinpoint the origin and time of where and when the population came into contact with the crop, as there were no written evidences or markers to indicate its association of time and this population like the rest of the Nagas have in common, no written records

except the reliance on oral tradition. It can be assumed that tracing the roots of taro association with the population can only be related without a specific time frame through oral narration in fragments, their agricultural practices, disposal of death, folklores, phrases and songs associated with their daily lives, marriages. There is also the added factor of scientific analysis of pollen and phytoliths, through which a clear time frame can be ascertained like those of the studies conducted in Polynesian and Southeast Asian areas. However, through oral

narrative, we can assume that the crop has been in association with the population since or even before their migration and settlement in the present site as they speak of food security provided by taro which was easier to carry, and could sustain hunger in long travels like the Hawaiians and their association with Poi prepared for food security in times of voyages. So, hypothetically it can be asserted that taro can be a cultural identity of the population, and a source of connection with the neighbours in terms of economic, social and political relations.

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Paradigm Shifts in Teaching and Learning

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Abstract

Education transcends beyond formal learning. It has to be made more responsive, ensuring learners thrive both in and outside the classroom. Given the profound transformation in recent times, our perspective of teaching and learning has gradually changed with more focus now being given to the wholesome development, encompassing all aspects of life. Appreciating, valuing and nurturing students' uniqueness by way of providing a supportive environment will go a long way in helping them realize their best potentials. This statement remains true for every generation and more so in the present context. Democratization of education has resulted in teachers being confronted with learners of different learning styles. Emphasis on 'Across-the-board' approach for every learner irrespective of their uniqueness is irrelevant in the recent times. Intellectual capacities alone cannot serve as the yardstick to measure students' merit. Having an overarching approach toward teaching-learning has gained a lot of attention in recent years which fosters an understanding of our world in an integrated manner and not simply through memorization of facts alone. Learning is seen as a dynamic process. This calls for the teachers to respond positively in tandem with the changing times. With the changes in educational paradigms, this study highlights the significance of having a comprehensive approach to teaching-learning and the multifaceted roles a teacher plays, not just as educators but also as facilitators, mentors, guides and life-long learning advocate. It is a qualitative study, a document analysis research paper.

Keywords: Paradigm Shift, All-inclusive Approach, Teaching-Learning

Introduction

Effective teaching-learning is an ongoing task often requiring teachers to master the art and science of teaching. Marzano (2020) defines instructional strategy as a series of actions having a definable outcome relative to student thinking or learning and a definable beginning and end. How a teacher

adapts and applies the right strategy to deal with the target group matters since instructional strategies are multidimensional and its effectiveness is dependent on the context in which they are applied. To cater learners with diverse learning styles, which approach will work best is influenced by factors like the nature of the group, course

content and the intended learning outcomes. Aligning instructional strategy with the intended learning outcomes would ensure its effectiveness. Equally important is the flexibility on the part of the teacher in integrating modern trends and practices. Argyos (2012) mentions that the role of the teacher has become more important due to current trends in teaching, requiring him to combat against outdated practices by way of integrating innovative teaching approaches into the educational process.

The traditional lecture method with focus on academics and students as passive learners is still an accepted and most popular teaching approach which has been the mainstay in higher educational institutions (HEIs). Emphasizing on the comprehensiveness and interconnectedness of all aspects of learning will empower students to utilize their academic learning as a footing for their holistic growth. A teacher plays multifaceted roles in teaching-learning, helping each student carve a niche for themselves by encouraging open and honest dialogue, a cooperative mindset, creating a positive environment, confidence building, incorporating emotional reflection, respecting and valuing others, enhancing mental wellbeing and

balancing scholastic and non-scholastic aspects as the key focus areas.

The role of teachers in the twenty-first century needs to undergo an upheaval. In these constantly evolving times, teachers must transform into something greater. With technology providing students easy access to knowledge, the role of a teacher can no longer be limited to knowledge provider, but requires the adoption of a greater responsibility - which encapsulates becoming a guide, mentor, and facilitator. (Souza, 2020, p. 132)

Teachers work out the curriculum, translating it into practice. Following a single teaching strategy for every student without taking into account the Principle of Uniqueness greatly undermines the true purpose of education which is to encourage individuals to become the finest that they can be and enabling them to experience all they can from life and accomplish their goals. To bridge the existing knowledge gaps, the NEP 2020 has also called for a revamp of the existing educational framework towards a more student-centric, holistic learning environment.

Objectives of the Paper

It is a qualitative study that aims to delve into the dynamics of paradigm

shifts in teaching-learning, exploring the significance and implications of integrating modern educational trends into teaching and learning environments to enrich students learning experiences.

Review of Literature

A study done by Biggs (2003) titled “Aligning Teaching for Constructing Learning” mentions the importance of matching curriculum, the teaching approaches that follows, including assessment process with the expected objectives, since teaching and learning are complementary to each other. Therefore, the role of a teacher is to plan for a supportive environment and plan for activities that will facilitate better learning in the students. McGonigal’s (2005) work “Teaching for Transformation: From Learning Theory to Teaching Strategies”, also suggests that for maximizing learning, it is not enough to simply present new information. Teachers should see to it that a change in students’ existing knowledge should be brought about by a change in their perspectives. Since approaches to instruction have considerably evolved overtime, teachers need to strive towards facilitating learning and a change in students’ attitudes, including their personal development by providing opportunities for reflection (Slavich,

2012).

Exploring the concepts quality and quality assurance, Netshifhe et al., (2016) in their study “Quality Assuring Teaching and Learning Processes in Higher Education: A Critical Appraisal” has attempted to draw a link by suggesting that any activity undertaken should attempt to enhance quality in order to ensure its relevance and produce graduates that will fit in the society. According to Behari and Saxena (2017), a teachers’ knowledge and perception towards instruction and learning do play a significant role in the realization of the intended learning outcomes. The aim of all higher education is to assist students in creating a niche for themselves and be responsible citizens. Hence, any teaching approach should be oriented towards facilitating such growth and academic freedom. Gudaji (2019) in his study “Pedagogy Approaches in Higher Education” has emphasized that better learning takes place when a change is brought about by new ideas and experiences to the already existing knowledge. To make learning meaningful, it is imperative that students be given opportunities for varied experiences which can enable them in discovering the true value of learning, and also help them in integrating into the society.

A study conducted by Snehi (2020) “Teaching-Learning: A Study of Undergraduate Level of Education” highlights how due to the demands of relevant skills and competencies for employability, there arises the need to adopt newer pedagogies and integrate technology, with emphasis on continuous professional development and collaboration among teachers for bringing about improvements in teaching and learning. As Varghese and Mandal (2020) observed, there is a need to establish linkage between students’ approach to learning and teachers’ approach to teaching to facilitate learning.

In “A Paradigm Shift for a More Inclusive, Equal, and Just Academia? Towards a Transformative - Emancipatory Pedagogy” Cappiali (2023) suggests that in order to move towards a more inclusive, equal, and just academia, it is necessary to address the challenges and capitalize on the opportunities, and promote a change in the way we approach teaching by implementing diverse learning principles and methods that motivate and challenge students’ abilities and potentials.

An analysis of the literature review reveals how various studies have attempted to address the necessity of a more holistic and innovative

interventions tailored to the varying needs of the students for ensuring quality teaching and learning. Insights can be drawn on how the success of any educational program is dependent upon the teachers’ capability to adapt their pedagogical strategies in tune with the course objectives and the evaluation process that follows. To help students face the challenges and navigate uncertainties of life, a relook at the various teaching and learning practices can help in developing new teaching approaches that can bring about a transformation in students’ learning experiences by recognizing their individuality, abilities, and interests (Margarit, 2021).

Methodology

The study analyzes various secondary sources like academic journals, books, educational policy documents.

Understanding Paradigm Shifts in Teaching-Learning

Educational paradigms have evolved overtime from the conventional teacher-centred instruction to a more dynamic, student-centred approach reflecting a broader transformation in our understanding of teaching-learning. The modern trend leans towards knowledge generation and its application, holistic development,

collaborative and blended learning, psychological integration, facilitative role of teachers, skill enhancement, digital literacy, experiential learning, use of technology driven methods, comprehensive evaluation and assessment, emphasis on independence and proactive role of learners, sustainability, inclusiveness and process-based teaching and learning – all tailored to the requirements of the students. Paradigm shift can be understood as a standard, perspective or set of ideas. In education, it refers to any improvement or need-based changes or a fundamental change in approach or underlying assumptions. One of the most important requirements at present is to embrace, prioritize and adapt an all-inclusive development over conventional teaching methods to enhance the learning experiences of the students. In such an approach, it is expected of a teacher to help students find meaning and purpose in life, by addressing both scholastic and non-scholastic needs. This pertains to going beyond memorizing facts ensuring learners not only excel in their academic pursuits but also become well-rounded individuals capable of facing the challenges of life. With classrooms becoming complex, multifaceted and demanding places to work, outstanding pedagogy is

far from straightforward (Husbands & Pearce, 2012). To help learners tackle complex life and work environments, it is essential that they be oriented in understanding global issues, citizenship values, sensitized towards preserving the environment, being articulate, collaborative and innovative, a concern for fellow beings, exhibiting responsibility and accountability towards self and others, analysis and synthesis of information and effective use of technology to evaluate and communicate information. While planning for instruction, teachers should also take into consideration different aspects like –

- Knowing the students.
- Taking into account the varied learning requirements of students.
- Understanding student learning processes.
- Appreciating difference in backgrounds and abilities of students.
- Matching instruction with the learning objectives and assessment process.
- Outlining goals and expectations crucial to effective teaching-learning partnerships.
- Offering diverse methods of feedback.
- Reflecting on the learning and its applicability in real life situations.

For creating a supportive and stimulating learning environment, various teaching-learning strategies that can be considered are –

- Self-guided learning.
- Learning by doing.
- Building connections, team spirit, social responsibility and collaboration with the community.
- Interdisciplinary coursework for seeking new perspectives.
- Strong student-teacher relationships; trusting rapport.
- Encouraging self-confidence.
- Mindfulness and wellness programs by incorporating emotional reflection and practices that promote mind – body well-being.
- Holistic / Integrated Assessment by evaluating students' overall performance.

Implications

A teacher's effort towards making active connections and building upon the students' previous knowledge and experiences can play a decisive role in realizing the intended learning outcomes. Besides, his personal passion and exercise of foresight can positively impact the teaching and learning process. As education continues to evolve, educators and stakeholders concerned must be responsive to changing educational needs to ensure an effective and relevant

education system. There is also the need for acknowledging the role of technology in broadening our access to knowledge, enabling customized learning, and facilitating collaboration and global connections. Paradigm shift in education are not without challenges and its effective implementation requires a significant investment in time and effort; a commitment and collaborative effort of all stakeholders concerned. To optimize teaching-learning, it is imperative that changes in the mindset and practice of educators, addressing challenges around curriculum reform, flexibility, digital access, teacher development and resource constraints, policies that support the independence and innovation of educators and changes in how to evaluate and measure learning outcomes be prioritized. This can lead to the creation of an educational environment conducive to the optimal development of students. With the focus heavily centered on academic achievements, adopting a comprehensive approach to education reminds us of the essential balance needed for a well-rounded upbringing. Teachers need to strengthen skills in developing academic rigor, building positive relationships, inspire and be reflective practitioners, adapting to

new insights and understanding the positive impact they can have on students. This humane touch in education fosters deep personal connections, essential for guiding academic and personal growth. Complacency in teaching perhaps is the biggest obstacle to self-development, often leading to lack of enthusiasm. Effective teaching calls for resilience, persistence, clarity and genuine concern on the part of the teacher. Teachers are expected to be constantly on their toes and work on their personal

transformation, which would involve introspection, reflection and shift in one's attitude in understanding what constitutes success and failure, recognizing one's weaknesses, accepting these and seeking ways to overcome them. Considering the reciprocal nature of teaching and learning, sharing knowledge and insights often resonate with an educator's personal growth and learning journeys. This aligns well with Seneca's quote, "While we teach, we learn".

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Fundamentals of Mentoring: An Outline

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Abstract

This paper explores the basics of mentorship programmes, which is gaining much deserved recognition as an effective form of developmental relationships. Mentoring plays a pivotal role in fostering personal and professional growth by providing guidance, support, and knowledge-transfer from experienced mentors to mentees. The paper provides an overview of mentorship, its origin and key characteristics. It examines the roles and responsibilities of both mentors and mentees, highlighting the importance of establishing effective communication and building trust within the mentoring relationship and explores the core skills involved in mentoring, emphasizing the importance of mentor training and development programmes to ensure mentors possess the necessary skills involved. Acknowledging the challenges to effective mentoring in educational institutions, some strategies are suggested to circumvent issues such as imbalanced mentor-mentee ratio.

Keywords: Mentoring, mentor, mentee, developmental relationship

Origin of the term Mentor

In the *Odyssey*, when Odysseus left home in order to fight in the Trojan war he left behind a young son, Telemachus. To ensure that Telemachus receives proper guidance and advice in his absence, Ulysses placed him under the care of his trusted friend Mentor. Mentor proved worthy of the trust vested upon him and provided sage counsel and guidance to Telemachus during the tumultuous twenty years of his father's absence. Such was his efficacy that when Athena, the goddess of wisdom, wished to approach Telemachus and later on Odysseus himself after his

return to Ithaca, she did so in the guise of Mentor.

Over time, "Mentor" has become a term for the purpose that the character of Mentor served in the *Odyssey*: to impart wise and seasoned guidance, knowledge and support to one less experienced. Thus, mentoring refers to a developmental relationship where an older individual, known as a mentor, utilizes the knowledge of their experiences to guide and counsel a younger individual, known as a mentee.

Within this relationship, mentors

serve two primary functions. They act as coaches, offering valuable advice to enhance the mentee's professional/academic performance and development. This function helps the mentee grow in their chosen field. Secondly, mentors can be role models and provide a vital support system for the mentee, fulfilling a psychosocial function. In this capacity, mentors offer guidance and encouragement, helping the mentee to navigate both professional development and work-life balance. The mentorship provides explicit and implicit lessons that contribute to the mentee's growth in their career/academics and overall life.

The mentee, in contrast, is the individual who receives guidance and support from the mentor. Usually an individual with less experience, the mentee seeks to acquire knowledge and skills in a specific domain. If receptive to feedback, the mentee uses the guidance provided by the mentor to set goals, enhance their strengths, address weaknesses, and make progress in their chosen field or area of interest. The mentee's active participation and willingness to learn play a critical role in the success of the mentoring relationship.

“The mentoring relationship exists

between one individual in need of developmental guidance and another individual who is both capable and willing to provide that guidance” (American Psychological Association, 2012, para. 3).

Forms of Mentoring: Informal and Formal

According to the manner in which the relationship is formed, mentoring relationships can be classified into two types, namely formal and informal. Informal mentoring relationships may occur spontaneously between individuals. This may happen when the parties have certain things in common, belong in the same social circle or share the same interests. The relationship may be initiated by the mentee who require assistance or support to complete certain specific tasks or guidance around certain decisions. Such mentoring relationship may occur within social groups or it may also exist within a larger organisation without being recognised or labelled as a mentoring relationship.

Formal mentoring relationships occur when organisations specifically design structures to facilitate and maintain such relationships. Formal mentoring programmes may manage the mentor-mentee matching process instead of letting these relationships

emerge on their own. In these cases, guidelines may be drafted for the principles and objectives of the programme, and also the frequency of the mentoring sessions. Mentors are either volunteers or they may be drafted to the duty and assigned a specific number of mentees for a certain duration.

According to Wanberg, Welsh, and Hazlett (2003), six primary characteristics of formal mentoring programmes can have a direct influence on the programme's effectiveness:

(a) Programme objectives: The objectives of mentorship programmes may vary from organisations to organisation. In some organisations, the purpose may be smooth initiation or enculturation of newcomers. In others it may be for intensive development of a target group. An ideal mentorship programme for educational institutions would be a values-oriented combination of both. Objectives determine the scope of the programme while also facilitating the goal-setting process.

(b) Selection of participants: "Formal mentoring programmes are generally more effective when mentors voluntarily participate, rather than being drafted or coerced, and are intrinsically motivated to help mentees" (Baugh & Fagenson-Eland, 2008, p. 249). It

has been noted that coerced mentoring can have adverse effects such as mediocre or negative outcomes.

(c) Matching of mentors and mentees: Some programmes permit mentors to review the profiles of prospective mentees and select accordingly. Or the organization may appoint administrators to match the partners based on certain common criteria. Mentorship matching based on tallying criteria complements the relationship. The criteria may include field of study, human or professional interests, values, personality, etc.

(d) Training for mentors and mentees: "Orientation or training programmes for mentors and mentees can help both parties establish a psychological contract for the relationship" (Wanberg & Welsh, 2003, p. 52). Key factors such as establishing clear a structure of expectation, goals, and nature of the relationship, communication and conflict resolution skills should be emphasized. A poor mentoring experience can cause long term damage even leading to a loss of trust in growth-oriented relationships.

(e) Guidelines for frequency of meeting: Studies have shown that clear guidelines for meetings results in more frequent meetings and more effective mentoring. The guideline may suggest which party

is to initiate the sessions, the parameters of the sessions and what each party may contribute to the sessions.

(f) Goal-setting procedure: Specific, attainable, relevant, and time-bound goals provide structure and meaning to the relationship. Both mentor and mentee should be clear of the purpose and the expected outcome of the relationship.

Core Mentoring Skills

“Effective mentoring requires more than common sense. Research indicates that mentors and mentees who develop and manage successful mentoring partnerships demonstrate a number of specific, identifiable skills that enable learning and change to take place” (Wanberg & Welsh, 2003, p. 40).

According to Linda Phillips-Jones, effective mentors and mentees use specific processes and skills throughout their relationships. These are skills and processes that can be developed for a more enjoyable and productive result.

“Unless a fairly structured process and specific skills are applied, mediocre mentoring relationships occur. Not much happens, and participants become frustrated with their well-intended but haphazard efforts. Worse, disappointed participants become convinced that

mentoring doesn’t work” (Phillips-Jones, 2001, p. 2).

Core mentoring skills for mentors as well as mentees:

1. **Listening Actively:** Active listening involve appropriate verbal and non-verbal responses. This is the basic skill upon which the development of all other skills depends. Active listening demonstrates to the speaker that their opinions and concerns have been heard and understood. Listening without judgement or unnecessary interruptions is not only a courtesy but can encourage timid speakers.

2. **Building Trust:** Trust is as vital in a mentoring partnership as in all partnerships. It is something which requires time as well as effort. Respect for the other, keeping confidences and keeping one’s word are the essential factors for the process of building trust.

3. **Encouraging:** According to Linda Phillips-Jones, the most valued mentoring skill is verbal positive encouragement. Sincere compliments on achievements, actions and traits or expressions of appreciation and gratitude boosts self-worth and encourages development.

4. **Identifying Goals and Current Reality:** To identify current reality involves a knowledge of one’s strength, weaknesses and also the

specific areas where help is required. Self-awareness is the basis on which goal-setting should be explored. For any assistance to be productive, goal-setting is important. Even tentative goals can provide a structure and direction to the process.

How is mentoring relevant?

Mentoring is relevant and valuable for a variety of reasons across different domains and contexts:

1. **Knowledge Transfer and Exchange:** Effective mentoring involve transfer of knowledge, and expertise from experienced individuals to those who are less experienced. It is a passing of wisdom which helps novices learn from the successes and mistakes of their mentors which can lead to an acceleration in the growth and development of the mentees. In turn, mentoring can help mentors practice and build interpersonal skills, strengthen knowledge, gain fresh perspective and stay updated on new trends and ideas.

Effective mentoring creates a legacy of knowledge and expertise that can be passed down through generations. This continuous process of learning and sharing knowledge enriches the collective expertise within a field or community. “These programmes serve as a bridge, connecting

individuals from different generations and providing them with valuable opportunities to learn, grow, and connect” (Winstanely, 2023, para. 4).

2. **Personal and Professional Development:** Mentors can facilitate personal and professional development of mentees. Identifying strengths and weaknesses and strategizing attainable goals is a crucial element of mentoring. Having someone believe in one’s abilities can improve self-confidence and motivate self-improvement which can have a positive impact on goals setting. For students, mentoring can enhance the educational experience. The personalized input and intellectual stimulus from teacher-mentors can motivate greater achievement in academics. Mentors can also offer valuable insights into career opportunities, career choices, and provide advice on how to advance in their chosen field. Mentors often have established networks and resources within their respective fields. This can open avenues for collaboration, partnerships, and professional connections to a mentee.

3. **Motivation and Accountability:** Mentoring can motivate a mentee to stay focused and committed to their goals. Regular check-ins and

accountability mechanisms within the relationship can help keep mentees on track and encourage them to overcome obstacles. Effective mentors foster leadership skills and qualities in their mentees, preparing them for future leadership roles in their academic, professional, or personal lives. The University of Washington (2020) outlined three skills mentors can help develop in their mentees: oral and written communication skills, team-oriented skills, and leadership skills.

4. Diversity and Inclusion: Mentoring can play a crucial role in promoting diversity and inclusion. Pairing mentors and mentees across backgrounds encourages cultural competency through familiarity and understanding. Furthermore, mentoring support could be the crucial leverage required by individuals from underrepresented groups. It can also create a more inclusive and equitable environment by addressing potential barriers and biases. The skills and awareness built in these relationships permeate the organization, helping members better deal with differences or diversity among themselves.

Addressing Mentorship Imbalance in the Mentor-Mentee Ratio in Educational Institutions

“Effective mentoring advances the discipline because students often begin making significant contributions long before they complete their graduate degrees. Such students are more likely to have productive and distinguished careers that reflect credit on their mentors and enrich the discipline” (University of Michigan, 2018, p. 6).

While mentorship can enhance the overall educational experience and equip students for academic and professional endeavors, achieving effective mentoring in educational institutions can be a challenge. As mentioned, research shows that formal mentoring programmes have greater chances of success when mentors are voluntary participants. In an educational institution, mentoring students may be a mandate for faculty rather than a voluntary initiative. Moreover, due to logistical considerations, a teacher may be assigned mentees beyond what is considered the ideal mentor-mentee ratio which is 1:1 to 1:5, according to, Mentorink, an award-winning platform for developing mentoring programmes for companies like Siemens and L’Oreal. This imbalance can undermine the intended benefits of mentorship programmes. Establishing a meaningful connection requires time and effort and with a large number of

mentees, a teacher may struggle to allocate sufficient time and attention to each individual, potentially hindering the effectiveness of the mentorship. This may result in superficial interactions with little comprehensive support or quality advice and guidance. Mentees may feel neglected or overlooked leading to disengagement from the mentorship process.

Managing a large number of mentees can be overwhelming for the mentor, leading to stress and burnout, negatively affecting the mentor's ability to provide effective support and guidance to any of their mentees. Teachers may resort to a one-size-fits-all approach. This is contrary to the spirit of mentoring and mentors may miss out on recognizing and promoting specific opportunities that align with the individual strengths and interests of each mentee. This could impact the mentees' overall growth and development. As effective mentoring requires an accommodation of the unique characteristics of each mentee, thus fostering a more tailored and meaningful developmental experience. In the case of the teacher/mentor, such a situation contributes to increased workloads and may detract from their primary teaching or professional

responsibilities while yielding minimal positive outcomes.

As such, it is best to avoid token mentoring: assigning mentors merely for the sake of having a mentor, as it may lead to superficial relationships without substantial benefits. Allocating resources to ensure manageable mentorship loads contributes to a more positive and impactful mentoring experience for all involved.

Strategies for Managing an Imbalanced Mentor-Mentee Ratio

While it is important for educational institutions to carefully consider mentor-to-mentee ratios, it may not always be feasible due to existing conditions. To ensure inclusiveness and parity, every student must be assigned a mentor and the standard teacher-student ratios in institutions may result in teachers being assigned more mentees than what is considered an ideal or optimal ratio. This imbalance poses a challenge for educators in providing personalized guidance and support to each student in an optimal manner.

Effectively mentoring a large number of mentees presents unique challenges but the challenges are not unsurmountable. Strategic planning involving various communication platforms,

acquiring adequate support and skills, setting goals that align with the existing situations, encouraging independence among mentees along with thoughtful implementation and cooperation from all involved can mitigate the drawbacks and optimize the positives of such situations. Some basic strategies are examined:

1. Communication Channels: “The effectiveness of communication in the mentoring process is positively and directly influenced by non-verbal channels and tools of communication, written and oral channels and tools of communication as well as social engagement in the mentoring process” (Rollnik-Sadowska, 2022, p. 8). The first step is to establish clear communication channels, such as regular group meetings and online platforms to maintain contact and efficiently disseminate information, updates, and resources to all mentees. Technology can play a crucial role to streamline communication and resource-sharing. Virtual platforms, emails, and messaging apps can facilitate quick and convenient interactions, while making it easier to reach a larger audience. Group sessions, whether online or offline, that address common concerns or topics relevant to all mentees allows mentors to efficiently share information with multiple

individuals simultaneously.

2. Creating Sub-Groups and Considering Peer and Alumni mentorship: Dividing mentees into smaller groups based on class/semester or common needs, interests, or goals can ensure a more personalized attention and interaction than addressing one large group. Promoting a culture of peer support among mentees by encouraging them to share experiences, insights, and strategies with each other can create a collaborative learning environment. Alternately, alumni mentorship and peer mentorship could be considered supplementing the guidance provided by faculty mentors.

Mentorship involving alumni is an opportunity for alumni of institutions to donate their time and experience to current students, while in peer mentorship, senior and experienced students mentor their peers. Such mentorship emphasizes support and relationship-building and can create a dynamic exchange of knowledge, skills, and perspectives among participants. Mentees may also find it easier to relate to such mentors. This relativity contributes to a stronger sense of trust and connection and thus to the development of a supportive community within an educational

institution. However, peer and alumni mentors should be trustworthy individuals who are not inclined to negative influence, and can offer a positive experience, and who are likely to be committed to the programme and their mentee for the required period. A screening process to assess applicants will help find mentors who meet these basic requirements (Blaber, 2006).

3. **Realistic Goals:** It is important to establish realistic and achievable goals for both mentors and mentees with a clear outline of expectations and priorities. This can ensure that the mentoring process remains focused, purposeful and manageable. It also safeguards against later disappointment and frustration on both sides. Again, encouraging mentees to engage in self-reflection and to take an active role in their own development help alleviate some of the burden on mentors while fostering independence among mentees.

4. **Mentoring Support and Assessment:** A mentoring network can be a support system for mentors. It provides a platform for mentors to share insights, discuss challenges, and collaborate on effective strategies. Scheduled check-ins and assessments to gauge the progress of both mentors and mentees ensures that everyone is on track and also provides opportunity to address any emerging challenges

promptly. Mechanisms for regular evaluation on the effectiveness of mentorship programme based on feedback from both mentors and mentees encourages continuous improvement in the relationships and the programme. Frequent professional development opportunities such as trainings and workshops enable mentors to enhance their mentoring skills, time management, and strategies. To motivate both mentors and mentees to stay engaged and committed, positive reinforcement such as recognition of achievements, milestones, and successes within the mentoring programme could be instrumental. This not only boosts morale but also reinforces the significance of efforts made, fostering a more gratifying and enriching mentoring experience for everyone involved.

For a supportive and effective mentorship environment that contributes positively to the personal and professional development of everyone involved, it is important to ensure that the mentorship programme aligns with the overall goals and mission of the institution.

Conclusion

A successful mentoring relationship involves the mentor in developing the next generation of leaders. This

can bring a sense of rejuvenation in the mentor's own personal as well as career development. Additionally, mentors often find themselves enriched by fresh ideas and insights through their mentees, fostering a reciprocal learning environment. Beyond personal rewards, mentors contribute to building a legacy, enjoy enhanced communication skills, and expand their networks, all of which lead to increased job satisfaction and recognition within their profession. Ultimately, mentoring becomes a fulfilling way for mentors to give back to the community and contribute positively to the future of their profession.

The mentor-mentee relationship is built upon the foundation of trust, mutual respect, and open communication. It fosters a supportive and nurturing connection that benefits both parties. According to Steven Spielberg, mentoring is not about creating someone in one's image

but giving someone the opportunity to create themselves. As the mentor imparts their knowledge and wisdom, the mentee gains valuable insights and guidance to explore, discover, and define themselves. This collaborative relationship contributes to the growth and development of both the mentor and mentee, creating a positive impact on their respective paths.

In conclusion, mentoring is relevant because it accelerates personal and professional growth, fosters supportive relationships and contributes to the overall development of individuals and communities. It remains a vital and effective way of transferring knowledge and building stronger, more resilient, and successful individuals and organizations.

“Research has consistently found mentored individuals to be more satisfied and committed to their professions than non-mentored individuals” (Wanberg, et al., 2003, p. 41).

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Revisiting and Reviving Traditional Practices: The Mech Kacharis of Nagaland

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Abstract

Culture and traditional practices are paramount in shaping communities' identity and continuity. These elements serve as repositories of collective wisdom, values, and historical experiences that are transmitted across generations. They play a crucial role in fostering a sense of belonging and identity among individuals, thereby connecting them to their ancestral roots and providing a framework for understanding their position within the broader social and historical context. Such practices and cultural expressions are integral to maintaining the social fabric and coherence of communities, enabling the perpetuation of shared heritage and continuity amidst evolving socio-cultural landscapes. Mech Kacharis, recognized as an Indigenous group in Nagaland, has faced cultural erosion due to Assamese influence, intermarriage, and modernization. In response, initiatives like the Burkhlang Cultural Society (established in 2016) and the Gyanswarang Forai Sali school (founded in 2022) aim to revive traditional practices. The Hornbill Festival further supports these efforts by providing a platform for showcasing cultural heritage. This paper emphasizes the importance of cultural revival in maintaining ethnic identity amid changing socio-cultural landscapes.

Keywords: Tradition, Mech Kachari, culture, folk

Introduction

The Kacharis are one of the recognized indigenous groups of Nagaland, along with the Nagas and other non-Naga tribes like the Kukis, Garos, and the Mikirs, who are listed as scheduled tribes of Nagaland vide Notification (Nagaland) Scheduled Tribe Order 1970 (Luhadia, 2016). The Dimasa and the Mech are two sub-tribes under the Kachari tribe, which comes under the Scheduled tribe

list in Nagaland. The term Kachari denotes many tribal communities originally belonging to the same stock of people, such as the Bodo Kachari, Dimasa Kachari, Mech Kachari, and other Kachari sub-groups. Unfortunately, people have yet to ascertain the etymological meaning of the term Kachari scientifically. The term's origin is complicated to trace, and the people themselves need to learn precisely why they are called as such. It can

be mentioned here that the people belonging to the aforesaid tribal communities do not generally call themselves Kachari. They introduce themselves as Bodo, Dimasa, Sonowal, etc. In their traditional folktales, the term Kachari also does not appear (Bordoloi, n.d.).

The genesis of the Mech Kachari tribe traces back to the Mechi River region of the Terai, where ancestral ties to the land fostered a sense of communal cohesion and identity (Dutta, 2022). From this primordial landscape, the Mech embarked on a migratory odyssey, traversing the rugged terrain of the Patkai hills that demarcated the boundary between India and Burma. The migration of the Mech Kachari tribe was characterized by a westward movement along the Himalayan foothills, leading to the establishment of settlements in regions such as Darjeeling, Terai, and Baikunthapur in Jalpaiguri district. The Mech diaspora, driven by environmental, socio-economic, and geopolitical factors, ventured eastward, crossing formidable rivers like the Tista and Sankosh. This eastward expansion established thriving Mech communities in locales such as Goalpara in Assam, epitomizing the indomitable spirit of resilience and adaptability that defined their collective ethos.

The Mech Kachari tribe, classified as one of the scheduled tribes of the Republic of India, occupies a notable position within the mosaic of indigenous communities in the northeastern region. Central to the narrative of the Mech Kachari tribe is their purported ethnic affiliation with the Mongolian race within the Tibeto-Burman linguistic family. Historically, the Mech people are believed to have spoken the Bodo language, although the gradual assimilation into mainstream Assamese culture has left an indelible mark on their linguistic identity.

Methodology

This study's data collection methods encompass primary and secondary sources alongside participant observation techniques. Primary data were gathered through interviews and oral testimonies from individuals actively engaged in the traditional practices. Secondary data sources were utilized to elucidate the socio-cultural significance of these traditions across various regions of Northeast India, facilitating a comparative analysis. Data was also collected through observation on different occasions when traditional practices were performed.

Objective

The primary objective of this paper

is to elucidate the traditional and indigenous practices of the Mech Kacharis in Nagaland. Additionally, this study explores the historical trajectory of these practices, detailing how they were once marginalized and are currently undergoing a process of revival.

Discussion

An ethnic minority is a group that makes up a smaller portion of a larger population. For instance, the Kachari are a major ethnic group in Assam, whereas the Mech Kachari are a less well-known subgroup of the Kachari. Although the Mech Kachari were once the rulers of the ancient Kamrupa Kingdom, they now represent a small fraction of the Kachari population. Their ethnic identity has been largely absorbed into the broader Assamese society. Within the larger Kachari kingdom context, the Mech-Kachari are considered a minority ethnic group in Assam. Minority ethnic groups often experience an identity crisis and typically seek recognition, autonomy, or a separate nation. In Northeast India, ethnic assertion is a prominent issue, primarily driven by political, economic, and social disadvantages and other benefits (Dutta, 2022).

After the establishment of Nagaland in 1963, the Mech Kacharis continued to engage in traditional

dances and songs on various occasions. However, over the ensuing years, they progressively began to lose their distinct cultural identity and ceased many traditional practices. The primary catalyst for this cultural erosion was the pervasive influence of Assamese culture and language, as most educational institutions operated in the Assamese medium during that period. Additionally, intermarriage and social integration with other tribes in Nagaland further diluted the Mech Kacharis' cultural distinctiveness.

The inability to preserve their language played a crucial role in this cultural decline, as language is a vital conduit for transmitting traditional customs and practices from one generation to the next. The erosion of linguistic heritage led to the gradual forgetting of these customs. Furthermore, the forces of modernization and Westernization exerted significant influence, prompting the Mech Kacharis to adopt new lifestyles that diverged from their traditional ways. This confluence of factors ultimately contributed to the significant loss of cultural identity among the Mech Kacharis in Nagaland. Recognizing the gradual erosion of their traditional practices due to various factors, the Mech Kacharis undertook initiatives to

revive these customs. This revival effort aimed to preserve their cultural heritage and ensure that younger generations could learn and perpetuate their traditional practices.

In an effort to revive traditional practices, the Burkhang Cultural Society was established in 2016. The term “Burkhang,” meaning “to dig up” in the Bodo dialect, reflects the society’s mission to rediscover and rejuvenate cultural practices that were in danger of being forgotten. Furthermore, Gyanswarang Forai Sali, a school dedicated to preserving and teaching traditional dances, songs, and language, was established in Kushiabill village, Dimapur, in 2022. This institution aims to impart cultural knowledge to younger generations, ensuring the transmission of heritage. In addition to these educational endeavours, various self-help groups have been formed to engage in traditional crafts, such as weaving traditional dresses and creating ornaments. These groups play a crucial role in maintaining and passing on traditional knowledge across generations. The cultural practices of the Mech Kacharis in Nagaland are derived from the traditions of the Bodo Kacharis, forming the foundation of their cultural heritage.

The art of dance and music has been an integral component of the socio-cultural life of the people of Nagaland. The Hornbill Festival has acted as an impetus for the growth of music in Nagaland (Roy, 2020). In addition to music, the Hornbill Festival offers a comprehensive platform for the exhibition of traditional practices from all tribes in Nagaland. The following traditional practices of the Mech Kacharis were performed during the Hornbill Festival 2023 and the Aai Sagi Festival 2024. These performances highlighted their rich cultural legacy and demonstrated their commitment to cultural preservation amidst modern influences.

Traditional game

1.Khomlainai

Khomlainai, an indigenous game integral to the cultural heritage of the Bodo tribes and also practiced by the Mech Kachari in Nagaland, exemplifies their physical prowess and traditional values. This unarmed combat sport, akin to wrestling, is conducted in a circular arena called the *Dokhor*, which features three concentric circles and a central point known as the *Nokhor*. Participants, attired in traditional garments and using a jute rope belt, engage in ten distinct sub-bouts, each emphasizing various techniques such as pulling,

pushing, lifting, and strategic positioning within the arena. For identification purposes, one competitor is referred to as *Agor* and the other as *Matha*, hence the designation *Agor* vs. *Matha*. The game is officiated by referees and judges, who oversee the adherence to rules and scoring. Points are awarded based on the extent of control exerted over the opponent and the ability to manoeuvre them within the defined circles. The competitor with the highest cumulative score across all sub-bouts is declared the *Derhasat* (winner). Khomlainai not only showcases physical agility and strength but also embodies the cultural richness and communal spirit of the Bodo tribes, reinforcing their enduring legacy and traditional practices. In each bout of Khomlainai, two wrestlers compete through a series of sub-bouts.

Traditional Dances

1. Baguroumba

The Baguroumba dance is the most beautiful dance of the Bodo-Kacharis, associated with merry-making and gossip (Roy, 2014). It is performed only by women, who wear the regorging spread around their necks and hold the ends with both hands. The Baguroumba dance is performed on every occasion and festival. This word is also written and pronounced as Bagurungba and

Bagurumba. The word Baguroumba consists of four sub-words: Ba+Ega+Rou+mba, which means to carry, to come out, heaven, and five, respectively. Hence, Baguroumba means to carry out the Bathou puja of the supreme god, who is the ruler of the five spiritual elements of heaven. The women dance by taking alternating steps with their feet, folding the lower back, and pushing the knees backward, all while keeping the song's rhythm. The dance begins with horizontal lines, then the dancers move into a circular pattern with a rising tempo, and ends in a beautiful, wave-like sea pattern. The Mech Kacharis draws inspiration from the Bodos and also practices it in Nagaland in a similar fashion.

2. Mwsaglangnai

Mwsaglangnai is an important traditional dance of the Mech Kacharis of Nagaland, performed during the Bathou Puja or Kherai Puja, celebrated in the last part of May. This dance is performed by young girls and boys. According to their beliefs, the Kachari youth, dressed in their finest traditional attire, perform this dance to pray to Bwrai Bathou, the Almighty. They seek purification of their souls and steadiness of mind, enabling them to engage in suitable activities for the welfare of society as a whole. (R. Saija & M. Mech, personal communication, Feb 3, 2024)

3.Chotrolee

Chotrolee is a dance performed by the women of the Mech Kacharis of Nagaland during the Kherai Puja, which takes place in the latter part of May. A distinctive feature of this dance is that the dancers wave a pair of swords in their hands, suggesting fervour and intensity. This symbolic act represents the courage and valour of the Kachari women, demonstrating that they stand firmly alongside their male counterparts in defending their homeland from enemies. This dance celebrates the strength and fighting spirit of the women within the Kachari community.

4.Daosri Delai

Daosri Delai is a dance performed by the women of the Mech Kacharis of Nagaland, inspired by the movements of the Moina bird. The dancers wear vibrant and colourful traditional costumes, gracefully emulating the bird's movements. The melodious sounds of traditional Kachari musical instruments, such as the Kham, Sifung, and Jotha Jabkhring, accompany this performance. Daosri Delai is showcased at all significant occasions within the Kachari community, celebrating their cultural heritage and the beauty of nature as represented by the Moina bird.

5.Bar-Dwi-Sikhla

Bar-Dwi-Sikhla is a dance from the

Mech Kachari dialect, which translates to “wind-water girl,” symbolizing Mother Nature. This title reflects the agrarian Mech Kachari community's deep connection with the environment, as the different seasons play a crucial role in their agricultural practices. This particular dance is performed to depict the windy season preceding spring's arrival. It celebrates the vibrant spring season, when plants sprout new leaves and flowers, signalling the start of agricultural activities. During the dance, performers mimic natural phenomena associated with the windy season, such as the blowing wind, swaying trees, and rustling leaves, bringing the spirit of nature to life through their movements.

6.Na Gwrnai Mwsanai

Na Gwrnai Mwsanai is a dance that reflects the significance of fishing in the rural life of the Mech Kachari community, where it is an everyday activity enjoyed by men, women, the young, and the old alike. The fishing equipment is mainly made from indigenous materials such as bamboo or cane. This dance explicitly portrays the women of the community fishing together in groups. They use a “jekhai,” a triangular-shaped bamboo crate open at the front, and a “khobai,” a small bamboo container to store the fish they catch. The dance captures

the joy and camaraderie among the women as they engage in fishing, temporarily setting aside their daily struggles. It highlights the spirit of togetherness and the brief escape from everyday life that fishing provides. Ultimately, the dance celebrates the satisfaction and happiness the women feel at the end of the day, pleased with their catch that promises a nourishing meal for their families. This dance is a vibrant expression of community life and the simple joys of shared tasks.

7. Khopri Sibnai Mwsanai

Khopri Sibnai Mwsanai is a dance integral to the agrarian lifestyle of the Mech Kachari tribe, closely connected to their agricultural activities. The title of the dance, “khopri,” translates to a bamboo hat, and “sibnai” means to put on or use. This dance highlights the importance of wearing a bamboo hat to shield oneself from the harsh sunlight during the labour-intensive tasks of sowing and planting paddy.

The lyrics of the accompanying song narrate the strenuous efforts involved in ploughing and preparing the fields day and night. They emphasize how the community members work together in groups, a practice that eases their workload and helps them alleviate their fatigue through mutual support.

The song vividly brings to life the elements of nature that mark the sowing season, such as the onset of the monsoon, seasonal floods, and the croaking of frogs, painting a vivid picture of the rural landscape during this critical time of year.

The performance concludes with a collective prayer to Mainao Buri, a revered figure seeking blessings for a fruitful and bountiful harvest. Therefore, this dance serves as a cultural expression of the Mech Kachari's agricultural practices and a communal invocation for prosperity and success in their farming endeavours.

Traditional Dances

1. Nagaland Rajiw Ni Sikhla Jwng

Nagaland Rajiw Ni Sikhla Jwng is a beautiful song and dance that celebrates the cultural identity of the Mech Kachari damsels of Nagaland. The title and theme of the performance express a heartfelt message of unity and respect. Through this dance, the performers express their greetings and respect to all the different communities within Nagaland and worldwide. It serves as a bridge, connecting the Mech Kachari community with others through the universal language of music and dance, and underscores their openness and welcoming spirit. This performance showcases their cultural heritage

and promotes a message of peace and harmony among diverse groups.

2.Dhansiri Dimapuri

Dhansiri Dimapuri is a poignant song that reflects on the historical splendour of the Kachari kingdom, with its capital once established in Dimapur. The song is an homage to the past Kachari kings and serves as a testament to the lasting legacy of their rule, evidence of which can still be seen in the ruins at Rajbari Dimapur. The lyrics emphasize the integral role of the Dhansiri River in fostering the growth and prosperity of the Kachari community and the kingdom at large. The river, often a lifeline for ancient civilizations, is celebrated for its contribution to the thriving culture and economy of the Kachari during their reign. Through its verses, the song encourages everyone to awaken from passivity and actively celebrate the rich heritage of the Kachari kings and their kingdom. It is a call to honour and remember the great deeds of the past, urging the community to take pride in their history and keep their ancestors' memory alive through song and celebration. This song is a reminder of past glories and a rallying cry for cultural pride and communal spirit.

Musical instruments

Musical instruments comprise the three basic elements - Rhythm,

Melody, and Harmony. Combining different musical instruments provides a lively, joyous, delightful aspect to the music (Roy, 2014). Most of the traditional music of the Mech Kacharis is instrumental in nature and accompanied by dance. Therefore, mentioning the traditional musical instruments used to create this music is essential. The traditional music of the Mech Kacharis is based on either the Carnatic or Hindustani scale (G. Mech, personal communication, February 3, 2024).

1.Sifung (flute)

Most of the traditional dances and songs are accompanied by the traditional Mech Kacharis flute called Sifung, a bamboo flute with six holes, out of which five are for playing and one for blowing. The musician can adjust the octaves in the sifung by changing the intensity of the blow.



Fig. 1: Sifung

2.Kham (drum)

The Kham is a drum crafted from trunks of trees like Sama and Odla. Its two sides are covered with goat or deer skin, while the braces are made from buffalo skin.



Fig. 2: Participants with the *Kham* during the Aai-Sagi Festival 2024

3. Jotha (cymbal)

Jotha is a cymbal made of bell metal that is used to keep time with the music played on different occasions.



Fig. 3: Jotha

4. Serja (violin)

It is a harp-like instrument, the body of which is made of Chitauna or Kanthal wood. The lower part of the body is hollow and a part of it is covered with the skin of Maphou. It has four strings made of Muga silk.



Fig. 4: Serja

5. Jab Shring / Jab Khring (snare)

It is a castanet (percussive instrument) with wooden frames with small round pieces of sheet metal attached.



Fig. 5: Jab Shring / Jab Khring

6. Khautha (bamboo clapper)

The Khautha is a bamboo clapper made from a piece of bamboo split lengthwise in the middle. It is played by holding it with both hands.

Conclusion

The annals of Mech history are replete with tales of adversity and triumph, none more poignant than the cataclysmic floods that beset the Baikunthapur forest area in 1952 and 1968. Despite the ravages of natural disasters, the Mech Kachari tribe exhibited remarkable resilience, enduring the vicissitudes of fortune with stoic fortitude. These tribulations, far from eroding their cultural heritage, served to fortify the bonds of communal solidarity and identity, fostering a sense of collective resilience that transcended temporal and spatial boundaries (Dutta, 2022).

The saga of the Mech Kachari tribe stands as a testament to the enduring resilience of indigenous communities in the face of adversity. Through their nomadic wanderings and sedentary settlements, the Mech Kachari people have woven a tapestry of cultural diversity and historical continuity that enriches the broader fabric of Indian society. As custodians of a rich cultural legacy, the Mech Kachari tribe beckons

scholars and enthusiasts alike to embark on a journey of discovery and enlightenment, unravelling the mysteries of their storied past and charting a course toward a more inclusive and empathetic future.

The preservation and revival of traditional practices among the Mech Kacharis of Nagaland highlight a concerted effort to maintain cultural heritage amidst the pressures of modernization and cultural assimilation. The establishment of the Burkhong Cultural Society and educational institutions such as Gyanswarang Forai Sali, alongside the efforts of self-help groups, demonstrate a proactive approach to safeguarding and transmitting cultural knowledge. The Hornbill Festival has played a pivotal role in this cultural renaissance by providing a platform for the Mech Kacharis and other tribes to showcase their traditions. Through these initiatives, the Mech Kacharis are preserving their heritage and ensuring its transmission to future generations, fostering a sense of identity and continuity in an ever-evolving socio-cultural landscape.

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A Critical Enquiry on the Introduction of Christianity and Identity Transformation among the Nagas: With Special Reference to the Ao Nagas

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Abstract

Religion has always played a crucial role in determining both individual as well as group identity. The conversion of the Nagas to Christianity beginning for the 19th century marked a new epoch in the history of the Nagas, witnessing a sea of change in every aspect of their life. This marked the formation of a new identity under the banner of religion. This paper is an attempt to critically examine the possible reasons for the conversion of the Nagas and the Aos in particular from their traditional belief system, often categorized as Animism to Christianity in the light of a new identity formation and structural changes among the Nagas.

Keywords: Identity, Religion, Christianity, Animism

Introduction

The history of the precolonial Naga society was marked by seclusion and exclusivity. The Nagas in general did not liked intrusion from the outsiders as such, there was very little interaction with the outside world until the coming of the British and its consequent occupation of the Naga hills. In the word of Hokishe Sema, "The rigid physical isolation and seclusion in which the different Naga tribes lived was not only a result of the peculiar circumstances in which these tribes found themselves, but was also self-induced and deliberately chosen" (1986, p. 8). One can observe that, there was inimical relationship not

only between the different tribes but, even within the villages of the same tribe prior to the establishment of the colonial regime in the Naga hills. The establishment of the British rule in this region brought about a transformation in the Naga society. These changes have both positive and negative implication. nevertheless, it is true that, the coming of the British and the missionaries did open a new era among the Nagas.

British intrusion and structural change among the Nagas

The British at first, had little interest in occupying the hilly tracks as the occupation of these

mountainous terrain with war like barbarous tribes was considered unprofitable. It should be noted that, in all of their policies, the colonial power was driven by profit motive. Yet, keeping the Nagas under their control became somewhat inevitable out of necessity and the prevailing circumstances over the time.

Different factors necessitated the British to establish their power over the Naga Hills of which, the imperialistic and expansionist policy of the Burmese that diverted the attention of the British towards the North Eastern region on the first place was one major reason for triggering their interest. The Burmese by the 19th century, reconquered Manipur in 1813 and occupied Assam in 1821. Manipuri Raja, Marjit Singh, along with his two brothers fled from Manipur to Cachar, which caused instability in Cachar compelling the Raja of Cachar to entreaty the British for help. Hearing no response from the British, the Raja of Cachar had to turn towards the Burmese: Sensing the danger of Burmese imperialistic policy as a threat to the British controlled area; the British did not hesitate and immediately declared Cachar as a protected state under British which in fact was a clear sign of deviation from its earlier policy of mutual relationship with

the Burmese. In addition, to this, Assam which was under the rule of the Ahom ruler, Raja Chandrakant at the time of Burmese occupation of Assam, was dethroned and later reinstalled to the throne when he beseeched the Burmese for help. But later on, he was compelled to seek political protection from the British when, he saw the inhumane act incurred upon his people by the Burmese. on the request of the Ahom ruler of Assam for protection, coupled with the fear of Burmese expansion on the British occupied territories of India, and not forgetting the Russian interest over Asia after the fall of Napoleon all accelerated the British to declare war against the Burmese earlier with whom, they were trying to maintaining obeisance in order to establish commercial relationship without war (Yonuo, 1974, p. 63-67). Thus a war between the two became inevitable.

History has recorded how the first Anglo-Burmese war which started on 13th of March 1824 after a fierce battle at all front, finally ended in 1826 after two years of constant war with a peace treaty also known as "Treaty of Yandabo". Between the British and the King of Ava of Burma. The Burmese were brought into submission and area like Assam and Manipur which never were under the dominion of any other

rulers or dynasties all came under the influence of the British. Notwithstanding the relationship maintained between the Ahom's and different Naga tribes prior to the Anglo-Burmese war, which was a concoction of mutual relation and aggression at the same time, the Nagas were not left unaffected by the War. The world of the Nagas and many other tribes like, Garo, Khasis, Lushai etc. living in the mountains and hills adjacent to the Assam and Manipur valley and plains were now exposed to the outside world through the first Anglo-Burmese war. In the word of Piketo Sema, "The treaty had an immense impact on the tribes of North east India with no evidence of any Knowledge of these tribes, the British became the de facto guardian of the whole region by the terms of peace treaty" (1992, p. 1).

The Nagas whose abodes were covered with thick and difficult to access forest areas, accelerated by heavy rainfall and malaria's region of course was not a bed of roses for the British or any other rulers for economic or political control. However, it became a necessity for the British to put a check on these tribes especially the Nagas who continuously raided the British occupied area of Assam and Manipur. Asoso Yonuo remarked, "Whatever might it be like a

thunderbolt from the sky, the British had sooner or later to get themselves involved with the hill tribes particularly the Nagas in order to keep their interest going in Assam, Manipur and Burma" (1974, p. 71).

Interfering in the affairs of the Nagas became inevitable as the interest of the British over their newly occupied territory grow deeper thus specially, with the discovery of tea in the plains of Assam augmented by the fear of Burmese and French whom though defeated in war, still possessed a threat to the British most important occupied colonial states of India (Yonuo, 1947). Thus providing it another reason to take control over the Nagas. It should also be noted that, the British wanted to take control over the Naga Hills for strategic reasons. In this concern, Piketo Sema wrote, "Evidently, the British had been drawn into territory not for any other purpose or attraction, but because of their strategic interest" (1992, p. 4).

The British at first left the matter in the hands of Manipur and Cachar rulers to usurp the war like Nagas, however, they soon realised that they were unable to curb the belligerent Nagas under their control. The first encounter between the British and the Nagas

took place in 1932, on their search for a road connection between Manipur and Assam. This encounter was not a pleasant encounter as the Angami Nagas attacked Captain Jenkin and Pemberton led troops and coolies. Owing to their superior military might, the British indeed could counter the Angami Nagas (Ao, 1970, p. 41-42). However, this incident did not put a stop to the Naga raiding over the British controlled plains of Assam.

Unable to befriend with the Nagas, the British Starting from 1832 took numerous expeditions which was reciprocated with massive retaliations from the Nagas. Properties and lives were lost for both the parties until in 1851, the British inferred the policy of non-intervention in the Naga Hills during the time of Governor General, Lord Dalhousie. Dalhousie in his minute wrote in 1851:

Hereafter, we should confine ourselves to our own ground: protect it as it can and must be protected; not meddle in the feuds or fights of these savages; encourage trade with them as long as they are peaceful towards us; and rigidly exclude them from all communication either to sell what they have got, or to buy what they want if they should become turbulent or troublesome. (Dalhousie, 1851, as

cited in Assam Administration Report, 1885)

The policy of non-intervention having failed to stop the Nagas from raiding, the British finally decided to completely control and administer the Nagas starting from 1866. Curbing the Nagas and keeping them under their control therefore became a better option for the colonial masters in keeping themselves safe from the Naga raids.

Thus, different Naga villages were occupied and annexed one after the other under the British rule. It is important to note that every Naga village irrespective of their tribe, was an independent unit, prior to the coming of the British and therefore, in order to conquer the Nagas and to take control of their land, it was impractical to conquer the whole of Naga Hill hence at once. Rather they were required to conquer every village as an independent sovereign entity.

The consolidation process continued till 1947. One after the other the different Naga tribes came under the control of the British either through warfare or submission without a fight. Starting from the Angami area, the different Naga villages submitted themselves to the British gradually and, in the process of their consolidation; the

Aos were also compelled to express their allegiance to the British rule. Finally, the Ao area was fully annexed to the Naga Hill district of Assam in 1889 and Mokokchung became the head quarter of the Aos (Sema, 1986, p. 14).

The British consolidation and the process of proselytization went hand in hand in the Naga Hills. In the eyes of the British; the precolonial Nagas were savages without law and order therefore, maintaining law and order among these lawless tribes became one of the most important objectives of the British: Converting the Naga into Christianity directly or indirectly became a tool for the British administration. This does not necessarily mean that, the work of the Christian missionaries were just directed to maintaining law and order among the Naga tribes; there were ample of reasons and objectives to which the missionaries directed their interest on the hill tribes nevertheless, for both the British administration and the missionaries' one thing was evident that, maintaining order and stability among the Nagas was a requisite for any further developments to proceed.

The arrival of British and the missionaries to the land not only exposed the unexposed hilly tract to

the outside world but, it brought about changes that would affect the very base on which the Naga society was structured.

The Ao Nagas, prior to the coming of the British and the missionaries practiced Animism. According to the Cambridge dictionary, Animism can best be described as a belief in the existence of soul and spirit in all natural things like rock, forest, trees, which can have influence over the activities of humans. The very nature of Animism as a belief system made their religious life intertwined with secular life thus; making it difficult to study the two separately. In the word of Chandrika Singh:

The ancient Naga people have strong faith in natural forces were, animist by faith. They carried various religious myths, which served as their religious scripture and creeds in absence of any prescribed religion. These religious faiths helped them not only to understand the environment and universe but also to shape their social and cultural life. (2004, p. 8)

It can be observed that the animistic belief system of the Nagas was an important determinant of the social, political, economic, and cultural lives of the Nagas; their ideas on geography, environment and so forth. Against this background, the

British administration and the missionaries during the 19th and 20th century brought forth a complete new social order in the Naga Hill district of Assam.

The belief system followed by the Nagas prior to the coming of the British encompasses every aspects of their life as such when the Christian missionaries attempt to introduce Christianity, it meant a complete structural shift. Once a person converts himself into Christianity, he would have to deny his ancestral religion which, as pointed out earlier was not only a religious belief but the root to all other social, political and cultural aspects of the pre-colonial Naga society; changing a person's religion from animism to Christianity therefore was not just identified as having a new identity in Christ but, a convert Christian was compelled to leave his old religion which has all his life activities knotted: tea in placed of rice beer, prayers and singing gospel songs instead of festivals and rituals; mutual love and respect in placed of head hunting, seclusion to inclusion of every individuals under the banner of Christ irrespective of tribe, greed or colour.

In a nutshell the Nagas saw an abrupt transformation in every aspect of their life once they

converted themselves into Christianity. However, it is also true that the introduction of Christianity did not utterly wipe out the entire social cultural and political fabric of the Nagas. The Nagas still endorse great reverence to some of their old customs and tradition which is practiced till date. For example, the governing institution of the villages of the Nagas are still strongly based on the traditional system of governance. The colonial period by and large ushered a new era among the Nagas.

Animism to Christianity

Though proselytization was not the prime move for the colonial masters, yet, they agreed upon the request of the missionaries and supported the missionary activities in the Naga Hills. This was possibly one way to maintain law and order among the Nagas. Things did really work out as; Christianity began to grow gradually among the Nagas. If the intention of the missionaries was to spread the gospel, the British officials by establishing schools further supplemented to this cause. It is worthwhile to know that the Nagas obviously disliked the British whom they would regard as *temesüing nisung* (white man) in Ao and were always suspicious of them. Hence, they disliked the missionaries at first. In the year 1871, when Godhula visited Dekhu

Haimong (Mulong Kimong) for the first time, his intention was challenged and impugned by the villagers. "What do we want of man's new religion?" "Get him out of the way", "A spy, doubtless of the company" (Clark, 1907, p. 11). He was assigned a small hut which was well-guarded and the villagers would not go near for two or three days (Clark, 1907, p. 11). Though Godhula himself was Assamese and not a white man, being a subject of the Company alone was enough for the Ao Nagas to be suspicious of him. How then, could the missionaries succeed in converting the Ao Nagas into Christianity? Conversion process was an amalgamation of various factors and one cannot be limited to a particular event or an experience as the reason behind this transformation. However, it is important to examine as to how the process of conversion began.

The ground was susceptible to change

The missionaries despite various difficulties, could sow the seed of the Gospel among the Aos and the Nagas in general. The Ao Nagas like the rest of the Nagas always wanted to live independently. The practice of head-hunting itself was a means to maintain sovereignty over their little villages. In the case of a weaker village, they sought

protection from a stronger village. For instance, Mulong Kimong was under the protection of Chungtia when the American missionary reverend Dr Clark first visited Mulong Kimong. In fact, Chungtia, the foster-parent, played a significant role in giving assurance to the newly converts when they formed a new village known as Mulong Yimsen (Clark, 1907). In such a case, submitting to a more powerful village does not necessarily mean the right to rule over the weaker village; it was a customary practice for the Aos to protect the weaker village from the attack of an enemy village once such an agreement had been made between the two villages. The protected village on the other hand, was required to pay tributes to their protector. Seeking protection from a stronger village itself was a way to maintain their autonomy along with the practice of head-hunting. Head-hunting was an act of protecting one's village from the enemies' attacks. Comprehending this as a factor that contributed to the conversion process may seem disconnected. However, a more critical approach to the social condition of the Nagas during the head-hunting times will give us a more vivid picture of how it worked well for the Christian missionaries in their proselytization process. Christianity talks about peace, and

love for one's enemy. Often, when one studies about the pre-colonial Nagas, one is prone to be erroneous about the practice of head-hunting as a symbol of pride and honour, especially, in cases like that of the Ao Nagas, where one would find various motifs with symbolic meanings carved on the main pillar of the house or in their culture attire. These were symbols of pride and honour. Yet the bigger picture is swallowed in this narrative, which is the intention of protecting one's village from the hands of the enemies; this is overshadowed by the image of heroism.

When the Christian missionaries started propagating the idea of peaceful existence, love for enemies like that of their own brother; it was obvious that it would appeal to the attention of those people living in constant fear like the weaker villages; since Christianity seemed to be a light in the darkness. Moreover, head-hunting as discussed was not a child's play for the sake of pride and honour; it was indeed for protection. If Christian missionaries could come with a better solution to remain unharmed even without taking the head of the enemies, the Ao Nagas were obviously open to the new changes that was making its way in their society. In addition, their old belief system demanded a great deal of

sacrifices: the Naga way of life was full of rituals and ceremonies mostly to appease the malicious spirits and sometimes to ask blessings from the benevolent Supreme Being. From the day of birth, an Ao Naga undergoes various ceremonies and rituals till his death. M. M. Clark in her description of the attitude of the Aos towards Sin stated, "The Aos define sin as 'unclean', 'foul', 'a stain', 'a spot', and greatly abhor anything they denominate as sin" (1907, p. 59).

If a woman dies during her childbirth, all her belongings must be destroyed; if a person dies of an unnatural death, his whole family must abandon their house, and live in the outskirts of the village until the next new moon during which, no person can visit or talk with the bereft family for six days. Since nothing of their possession can be taken, they had to survive with the clothing and food provided to them by their relatives which had to be done without communication. Everything related to the old is forsaken: their field, their clothes, cattle, including their house. Therefore, the unfortunate family had to bear the consequences of their sin by giving up all their possessions (Clark, 1907). Such taboos were economically demanding and as such, when the

Christian missionaries preached about Jesus of Nazareth who paid for all the sins of man, unlike their old belief system that demanded a lot of sacrifices, it was most likely more appealing to the Nagas. In the words of M. M. Clark, "Religiously, these hill people South of Assam, not being grounded in the old systematized religions of the East, and having no caste, are far more ready to accept the simple story of Jesus of Nazareth" (1907, p. 59).

Democratic practices

If we look at the governing institution of the pre-colonial Ao Nagas, interestingly their system of governance was democratic in nature. The Ao Naga villages were republic leaning. In the words of Major Butler about the Ao village governing body he elaborated, "Every man follows the dictates of his own will, a form of the purest democracy which is very difficult indeed to conceive as existing for even a day; and yet that it does exist here is an undeniable fact" (Elwin, 1961, p. 525). It was this democratic nature of the Aos that further widened the space for the penetration of Christianity in the land. Taking the example of the first Ao Christian village Mulong Yimsen, it was evident that the high risk for the newly converted Christians led to the formation of a new village some miles away from the old

village Mulong Kimong. They faced contempt and criticism from the members of the old village, but this did not stop them from forming a new village. If contempt and mockery were to be heard, it was out of their concern for the newly converts: living in a time where there was constant threat from the enemy villages. They never expected the newly formed village to sustain by itself even for a week. However, individual decision was respected which is why the first converted Christians could coexist with the unbelievers whom the converted Aos would often term as *yimcha memanger*. This does not necessarily mean that there was always an armistice between the two. The new converts were forbidden by their new faith to participate in their traditional festivals and rituals. However, it was also true that as member of the village they were required to participate in certain traditional practices. Misunderstandings between the two parties was also inevitable. It must also be taken into consideration that, though there was individual liberty, the Ao Nagas would often, after an elaborate discussion, come to a decision that was final and mandatory for all members of the village. However, it is also true that, individuals or groups who could not adhere to the popular decisions were punished

and excommunicated. Yet individual rights were not curtailed and every individual enjoyed maximum freedom as far as individual decisions were concerned. The individuals were still in a safe zone and were less questioned for accepting the new faith. Thus, the very nature of the governing institution of the Ao Nagas itself proved to be suitable for the spread of Christianity.

Songs and Christianity

When the Assamese evangelist Godhula first visited Dekha Haimong, he was put to question by the villagers as a subject of the colonial administration. As mentioned earlier, he was put in a hut and kept under surveillance to ensure their own safety. Mrs. Clark elaborated how the evangelist was left all by himself and no villagers could go near him for the first two or three days. It was his singing that slowly caught the attention of the villagers (Clark, 1907). Mrs. Clark remarked, "But when with his deep-toned, melodious voice he poured out his soul in the sweet gospel hymns in Assamese, the people flocked around him and listened as he told them, in his own eloquent way, the sweet old, old story" (1907, p. 11). The Ao Nagas are known for communicating through songs. Songs had always played a vital role in the life of the Ao Nagas.

Singing accompanied every festival, and lovers would communicate through songs. Songs were a medium of communicating and transmitting their history and tradition. It was indeed the hymns that Godhula sang in Assamese that got the attention of the first converts in Dekha Haimong.

Singing is an important aspect and an integral part of Christianity. Singing accompanies every worship in a Christian religious setting. Therefore, as part of a Christian worship, when the missionaries along with the message of the gospel used songs as a medium of conveying their message, it was easier for the Ao Naga people to connect with the new religion. Though unfamiliar with the meanings, the first Ao converts were eager to learn the English and Assamese hymns and songs taught by the missionaries. Till date, a typical Naga worship service begins with a hymn and ends with a song followed by prayer. In short, song played a significant role in proselytizing the gospel among the Ao Nagas as, it could connect the new with the old.

Conclusion

There are various other factors which exerted great influence in the spread of Christianity such as the introduction of modern medicine

and economic support. Dr Chandrika Singh opines that, one of the factors responsible for the growth of Christianity among the Nagas was by and large, the economic assistance given to them by the mission centres (2008). Assistance in the form of financial help in times of distress, medicines, and so forth, contributed in the spread of Christianity among the Ao Nagas. Like the old saying that goes, “Little drops of water make a mighty ocean”, the unceasing determination and persistent efforts executed by the missionaries altered the course of the Ao Naga history.

However, it should be noted that it was not only the missionaries who single-handedly manage to walk the path that was so challenging. In fact, the British officials were just as instrumental in transforming the Naga society. If the missionaries were injecting the seed of love and prepared the minds of the Nagas,

the British with their heavy hand would compel the Nagas to stop the activities such as head-hunting in the form of law, establishing schools, and protecting the missionaries under their care (Singh, 2008). The ground was prepared by the officials for the missionaries to spread the gospel among the Ao Nagas.

The little light that started to ignite from one of the weakest villages slowly and steadily transferred the light to all the other villages. Once the flame was ignited, in no time the converted Nagas themselves took up the flame and spread the gospel not only among the Aos but even to the other tribes of the Naga Hills. The history of the Naga's conversion to Christianity is a fascinating tale marked not just by a shift in their religious beliefs and perspectives, but, a total transformation which eventually became the defining mark for both the individual and social identity of the Nagas.

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On the Issues of Body Vulnerability and Beauty Complex: An Outcry for Ethical Responsibility

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Abstract

The subject of the body has been a matter of interest since the earliest times. For example, the artistic representations of the body from ancient times in the form of paintings and stone carvings either for art's sake or as a religious symbol continue to influence us with the concept of 'body perfect'. Like any other physical entity, bodies are expected to fit into a 'mold' which is purposely designed by our society under the themes of 'body beautiful', 'body perfect' or 'body goals'. This certain demand for aesthetic appeal has led to a series of ethical and moral issues. Constant pressure on an individual to meet certain beauty standards has led many become victims of anorexia and dysmorphia. The demand for this aesthetic appearance is due to the rise of social media and glamourized consumerism. Stirring a huge rise in demands for plastic surgeries, and prosthetic procedures to reconstruct one's face and body to meet the standards of society. But the ethical question lies in how far it is morally permissible. There is a need for moral responsibility. For ages, the body has always been under strict scrutiny, governed and controlled by the societal constructs that dictate rules on how one should maintain the body, both outwardly and inwardly. Yet this type of control over human bodies by specific beliefs and ideals is challenged and questioned by new movements like 'body matters' and 'body positivists'. This new ideological movement under the banner of 'body positivity' or body positivists argues that all bodies despite the differences in weight and shape are beautiful. They aim to address the problems of body dysmorphia by liberating the body from all cultural prejudices. Therefore, the paper aims to critically analyze the ambiguity of the human body and the paradoxical nature of the search for beauty in the body. It shall put forward arguments by deeply analyzing the conceptions of the body, questioning if the ideas of ideal bodies were constructed and how to draw an ethical line while approaching the moral issues of the body.

Keywords: Body, Beauty, Vulnerability, Ethics, Morality

Introduction

“What is the human body? The human body is the whole human being from top to toe in the way it appears to us in our immediate

experience” (Bjurvill, 1991, p. 317).

The human body has often been considered to be an exclusively biological entity: the physical aspect of a person. Therefore, the

treatment of the body in matters of study has mostly been towards the biological and medical arenas. The body as experience, a lived embodiment is often ignored and underwhelmingly studied. So then, to highlight the significance of the body converging from the areas of subjectivity and embodiment to lived experiences becomes imperative.

Although the area that studies the physical experiences and embodiment of the body has been limited, we cannot claim that there has been no study. Chris Shilling in his work *The Body: A very short Introduction* gives us a detailed explanation of how studies of the body began to emerge in the field of social sciences and humanities under a broad area of interdisciplinary research known as body studies. According to him, this academic field addresses a wide variety of social and cultural issues, ranging from how traditional societies uphold a keen marker in maintaining the bodies, to changes in historical beliefs and cultural values that resulted in shaping the ideas of the body. To understand how the body became a viable and popular subject under humanities and social sciences we need to delve deep into the historical and social developments that raised the issues of body as an academic concern. For

him, several social and historical factors paved the way for the growing interest in the body as an academic issue since the 1980s, each highlighting different aspects of the body's importance. Firstly, he reckons the resurgence of second-wave feminism during the 1960s and 1970s, which tried to highlight the inequalities done to women, especially in the field of health provision. Another factor that contributed to the study of the body in the academic field was the issue of ageing bodies. These led to the problem of body politics, where the entertainment industries tried to sell the idea of young / sexy / independent bodies, having an extremely negative impact on individuals falling out of this body category. The third factor was the increased growth in capitalism that encouraged consumerism. Here the body became an object of display, a medium to sell products and earn self-esteem. And lastly, the development in science and technologies that study and control the shaping and reshaping of our bodies (Shilling, 2016).

According to Shilling, body modification directed towards personal control and transformation is not a new concern, he mentions that the early Christians engaged themselves in strict regimes to control their body

to retain their faith. Cosmetic surgery can also be traced back to ancient times in the Indian Sanskrit text where accounts of facial reconstructions have been mentioned (Shilling, 2016). Bodily alteration has, however, become more individualized. The advertisements of bodies in the film industry, and social media are replete with bodily features that are young, sexy, and appealing with a definite structure. Unfortunately, those who fall outside this idealized image should redeem themselves by various measures like diet control, exercises, cosmetic procedures, and various other treatments that will help in altering the body; all to fit the criteria of physical desirability and attraction. According to Shilling, this type of influence has resulted in treating the body as a project, a raw material to be worked upon as an integral expression of individual self-identity. He provides examples of how bodies are used to build one's identity. For example, tattooing our bodies provides a stable means of selfhood for certain individuals, and in some cases a form of self-expression. Another case is how women bodybuilders use their bodies as a medium to challenge the idea of conventional gender norms. Bodies are treated as markers for social value and self-identity; therefore, a deep analysis is required to study the relation

between an individual's sense of selfhood and their vulnerability, with their body (Shilling, 2016).

The indefinability of Body

What is the body? The meaning and the value that is attributed to the body have taken its due course of change over time. A series of 9 articles written by Eugenia Ivanova titled "The Body as an Idea in Ancient Greece Series: The Culture of the Greek Bronze Age" to "The Body as an Idea in Ancient Greece Series: The Culture of Late Antiquity" discusses the idea on how the body has been perceived in different civilizations and cultures. Her aim in discussing the matters of the body was so that, it could help address the real and the illusory social pressure that dictates the rule of self-presentation. In her nine extensive writings, we can see how in ancient cultures people associated the female body with the fertile soil by the idea of its ability to give life. Many symbolic images, artworks, and ornaments give us an idea of how female images must have been worshipped. In her second chapter, "The Body as an Idea in Ancient Greece series: Heroic nudity," she describes how the concept of heroic nudity a scholastic term used for describing a phenomenon in Ancient Greece marked the start of an appeal towards classical artistic tradition.

This heroic nudity implied the depiction of an ideal naked body as an allegory of a complex of the highest human qualities, comparing the depicted allegory with heroes and gods of antiquity. Nudity reflects their strength and superiority, expressed in the ideal and the balanced proportions of their bodies. These artistic representations of physical perfection from that era of Ancient Greece continue to influence contemporary conceptions of the body. We are fixated on the image of an ideal body with balanced proportions. In her 5th chapter, Eugenia explains how later in the Ancient Greek Philosophy the perception of the body revolved around the period's desire to comprehend reality:

Originating from the desire to cognize reality in all its manifestations, philosophy forthwith pondered over the issues of the physical embodiment of a human being. The matter of perception and of understanding of the body were developed and solved under cross and social traditions, philosophical thought, natural sciences and medicine. (Ivanova, 2022, para. 2)

With philosophical developments and cultural changes, the concept of the human body became more complex than simple. The Ancient

Greece philosophers have devoted sustained devotion to the relationship between body and mind. This relationship between mind and the body, or body and spirit has been puzzling since ancient times. The idea of soul and consciousness and their relation with the body became a pool for debate. While for Socrates there is a dependency of the body on the soul. For him good soul by its virtue renders the body the best. Aristotle a philosopher as well as biologist says that "soul and body are not separate entities but two mutually complementary and inseparably connected aspects – the 'form' (morphê, eidos) and the 'matter' (hylê) – one of the same entity, viz. a living being" (Royal College of Psychiatrists, n.d., p.3).

Meanwhile, in the seventeenth century the dawn of modernity, thinkers like Descartes started to develop their notions that the mind and body are separate entities; it was with his philosophy that the dualistic nature of mind-body began to flourish intensely. According to him, we experience ourselves in two different ways: first, as bodies occupying a specific location in space and time and, secondly as a self who is associated with the process of thinking. For him we cannot associate ourselves with any aspect of our own bodies,

for if many of the attributes of our physical presence were to disappear, we would still continue to exist as a self (Burkitt, 1999). For Descartes, the idea of self, the idea of what I am is truly distinct from the body (Descartes 1640/1968). However, this idea is questioned by Ian Burkitt in his "Prolegomenon to Bodies of Thought" for him, the radical viewpoint of overlooking the body's relation to the self is wrong because if we observe the connection between the mind and body we find the being embodied and located in the extended time and space is not only necessary precondition for thought, but rather, its basis (Burkitt 1999).

The idea of the body had a radical shift in philosophy with the philosophy of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, influenced by the thoughts of Husserl's Phenomenological reduction; the latter presented an idea of the body that was different from Cartesian Dualism. His idea of the body was a lived body, a body that was involved in the act of perceptual process. For Merleau-Ponty the act of perception is fundamental to give us experiences of the world, this act of perception is embodied meaning that bodily experiences are fundamental to how we perceive, understand, and create meaning in the world (Burkitt 1999). Here lived body is a

non-object body that is involved in the perceptual process (Gallagher, 1986).

Foucault fosters a new idea of sexuality and power that ultimately defines a new conception of the body. For him, bodies can be understood as a surface of inscription of past and current systems of political power. Foucault in his book *The History of Sexuality: Vol. I* claim that the body is a site of culturally contested meanings. He explains that bodies are constructed by cultural constructions. Foucault's main idea was to describe how distinctive forms of power and knowledge have historically exerted a pervasive effect on people's bodies (Shilling, 2016). His idea of sexuality and questions on power ushered a new movement and a new outlook later in both academia as well as in human society. His emphasis on the sexual body as a target and a vehicle for a new form of power and knowledge has been hugely reproduced in feminist analyses which shall be discussed later (Sawicki, 1994). His description of the body as culturally constructed has left a question on whether there is in fact a body that is external to its constructions, a body that represents a dynamic locus of resistance to culture per se (Butler, 1989). The question remains what is the existential status of the body?

The idea of the body has a dynamic shift with the approach of Butler in contemporary times; following the works of Foucault she questions the ontological status of the body by asking whether the body is ontologically distinct from the process of constructions it undergoes (Butler, 1989). Butler's concerns about the body, however, center on the issues to link the question of the body to the performativity of gender (1993, p.10). The idea that our bodies are shaped by social forces rather than being ruled by our natural biological factors is mostly contested by Butler and the advocates of gender theorists. In general belief, it is usually accepted that there is a fundamental and immutable difference in the psychological and neurological makeup between men and women based significantly on their role in biological reproduction. These facts of biologically sexed bodies are bound to constrain and direct the organization of society (Shilling, 2016, pp. 24-25). Despite these general views, the subject of sexed bodies and the gender theory provide an excellent yet very contrasting viewpoint to challenge how social relations and cultural meanings have influenced the assignments of a person's identity as male and female. The problems for the classifications of human

embodiment into two neat categories as men and women or what really constitutes the sexed bodies is now debatable. However, the paper shall refrain from any specific answers to this debate; the main idea here is to specify the concept of body understood in the locus of the sexed bodies.

Butler claims that the category of sex is from the start normative. For her, sex not only functions as a norm but is a regulatory practice that produces the bodies it governs. Sex is an ideal construct that is forcibly materialized through time (Butler, 1993). This materialization for Butler occurs through repeated practices of certain norms and dictates. For Butler, the question we need to ask is through what regulatory norm is sex materialized? For her, it is through performances i.e., arranging our bodies to engage in certain performances that are usually schematic and repetitive acts fixed in gendered coded ways.

For Shilling, Butler's focus on structured, gendered performances and performativity can help us indicate how the relationship between the body, sex, and gender is fluid, though appears to be fixed. This illustration of gender fluidity for Shilling is referred to the phenomena of transgenderism,

where a person feels immense dissonance between their bodies and sense of gendered identity; therefore, they deliberate upon and often decide to change their identity into the match of the latter identity (Shilling, 2016). According to Shilling, Butler's suggestion that sexed bodies can somehow be brought into being by performances is useful in addressing a key theme: "the difficulty of specifying what is natural or even 'real' about the body in the contemporary era" (Shilling, 2016, p. 39).

Social System and Politics of Body

Although the attitude towards the approach of the body has been different, the importance of the body goes beyond abstract and ambiguous philosophical definitions. Our embodied existence is a foundation through which we build our empirical experience of our society, identity, culture, and history. Through our embodied body we recognize our ability to shape our own life and create impact for others. Thereby, our bodies become important in both practical as well as in intellectual matters (Shilling, 2016). A holistic approach to the study of "body matters" and "body's embodiment" is necessary to be discussed, so that, we get a clear perspective on how we approach our everyday affairs through our embodied experience.

Our culture affects our idea of how we perceive our body. Therefore, a keen consideration is needed to understand these complexities of how the body is interrelated to culture, beliefs, and politics. How the body is constructed before and after the arrival of modernity, and modern science, and to what extent the beauty standards set by our society have affected the treatment of bodies. Shilling in "The Body and Social Theory" systematically describes how we conceptualize body, self-identity, and death. He highlights how in a "high modernity" society body became a factor for political and cultural activity. He explains how in recent times body has become a major interest; news and media are full with features on body image, plastic surgery, and how to maintain young, sexy, and pleasing bodies. This type of promotion has positioned the body within contemporary popular culture with an unprecedented individualization of the body. "Growing numbers of people are increasingly concerned with the health, shape, and appearance of their own bodies" (Shilling, 1993, pp. 1-2). Bodies are now either used as an expression of their self-identity or used as a marker of the individual's identity.

For Shilling, this rise of high modernity has led to a reduction or

a decline in the power of religious authorities to define and regulate bodies, yet modern science and technologies have failed to provide us with values and moral guiding principles. This has left many individuals to make their own meanings of life. As he says, "With the massive rise of the body in consumer culture as a bearer of symbolic value, there is a tendency that people in high modernity to place more importance on body as a constitutive of the self" (Shilling 1993, p. 3).

The rise for concerns about health, body, and appearance might have risen in early modern society however its impact is still apparent. In our current society the external body has become a symbol of the self, there is an unprecedented value attached to being young, slim, sexy, and sensual body. Society has created a rigid idea of who can be considered beautiful; any person falling out of those categories is often marginalized under undesired or ugly bodies. The desire for perfect bodies and attainment of body goals has been inculcated in us. We are either influenced or taught to attain such unsettling ideals. This according to Shilling is due to the rise of consumer culture. In the contemporary consumer culture, the media industry is a multi-million-dollar industry, often

profiting by promoting the business of weight loss and beauty. This marketing is further aided by big celebrities who have a large fan following. We often associate negatively with our exterior body, which results in developing anxiety towards our appearance.

This tension between the body as an embodiment of experience and a product of the cultural system has continually been debated. Bryan S Turner in his work *The Body and Society* terms this a somatic society and it describes how the body in modern society become the principal field of political and cultural activity (2008). With the rise of popular demand for young, slender bodies led to a rise of the body in consumer culture attaching a symbolic value to the external surface of the body. The body is now a symbol of the self. Shilling says that body promotion systems tend to promote self-care regimes which are not only associated with preventing disease but are also concerned with making us feel good about how our bodies appear to ourselves and others (Shilling, 1993). Therefore, investing in the body provides people with a means of self-expression and a way of possibly feeling good.

To understand how conceptions of ideal bodies are sold in our society,

let us examine some analogies brought out by some eminent scholars. Sabine Gieske in her paper "The Ideal Couple: A Question of Size?" argues how the picture of an ideal couple – taller man with a shorter woman, is culturally transmitted (2000). She shows how in the 18th and 19th centuries especially in middle-class society, there was an unconscious pattern in the selection of partners, this unconscious production of a specific bodily regime has gradually turned from social to self-compulsion. The requirement of a couple in a specific bodily regime is a display of our aesthetic sensibilities. It is not only the aesthetic appeal but often an unspoken display of symbolic gender roles that is generally attached to this ideal couple picture. To be tall is secretly attached to being strong; thereby being shorter in height in comparison to the wife displays a sign of being a weakling. Man and Woman as a couple is poured into a symbolic mold that confirms the stereotype of the man who is physically and intellectually superior to the shorter woman who is more delicate. She mentions that in the mid-century, these values have gradually changed, where an ideal union was based on emotional compatibility. However, the question remains whether the ideal physique and aesthetic sensibility

continue to influence us (Gieske 2000).

A paper by Jacqueline Urla and Alan C. Swedlund titled "The Anthropometry of Barbie: Unsettling Ideals of the Feminine Body in Popular Culture" writes that there are thousands of healthy women in the United States who perceive their bodies as defective (1995). There is a myth of somatic femininity where women are somehow forced to pursue a feminine delicate body making them believe that their bodies are never feminine enough. She calls this a condition of somatic femininity, where women are deliberately and painfully made to remake themselves like cosmetic surgeries for breast implantations, liposuction, rhinoplasty, double eyelid surgery, fillers and botox, and dieting cultures. According to Urla and Swedlund, this describes a condition where bodies are dramatically accentuated under consumer capitalism. This fact becomes one prime factor that encourages us to consider the deviant bodies and the images of the feminine ideal that might be socially constructed (Urla & Swedlund, 1995). The most iconic doll in human history was the invention of Barbie, which was the brainchild of Ruth Handler, who was inspired to create Barbie after

seeing her child play with paper dolls. It soon became an icon, using it as a marker for women to achieve Barbie's body standards. As Urla and Swedlund write, it is not the motive to question or critique the idea of Barbie as such but offer a question that will enable us to see how there is an ironic usage of her body measurements by comparing it to the lived humans, especially women. "Barbie is fantasy" yet this creation soon hit the sociopolitical and cultural setting (Urla & Swedlund, 1995, p. 279). Barbie was quickly used as a symbol of femininity and class, enabling the impositions of gender roles. It is portrayed as an allegory of a good girl who is sexy with polished skin and hair, yet, is docile, innocent, and naïve. Barbie also made a perfect icon for capitalism as she was marketed with a captivating body, filled with pleasing clothes and lifestyle. These slowly were commoditized not only in the commercialization of the dolls but also encrypting the idea of being feminine and having a slim body.

This encryption of a slim body having feminine qualities is perhaps what Foucault meant by how cultural meanings are inscribed in the bodies. If in contemporary culture, an imposition for an image of an impossibly thin woman's body has become a reality then we need

to reconsider the ideas on how to recourse our natural bodies. The idea that one can manage one's body and choose the body one wants by artificial procedures and extreme diets, is a pervasive feature of consumer culture.

This idea of confirming to social construct, especially in the case of women has been heavily criticized by Sandra Bartky, a feminist philosopher in her book *Femininity and Domination* who gave us a compelling argument on how disciplinary technologies have produced a specific targeted feminine embodiment, where a woman is expected to maintain her female body with strict diet regimes and exercises, a woman is regulated by certain discourse on how to walk, talk, style one's hair, care one's skin and wear one's makeup (1994, pp. 68-74). Bartky argues the dominant control of patriarchal power and structure has programmed women to adjust their nature and appearance according to its standards. According to Bartky, this fashion and beauty complex commonly persists among women as they are often tied to a central component of normative feminine identity namely, sexual attractiveness. Another feminist who addresses this issue is Susan Bordo, who gives a detailed account of the cultural analysis of anorexia

nervosa. She argues that women are subjugated under the “tyranny of slenderness” unconsciously submitting themselves to men and their unnatural cultural standard for the ideal human body (1993, p. 154). Bordo gives us a deep analysis of the current epidemic of eating disorders as disciplinary technologies of the body. Following Foucault, she points out that the body has been a product of cultural practices, which not only shape and manipulate the physical body but affect the lived experiences of a person. According to her, anorexia nervosa represents the imposition of widely encouraged dietary regimes that have come to be associated with new forms of a healthy, attractive, and disciplined life (Bordo, 1993, p. 139). Although this study has been analyzed from the perspectives of American society, it is safe to assume that this type of control over the physical body either by societal constructs or through capitalist schemes is widespread and can be seen in almost every society.

Body Vulnerability and Responsibility

From bodies as an artistic representation that influenced and shaped body ideals to thinking bodies, governed bodies, and sexed bodies. The conceptions of the body have been varied. Yet the most

important question that lingers is how all the assumptions of the body make it vulnerable.

It is quite clear that based on gendered stereotypes it is not just women, but men as well that are subjected to the tyranny of maintaining their bodies following societal demands of the body ideal. Men are encouraged and expected to train their bodies so that they achieve masculine strong bodies: a display of strength and dominance. Meanwhile, women are directed towards aesthetic concerns, focused on appearance and dieting. The body is constantly shaped, monitored, and controlled according to the musings of social demand, which opens a big ethical concern on the vulnerability of the body and self-identity. The fragility of the body is undeniable in all the previously discussed social conditions. If we are engineered to assume that our bodies can be designed under the themes of femininity and masculinity. Then what defines this masculine and feminine? And if designing of the body was mostly to enhance the attainment of the better self, then, who is responsible for this design pattern? Lastly, if the body is reconstructed for the attainment of beauty and aesthetic appeal, the question of beauty and the search for beauty arises. Is the search for

an ideal beauty real? Beauty as understood generally can be said to be a harmony of a given state, where all elements are proportionate and in symmetry, something which is pleasant to look at, which can generate an interest on the onlooker. But if we are to compare this ideal concept to the body, then, a body is biological and genetically made up. It occurs naturally. Therefore, we are in an ethical dilemma to reconsider the sanctity of natural.

It is evident that during the Victorian era, women wore corsets and used various other caricatures to enhance their femininity at the risk of their physical health. This condition is a demonstration of the body's fragility and vulnerability under the demands of social standards. Historically, it was mostly women who were pressured by socio-cultural standards to look a certain way. The case is different in the present context. A person both man/woman is often valued based on their aesthetic appeal. If we look at the present scenario of our society, there is a case of pretty privilege; this privilege has become more and more evident after the increased usage of social media. There is a widespread phenomenon where the body is objectified. Body shaming has massively impacted both men and women.

We are unable to recognize that there is an unconscious production of a specific bodily regime in everyday life. This social compulsion has gradually turned into a self-compulsion. There seems to be an aesthetic sensibility that is deeply embedded in that we tend to idealize or fantasize. There is a symbolic mold where a person is expected to fit in. A certain type of body shapes tend to become obsolete and unattractive because society deems them to be. Feminine and masculine forms of embodiment are often used as a quality to be possessed. It is seen as a quantifier, a category to denote a person as being beautiful or handsome. Such criteria created by our society have led the human body under the subjection of a particular aesthetic beauty appeal. Therefore, it is crucial to raise an ethical concern on how social variables affect the body and lived experiences of a person.

If the body is a mechanism that enables us to move and function then our experience of life is undoubtedly experienced through our body. The body is constitutive of an individual's experience and perception. The body becomes central to the person's sense of self-identity. Therefore, there is a fundamental importance to address the problems of the body in the

sphere. We need to change and usually constructed by society, then deconstruct the ideals of beauty many individuals might fall apart. standards that are forced upon The question remains how we can individuals. If bodies are expected safeguard the real nature of the to keep up with ideals and trends body?

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Gods Venerated by the Nagas: Traditional Beliefs and Practices

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Abstract

Before the advent of Christianity in the Naga Hills at the end of the 19th century, various Naga groups believed in different gods. Gods were formless, feared and appeased by the people. Any practices in the society had to be pleasing to the various gods. Though just a preliminary work, this paper tries to highlight the various gods venerated by the various Naga tribes before the introduction of Christianity, along with their abilities and their dominion. The paper also tries to understand their supremacy and the various practices and festivals associated with these gods.

Keywords: Beliefs, Practices, Traditional, Gods, Naga society

Introduction

Believing in a god plays a central role in every society irrespective of traditional or modern society. It teaches about ultimate claims on believers' lives, providing a core vision which influences and shapes their socio-cultural aspirations and activities. According to Tzüdir (2019), there was no particular name for the Ao religion, which we can apply to almost all the Nagas, as it was not restricted only to the ritualistic part of life, but was the very basis of their identity. Many Naga researchers believe that there was no proper word for religion in a traditional Naga society. However, believing in various gods, who were formless yet controlled human affairs, existed in almost all the

traditional Naga societies even before the introduction of Christianity. This belief in various gods garnered such authority that it maintained, controlled and sanctioned the various ways of life in the community; be it social norms, economy or even polity.

Nagas reveal a rich tapestry of beliefs, practices, and rituals focussed on various deities, spirits, and natural forces. They practised animism that often entailed reverence for the land, plants, animals and celestial bodies, with rituals aimed at maintaining harmony between the human and the spiritual world. Various types of traditional Naga worship centres on multiple gods or deities, whether

they were good-spirited / bad-spirited, and they were often linked to specific aspects of life such as fertility, harvest, war and weather. Each god had distinct roles and attributes. This paper will focus on the concepts and ideas of the traditional Naga belief system and the practices associated with the various gods worshipped.

The various traditional Naga gods

1. The Ao Nagas

The Ao Nagas are one of the major tribes in Nagaland. Majority of the Ao population reside in Mokokchung district. The whole district is divided into six ranges where various villages according to their geographical location are placed within the range. Traditional AOs believed in number of spirits called as *Tsüngrem* (god) associated with rocks, rivers, trees and mountains (T. Ao, 2019). It is the *Tsüngrem* who plays an important part in human life and largely depended on man's health and happiness. *Tsüngrem* was present everywhere be it the fields, jungle, streams, trees, house etc. *Tsüngrem* acted as a guiding principle of their conduct in life. Therefore, each individual is enjoined to revere god and conduct his/her personal life to justify his blessings.

Longtitsüngba Tsüngrem is revered as the Lord of the Sky or Heaven.

This was the *Tsüngrem* attributed with the power over the heavenly bodies like the sun, the moon and other elemental forces like the rains, storms, lightning, thunder and winds. *Tsuba Tsüngrem* (spring god), *Tekong Tsüngrem* (mountain god) *Along Tsüngrem* (stone god), etc. are also some of the gods revered by the AOs (T. Ao, 2019).

According to Mills (1973), the religion of the AOs is not a moral code. It is a system of ceremonies, which is lawful and right in the moral sphere. A person will not prosper if he omits the sacrifices that are due to the various gods around him, who if unappeased, will bring disaster to the crops and illness to the family. Therefore, it was a necessity to perform the necessary sacrifices in high spirits in all the social activities.

Huge, and naturally formed boulders were also worshipped and regarded as sacred, wherein their gods resided. Mills (1973) writes about how the AOs also worshipped the sacred boulders, and mentions a sacred boulder by the name of *Changchanglung*, a huge boulder on the very top of the Changkikong range in Mokokchung district, between Waromung and Dibua village. In the olden days the *Tsüngrem* of *Changchanglung* was believed to be having a bad

reputation as a poltergeist. Boys sleeping in the Morung (traditional school for males) would be knocked off from their sleeping benches by its invisible hands or even their bodies be carried outside the village unknowingly by the person. Animals tied up for sacrifice would often be loosened. The spirit of the stone was not wholly malignant. However at times, it would appear in a dream to the man who performed the annual sacrifice, and give useful information about the future.

The creation of the world is attributed to the greatest of the *Tsüngrem* called, *Lichaba* by the Aos. He is also known as *Lungtisangba* by some villages. During traditional times, a yearly sacrifice called as *Lichabamung* was held in his honour in all villages. It is said that it prevented landslips since *Lichaba* made the world; it is he who can keep it firmly held together. If anyone breaks the *Lichabamung*, a supplementary ceremony in honour of *Lichaba* called the *Lichaba ayi* was performed about ten days after the main ceremony. During this time all agricultural activities and other engagements were withheld (Mills, 1973).

When an Ao village is established, the villagers would decide a day to worship the village god, *Yim Külem*

(worshipping the village god) known to be the sustainer as well as the protector of all humankind. As a tradition and practice, the worship of *Yim Külem* was done once in every three years, mostly after the harvest (October / November). This is done to invoke peace, prosperity and victory over the enemies in case of war as well. Such practice was carried out entirely for prosperity and if anyone did not observe the worship in its rightful way, there is a legendary belief that there would be famine, disunity and defeats at the hands of the enemies (Sosang, 2012).

Meyutsüngba was another important god venerated by the Aos, who was known as the supreme judge over every man and all his deeds at death. At the gate of *Meyutsüngba*, every sin will be revealed and disclosed for shame and punishment (Imchen, 1993). Minor spirits were also worshipped by the Aos where the most important was the house spirit known as *Kitsung Tsüngrem*, and the house site spirit called as *Kimung Tsüngrem*.

2.The Angami Nagas

The Angami Nagas mainly occupies the Central and Northern part of Kohima district which is also the capital of Nagaland. The Angamis identify themselves to be *Tenyimia* and some people believe that the

name is derived from *Tuonyümia* (the epithet given to him, the Angami) which means the Swift Walker, because he was always walking ahead of his two brothers who were most probable Sema and Lotha (Zetsuvi, 2014).

Traditional Angamis practised animism characterised by the belief in both good spirits and bad spirits. These spirits were believed to be source of all events and occurrences. It revolved around superstition, logic and ways of virtuous life. They had belief in the existence of spirits in all aspects of life and their surrounding environment like the tress, rocks, rivers, etc. Good spirits were worshipped and revered whereas bad evil spirits were feared. They believed that they were the cause of calamities, natural disasters, illness, death etc.

Angamis believes in a supreme being who is known as *Ukepenuopfü*, which literally means, “she who bore us”, giving a simple logic that only a female can give birth to any being (Zetsuvi, 2014). Thus, for the Angami Nagas unlike many other Naga tribes, the supreme being is said to be a female. Zetsuvi also writes that there were also deities called *Terhomia* with personal names, and several unnamed spirits. Angamis believed that the

world is full of *Terhomia*, with both benevolent and malevolent spirits. To appease these deities, rituals were performed where offerings were made to the god *Terhomia* to seek more blessings. Among these, the Angamis considered *Terhomia Rutzeh* (the evil one) as the giver of sudden death (Hutton, 1969).

The presence of spirited stone is also observed in most of the Angamis villages. According to the belief system of the Angamis, there were several spirits known and worshipped. Zetsuvi (2014) mentions the names of the various spirits worshipped by the Angamis as given in Table 1 on p. 75.

Chükhio, the god of beasts, to whom the hunters would give offerings before ensuring their hunt so that they would get a bountiful kill. *Chükhio* ascertains that no one kills his animals for sport but only for food. Successful hunters even offered him a part of their kill.

Miaweno, the goddess, had a penchant for ignoring a devotee's actual need while granting wishes. If a person sought good harvest, she would bless them with children; if someone asked for children she would grant them livestock. *Miaweno* in a way helped the Angamis think before wishing. She also taught them a lesson: to rely

more on their own enterprise than on the supernatural to get work done.

Name of God	Classification
<i>Kesüdi</i>	The giant ferocious spirit
<i>Ketsierho</i>	The spirit of stone
Rothse	The killer
Rapu	Ghost of nightmare
Mechiemo	Gate-keeper of death
Chükhio	God of beasts
Temi	Ghost
Ruopfü	Men's spirit
Telepfü	Spirit of intellect
Miaweno	Goddess of blessing
Dzürhu	Goddess of water creatures

Table 1

There were also gods to ensure rain, children, good health and harvest. Gods of war and victory were also

worshipped. Certain rituals and sacrifices had to be performed to keep the gods and goddesses in good spirits, so that the people would receive their blessings. Different gods and goddesses were worshipped. The earth, the sky and other natural elements were considered to be sacred. They believed in divine powers and superstitions linked to various animistic beliefs. It was only after the coming of Christianity that such beliefs ceased.

3.The Sumi Nagas

The Sumis, one of the major tribes in Nagaland is located to the north-east of the Angami country. The belief system of the Sumi Nagas is also labelled as animism. The spirits which the Sumis revered are divided into three distinct deities. *Alhou* or *Timilhou*, regarded as usually beneficent, as supreme god. *Kungumi*, the spirits of the sky, and the third spirit, *Teghami*, the spirits most in touch with man and the spirits of the earth. The Sumi Nagas also believed in the spirit of the house called as *Aghau*. These spirits are attached to individuals and houses and perhaps villages, although it is difficult to obtain a precise description (Hutton, 1921). There are also some *Teghami* spirits like *Litsaba*, *Shikyepe*, and *Muzamuza* whose functions are reckoned by the Sumis. *Litsaba* or

Latsaba, is more often attributed as the important spirit as he is apparently the spirit of fruitfulness and gives the crop. He is usually recognised as being responsible for the increase of the crops. Some of the Sumi villagers considered Latsaba as a spirit of fertility and beneficent rather than malicious (Hutton, 1921). The Sumis also believed in malicious spirits of the woods known as Muzamuza (echo),

who lead men astray in the jungle (Hutton, 1921). Hutton (1921) mentions that the Sumis also believed in the spirit of the house called as Aghau. These spirits are attached to individuals and houses and perhaps villages, although it is difficult to obtain a precise description. Some of the names of the several spirits associated with the belief system of the Sumis as recorded by J.H. Hutton are (Table 2):

Name of Spirits	Classification
Tegha-aghüzuwu	The delirium spirit
Aphowo	Spirit propitiated in alternate years at harvest
Tegha-kesa	The bad spirit often associated as the spoiler of crops and also mischief maker
Kukwobolitomi	The spirits who destroy children in the womb and cause miscarriage
Loselonitomi	A malicious spirit who causes strife between families and friends
Kitimi	The spirit of the dead.

Table 2

4. The Phom Nagas

Phoms are one of the 16 major tribes of Nagaland residing at Longleng district, Nagaland. The district can be divided into three regions topographically, namely: *Chingmei* range in the Northern part, *Shemong* range in the middle part and *Yingnyü* range in the Southern part. The Phoms call themselves *Yingnyüli*, referring to the legendary origin from Mount *Yingnyüishang* located at Longleng district.

Traditional Phom Nagas believed in *Vaipüvanglem* – the way of faith or belief. For the Phoms, *Vaipüvanglem* was the way of life. Thus, every aspect of their lives is related to the system of religious beliefs and practices (Henshet, 2015).

Monyü is the biggest festival of the Phom Nagas. Monyü like the Ao Moatsü, is celebrated in April for twelve days after sowing. Like all other sowing festival of the Nagas, Monyü festival is for worshipping the supreme spirit whose blessings are sought to protect the crops. In each house, the head of the family sacrifices the chicken with its hot blood sprinkled at all the posts of the house and the granary as for a sign of opening the festival. The rites in which the intestine of the chicken is examined for prediction of the family's future and the meat

cooked with prawns and crabs and the portion of the meat tied to the posts with leaves. Everything is done meticulously for any mistake would mean failure of the rites, and it was believed to be followed by wrath of their God (Shimray, 1986).

The Phoms defined *Kahvang* for god where '*Kah*' means earth and '*vang*' means sky or heaven. God was understood as the transcendental god of earth and heavens, the ultimate, who is beyond human comprehension; he was omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent. God was believed to live somewhere beyond the blue called *Shang Kahvang* which means celestial god (Among, 2018). The Phoms also believed in the celestial god for healing and practiced certain rites as a sacrifice to appease this god. Such sacrificial rite was called as *Vahng jingbü*. The belief system of the Phoms also says that both benevolent and malevolent spirits were known to them. Among (2018) pointed that when a person climbed on a tree, the *Chong Shepe* (terrestrial devil) would try to make him fall, but the *Shang Kahvang* would not allow him to fall. They also believed that there were constant warfare between god and the devil.

Everything that happens from above like rain, snowfall, lightning,

thunder, sunshine and so on is believed to be the work of *Shang Kahvang*. However, Henshet (2015) further explains that there is *Vangyong Ongba*, a distinct name given to the god of lightning. *Chong Kahvang* or *Chong Shübe* was believed to be responsible for everything that happened on earth. The Phoms also believed in many deities like god of home, god of paddy field, god of forest, god of river. Rites and sacrifices were performed by the Phoms associated to these deities with the observance of taboos, and often believed that misfortunes comes to those people who does not adhere to these practice.

There is also another figure called *Akongdiidangba* in the traditional Phom Naga religious belief system, understood as god in one sense but never termed as god. He acts like a judge who passes judgement to the souls of the dead on their way to *Yimching*, the land of the dead souls. Phoms also believed in many deities like the god of home, the god of jungle, the god of paddy fields, the god of river and big trees, high cliffs, dark and thick woods, lofty mountains, etc. were the abode of gods (Henshet, 2015). The deities were appeased to let the crops grow or to heal their sickness. It was believed that it was god who saw the actions and was judged according to

their actions. The wicked were punished and those people who obeyed were rewarded accordingly.

Discussion

The Nagas believed in various gods who were formless yet feared and their involvement in the beliefs in spirits, ancestors, and supernatural forces influenced the physical and social world. Though the Nagas during the traditional time did not have a developed religion as how we understand in the modern context; yet, they constantly felt and feared a supernatural force that was guiding and leading them. It was thus common practice and in their belief system to revere a supreme being and a divine power who was presumed as the creator, provider as well as destroyer.

For the Nagas, to fathom the various gods in the form of images was impossible. However, there are certain sites all over the Naga Hills venerated and observed by the various tribes habiting there as sacred sites and groves. Such sites are served and recognised as sacred with embodiments of natural elements and are believed to be the dwelling and sacrificial areas for the gods and spirits. Lanukumla Ao (2023), talks about the important significance of such sacred groves among the Nagas where sites like *Yimchingkaba*, located at Lakhuni

village, Mokokchung District; Mt. *Tiyi*, Wokha District; *Ihaingikia*, located at Peren village; *Yemetsu Lhove*, located at Mishilimi village, Zunhebho District; *Wohnu-ya* meaning abode of birds, located at Sotokur village, Tuensang District; *Oloanu*, Zakho Village, Mon District, etc. were respected and observed as the dwellings of spiritual beings which they had deep reverence for. They worshipped and made sacrifices seeking blessings, protection, and guidance in the belief that by doing so, the gods and spirits would bless and protect them. Nagas venerated and respected these places to be holy, and a certain demarcated area within the sites was protected where no agricultural practices or any other social activities were allowed besides the sacrificial ritual. This is also reflected on the tribal's way of preserving and conserving socially and religiously important sites, and also recognizing their ecological importance. Thus, to say Nagas were savage and primitive by various colonial ethnographers is debatable. Various archaeological works on such sacred sites and groves carried out by researchers like Walling (2016), and Ao (2023) have recognized and confirmed the existence, and the kind of practices in such sites.

Henshet (2015) discusses one

peculiar belief among the Phom Nagas which was addressing their god as *Obü*, meaning grandfather. He further explains that perhaps this is because of the culture among the Phoms where the eldest member of the community commands the highest respect and authority. Therefore, it might be to show that god is the eldest and the greatest among them all. However, reverence to female goddesses is also emphatically mentioned in the Angami Naga belief system. They were worshipped for their connection to nature, regarding them as a nurturing, life-giving force; to fertility, ensuring human reproduction and agricultural prosperity; and to water, linking to the fertility of the land, health of the crops and the control over water sources such as rivers and rainfall.

The Nagas believed that deviating from traditional practices may provoke anger from these spiritual entities, leading to punishment such as illness, misfortune, or disturbance in their daily lives. The fear of not following the traditional tribal belief systems is rooted in the interconnectedness of social, cultural, spiritual, and historical factors. These create a complex web of reasons why adherence to these beliefs is not just a matter of personal choice but is often linked to survival, social cohesion, and the

preservation of identity.

The religious beliefs and practices of indigenous people are diverse and deeply embedded in their cultural identities. Understanding this system requires respect and acknowledgement of their complexity and significance. While modernity has influenced many of these practices, indigenous religion continue to offer insights into the humanity's fundamental questions and connection to the environment. The arrival of Christianity brought significant changes to the traditional way of life as the people began to adopt new beliefs and practices. While this transition marked a significant shift in the Nagas' cultural and religious landscape, it is essential to acknowledge and respect the rich cultural heritage that defined them.

Conclusion

With the advent of Christianity, Naga beliefs and practices underwent great changes. Nagas no longer inferred upon such gods and deities as seriously as they had done in the past. However, it does not mean that Naga society has completely changed and forgotten their indigenous beliefs and practices. According to Henshet Phom (2015), Christianity could not completely uproot all the indigenous beliefs and practices in the Phom society. They believed their god was a powerful god who punishes the wicked and rewards the good. They tried their best to live a good moral and honest life. Thus, the socio-religious and customary laws strongly disciplined the life of the Nagas who lived with a strong sense of community, unity, backed by their submission to the power of God.

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Articulation of Dissent, Assertion and Resistance in Death through “Laburnum for My Head”

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Abstract

This paper discusses “Laburnum for My Head” as a springboard to analyze the transition in the socio-cultural attitudes from the pre-Christian to the postcolonial Christian era towards death in the Ao Naga society where patriarchal power seeks to control and haunt even in death. The paper shall attempt to argue how the short story creates a space of transgression for the Ao Naga women and Naga women in general in a society where feminism is still in its nascent stage. The subversion of the age-old relationship between women and nature by the protagonist of the story becomes an important event in the articulation of female desire and agency, achieved through dying on her own terms in the story.

Keywords: Naga Literature in English, Temsula, Feminism, Death

In my paper, I shall discuss “Laburnum for My Head” as a springboard to analyze the transition in the socio-cultural attitudes from the pre-Christian to the postcolonial Christian era towards death in the Ao Naga society where patriarchal power seeks to control and haunt even in death. Through this, I shall discuss how the short story creates a space of transgression for the Ao Naga women and Naga women in general in a society where feminism is still in its nascent stage. The subversion of the age-old relationship between women and nature by the protagonist of the story becomes an important event in the articulation of female desire and agency,

achieved through dying on her own terms in the story.

“Laburnum for My head” is a short story by Temsula Ao that appears in her collection of short stories under the same name. The story is about the life-long obsession of a woman named Lentina and her wish to be buried beneath a laburnum tree. Her attempts at growing a laburnum tree in her garden is futile as her every attempt is thwarted by forces out of her control. At her husband’s burial, the sight of “man’s puny attempt to defy death” and attain immortality by erecting tombstones evokes a sense of antipathy in her (Ao, 2009, p. 1). It is at this moment that the idea of

being buried beneath a laburnum tree dawns on her. Laburnum blossoms for Lentina symbolize feminine grace and humility “not brazen like the like the gulmohars with their orange and dark pink blossoms” (Ao, 2009, p. 2). The rest of the story is about how she executes her plan in secrecy with the help of her husband’s old driver who is also a widower. The story inevitably ends with Lentina’s death and her burial beneath the laburnum tree in a plot of land that she originally bought but was taken away from her by the town committee. The story as a work of literature is important as it opens up the possibility for an analysis of the patriarchal order of the Ao Naga society through the socio-cultural attitudes towards death manifested in its social customs of burial, the handling of the dead, expectations of mourning and the haunting of the living by the spectral presence of the dead among the living where the dead still exercises control over women.

In the pre-Christian era, the Nagas followed animistic religious beliefs. The life of animism was prevalent among the Nagas till the end of the 19th century when Christian missionaries came to the Ao Naga areas and began the proselytization process which gradually spread to other parts of the Naga inhabited

areas. Dr E. W. Clarke and his wife Mary Mead Clarke first came to the Ao Naga region of the Naga inhabited areas in 1872 (Chasie 2005, p. 1). E. A. Gait, in the Census of India 1891 writes:

There is a vague but very general belief in some one omnipotent being, who is well disposed towards men, and whom therefore there is no necessity for propitiating. Then come a number of evil spirits, who are ill disposed towards human beings and to whom malevolent interference are ascribed all the woes which afflict mankind. To these, therefore, sacrifices must be offered. These malevolent spirits are sylvan deities, spirits of the trees, the rocks, and the streams, and sometimes also of the tribal ancestors. (as cited in Eaton 1997, p. 249)

Godden also writes:

No uncertainty hangs over the Naga beliefs in the power of the unseen agencies who cause sickness, and gives prosperity, to whose favour riches are due, whose dwelling is in the uncut jungle, or rocks or water, before whose presence on a day of sacrifice all evil spirits must be driven away from the village, and who are challenged for the death of a tribesman with curses and war cries. (1897, p. 186)

Such beliefs in the existence of

supernatural beings influenced death rituals and the handling of the dead. Godden writes on the funeral rites in the Ao Naga society:

The customs of the Aos of the present day is to leave the body on a platform in the cemetery without the village gate. The body, placed in a coffin, is smoked for a period extending from ten days to two months; then the coffin, over which is laid one of the dead man's cloths, is taken out and placed on a bamboo platform in the village cemetery. (Godden, 1897, p. 199)

T. Senka Ao, however, in his book on Ao Naga customs and traditions, writes that the period of smoking, which was also the period of mourning, was limited to a period of five days for women and six days for men. Only in the event of the death of well-known members – leaders, rich men and warriors – of the community was the cadaver exposed to sunlight. If the bodies of unworthy individuals were exposed to sunlight, it was believed that it would invite curse upon the entire family from the spirit of the underworld *motsingba* who was a malevolent spirit (Ao, 2013, p. 221). What happened to the corpse after it was placed in the cemetery was also an indicator of how the person had lived his life. If the corpse was devoured by wild animals or if the bamboo platform upon which the

corpse was laid collapsed, it was an indication that the person had led an unrighteous life. It is not uncommon among the Ao Nagas even today in the event of disputes to use the idiom “*tasü nü reprangteptsü*” meaning that the nature of one's death will indicate if the person had wronged another while they were alive. Dying a good death becomes a marker of a life lived well even in the modern era where Christian practices of burial exist alongside such older beliefs in the supernatural forces. West also writes on how the idea of the passage to the Land of the Dead was one “beset with dangers” (West, 1985, p. 28). T. Senka Ao writes:

Once the soul had set out on this path, sometime after death, it had to struggle with spirits and its headless victims. The part of the soul which made this journey carried with it the status achieved in this life; thus, a successful headhunter was investing in his future or next life. (Ao, 2013, p. 28)

A discussion of the customs and attitudes to death in the pre-Christian era becomes necessary in order to understand the context under which certain socio-cultural attitudes towards death developed in the modern Naga society. It is pertinent to note that in the discussion of the rituals and

attitudes towards death, women occupy a very marginal space. The heads of women, especially young maidens, were considered to be among the most prized possessions of headhunters and they often feel victims to raids from invaders. At the same time, “the body and the persona of a headhunter’s victim were consigned forever to obliteration”. “There was an important distinction between proper and improper deaths; the latter being deaths for example by accident, in childbirth, having one’s head taken. Improper or calamitous deaths brought dangerous souls and such deaths were not accorded the usual ceremonies” (West, 1985, p. 28). Women were more prone to such deaths as many would die during childbirth and were exposed to enemies as they worked in the open fields. While West fails to mention how women are to undertake this rite of passage, T. Senka Ao in his book on Ao Naga customs and beliefs writes about how this rite of passage to the Land of the Death for a woman is through her *allem*, which was the most important part of a woman’s traditional handloom. He writes:

Allem is the most important and valuable tool that a woman uses on the handloom to weave...The power and the right of a woman

this *allem* and cannot be taken away from the woman by a man. If a man touches the *allem* when the woman is weaving on her loom, he is either rendered impotent or wifeless for the rest of his life...When a man goes down to the Land of the Death, he hurls his spear at *Akumliba Sungdong* (the Tree of Life). Those who lived truthful and righteous lives strike straight at the tree. If a man had not led a righteous life, he misses the strike and is put to shame. In the same way, women also hurl their *allem* at the tree. *Allem* is one of the most powerful objects in the Ao Naga cosmos that a woman carries with her even to the Land of the Death.¹ (Ao, 2013, pp. 130-131)

The spear and the *allem* become the symbolic markers of men and women according to the social roles they play in the society that extend beyond their earthly existence. There is a sense in which the woman is the strongest in the domestic space where she is engaged in domestic production activities while a man’s prowess lies in his spear, a weapon used for both protection of the village as well as in the battlefields.

With the advent of Christianity,

¹Originally written in Ao language. Translated by the author.

there were significant changes in the attitudes towards death and the handling of the dead bodies. Ao Nagas no longer placed their dead in the open on the bamboo platforms. It was because of the Christian influence brought about by the American missionaries that the Ao Nagas started burying their dead. The period of mourning with the dead body in the house was also cut short considerably and burial funerals are often conducted a day after the death. The practice of memorialization of the dead through the installation of tombstones also became common. Prior to this, there were no markers that indicated the site where the remains of the deceased laid. The cemetery was a communal space where the remains of the body were left to the elements. However, as Eaton comments, "For all their condemnation of Naga ritual and social life, the missionaries were extraordinarily accommodating toward Naga doctrine and cosmology, in which they and the Naga converts systematically sought points of entry for Christian terms and ideas." (Eaton, 1997, p. 259) Hence, older forms of beliefs, especially in the supernatural, continue to exist comfortably alongside Christian beliefs and practices.

This transition was also marked by

a change in the socio-cultural values. As Chasie writes, "The stress on personal salvation introduced a new individualism in place of the former community spirit" (Chasie, 2005, p. 256). He continues to write, "The notion of personal salvation encouraged individualism in a society where individual identity was indivisible with that of family, clan, *Khel* and village. The values by which the Nagas lived were turned upside down" (Chasie, 2005, p. 261). The notion of individualization is also manifested in "Laburnum for My Head" which is set against this context, where the memorialization of the dead becomes a project in seeking individuality in death. This is resonant of what Aries speaks of, where cemeteries and tombstones in the modern era are associated with perpetuating the memory of the deceased. He writes, "The exaggeration of mourning in the nineteenth century is indeed significant. It means that survivors accepted the death of another person with greater difficulty than in the past...This feeling lies at the origin of the modern cult of tombs and cemeteries" (Aries, 1974, pp. 67-68).

The antipathy of the protagonist of the story "Laburnum for My Head" arises out of these attempts at immortality by men in the advent of modernity. The omniscient narrator

reveals:

But each year as the bush grew taller and the blossoms more plentiful, the phenomenon stood out as a magnificent incongruity, in the space where men tries to cling to a make-believe permanence, wrenched from him by death. His inheritors try to preserve his presence in concrete structures, erected in his homage, vying to out-do each other in size and style. The consecrated ground has thus become choked with the specimen of human conceit. More recently, photographs of the dead have begun to adorn the marble and granite headstones (Ao, 2009, p. 1)

The protagonist is skeptical of the modern practices of memorialization as it is rendered futile for “nature has a way of upstaging even the hardest rock and granite edifices fabricated by men” where “the particular spot displays nothing that man has improvised; only nature, who does not possess any script, abides there: she only owns the seasons” (Ao, 2009, pp. 1-2). At the same time, her desire also is not that of a pre-Christian tradition where domesticity becomes an intrinsic attribute of the feminine. The laburnum tree flourishes and blooms in a space away from the masculine space.

Characterized by its concrete structures and edifices, the cemetery and the tombstones symbolize the attempt of men to defy death and in doing so tries to tame nature, where ageing and dying are a part of the natural processes. Lentina's wish is fulfilled when she lets nature take its course instead of trying to tame it in her garden. The garden like the cemetery also is artificial and hence the laburnum trees that grow freely on the highways cannot grow in the garden. At the same time, gardens are usually seen as an extension of the domestic space. Domesticity ascribed traditionally to the feminine, also chokes the laburnum trees.

Like most agrarian societies, women and land has had a close relationship in the Naga society. “In the Naga society, title and ancestral property are inherited solely by the male members...The Naga women have no share in such inheritance. The right to ownership of land whether private, clan or community land, always rests with men and is never owned by women...Naga women constitute about 47 per cent of the total population and contribute more than 75 percent of the labour force involved in agriculture” (Longkumer & Jamir, 2012, pp. 32-33).

This is why women in Naga society tend to have a very close relationship with the environment they live in. However, what one could easily miss is the systematic patriarchal marginalization in the name of maintaining an order in society where each gender performs designated roles. Hence, although women are closer to land and nature as majority of the women especially in rural areas engage in production activities, men possess the sole ownership of the land. The inherent relationship between women and land/nature becomes problematic. As Kaur writes:

In dominant modes of patriarchal thought, women are linked closer to nature and men are identified as being closer to culture. Nature and women then are seen as inferior to culture and men. The impact of such dualistic thinking, where hierarchies are set up between dominance and submission, is that the inferiorised group...must internalize this inferiorisation in this identity and collude in this low valuation, honouring the values of the centre, which form the dominant social values.

(Kaur, 2012, pp. 32)

Hence, an ecofeminist reading of the text gives rise to the problem of not only essentializing but also stereotyping women by assigning

them roles that are already dominant in patriarchal discourses. As Plumwood writes:

The inferiorisation of human qualities and aspects of life associated with necessity, nature and women—of nature-as-body, of nature-as-passion or emotion, of nature as the pre symbolic, of nature as primitive, as nature as-animal and of nature as the feminine continues to operate to the disadvantage of women, nature and the quality of human life. (1993, pp. 21)

Lentina's identification with the laburnum blossoms and her desire to be buried under a laburnum tree should not be read as the essentialization of woman and nature. Rather, this obsession of Lentina propels her to be the author of her own death and memorialization, an agency denied to her by patriarchy.

Lentina's acquisition of the plot of land beside the cemetery, which was almost an unwanted wasteland becomes a source of great discomfort for the Town Committee. Lentina's possession of the plot of land threaten to dismantle the patriarchal order that has been so fiercely guarded by the Aos over the ages. What Lentina does in the story becomes significant. Although the land is ultimately taken away as a donation

to be converted into a burial ground, it is done on her own terms. "The new plot of land could be dedicated as the new cemetery and would be available to all on fulfilling the condition that only flowering trees and not headstones would be erected on the gravesites" (Ao, 2009, p. 12). This space becomes the space of female assertion where the dead becomes one with nature in a willing embrace. This is unlike the other male dominated spaces where attempts at resisting mortality are made through artificial monuments. This also becomes the space where Lentina's laburnum trees are finally able to bloom into its full glory. Lentina's victory lies in her ability to work within the patriarchal order and negotiate with it through the creation of a space of resistance which comes to fruition with her death.

The spectre of Lentina's dead husband also haunts her by continuing to exert control. The status of Lentina's widowhood is not peculiar to her. A number of studies conducted across the different tribal groups among the Nagas suggest that there is a higher incidence of widows in the Naga society. A study conducted among the aged population above sixty years of Kohima town revealed that there is a predominance of widows

over widowers. Out of the one hundred people that were taken into account for the study, there were only eight widowers as against fourteen widows (Visielie, 2007, p. 46). A similar study in Mokokchung district in Nagaland has similar findings. Out of the one hundred and six people aged sixty-two and above that were considered for the study, there were eighteen widows as against seven widowers (Ao, 2007, p. 73). It is not just mere coincidence that the number of widows are higher in the Naga society. Women are often encouraged to marry earlier than men and often married off to older men. As Visilie suggests, "Women tend to marry men older than themselves, and sometimes the age gap in marriage is as huge as 8-10 years, which compounds the likelihood of women outliving their spouses" (Visilie, 2007, p. 46). Although there are no restrictions on widow remarriage, it is not encouraged either. On the other hand, widowers, especially those with children are encouraged by the family and the community to marry again in order to nurture the family.

The customary laws allow remarriage, however it discourages widow remarriage. The church does allow widow remarriage but remarrying after having many children after a certain age is discouraged. The

consequence of a widow having relations with another man is the same with the case of adultery, because as long as she remains in the marital home, she is expected to maintain the sanctity of the first marriage. (North East Network, 2016, p. 108)

Loneliness and melancholia therefore becomes symptomatic of widowhood, more so among older women. As the Naga society makes its way into the modern ways of living, the communal spirit of the traditional society is fading away and as a result of which loneliness among the aged, is becoming more pronounced.

Lentina's growing intimacy with her dead husband's old driver, who also is a widower, although platonic, would be inappropriate not only because she is too old to remarry again but also because customary laws would expect her to mourn the death of her husband at least for a year (Godden, 1897, p. 176). "She had always maintained a discreet distance as befitting a master-servant relationship. But she gradually broke down the barriers by showing her dependence on him, first only by extracting dutiful service; then imperceptibly as a friend; and finally, a confidant" (Ao, 2009, p. 17). Interestingly, her driver becomes the vehicle through which her desire to be buried under a

laburnum tree is fulfilled. Lentina's transgression lies not just in building a relationship with her husband's driver but also in her refusal to be buried beside her husband. Although there are no customary codes that say that a wife should be buried beside her husband, Lentina's refusal to comply with the arrangement made would be a source of embarrassment for the family as it would amount to undermining the patriarchal power symbolized by her husband.

The death of the husband, who is a symbol of patriarchal control in the family, is also the beginning of reconciliation and healing for the family. "The sons too, sensing a new spirit in their mother, began to ask for her advice on business and family matters, something which had never happened during the father's lifetime...They also discovered how uncannily like their father she sounded sometimes" (Ao, 2009, p. 15). Lentina, invisibilized by her husband when he was alive, becomes visible to her sons. In Ao Naga households, the oldest male member has the final say in all decision-making processes. It is also unlikely that a woman's opinion would be taken into account in matters of business. The debates in Nagaland over the reservation of seats for women in

the municipal bodies quickly escalated into the question of what a woman is entitled/ not entitled to do according to customary laws including ownership of land and political participation which are both restricted to women. Hence, it is only in the absence of the patriarchal bind over Lentina that she is able to realise her full potential as her sons become aware that she is not very different from their father in terms of ability.

Feminism in the Naga society is still in its nascent stage. The articulation for a feminine subjectivity in order to give more agency to women is the need of the hour. However, as Longkumer and Jamir writes, "Till date, there has been no significant move by Naga women against their limited role in resource control and management. Though voices from certain sections of women have emerged against the prevailing ownership and control system which remains heavily gender-biased, these voices have so far been isolated ones and simply not strong enough to cause any major stir in the status quo" (Longkumer & Jamir, 2012, pp. 35-36). The political space cannot offer the space for resistance and the articulation of a feminine subjectivity as it remains a male-dominated bastion with little to no women representation.

It is the space of literature therefore that provides the space for transgression, of dissent and resistance for the Ao Naga women. Ao's "Laburnum for My Head" becomes important because of the socio-cultural context that the story is rooted on. The story then not only becomes the story of Lentina's resistance but also the author's individual dissent by reworking patriarchal structures and accommodating female desire through fiction. The familiar is deconstructed and the underlying socio-cultural structures are made apparent which becomes an important exercise of dissent even as Ao Naga women are told by the men to be satisfied with the comparatively better status they enjoy than women from other communities even within the Naga society. The idea of death becomes important not only because of the transgressive potential and the quiet victory of the protagonist of the story but also because of the socio-cultural significance. As discussed earlier in the paper, dying a good death determines if the deceased had led a righteous life. By dying peacefully in her sleep, Lentina's righteousness is proved beyond doubt to the reader who is aware of Lentina's dissent throughout the story. It is death alone that can justify the course of action that Lentina has taken.

Hence, the story ends on this victorious note, “And if you observe carefully, you will be amazed to see that in the entire terrain, there is so far, only one laburnum tree bedecked in its seasonal glory, standing tall over the other plants, flourishing in perfect co-existence, in an environment liberated from all human pretensions to immortality” (Ao, 2009, p. 20).

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Integrating Folklore and Traditional Ecological Knowledge: Insights from the Ao Community of Nagaland

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Abstract

Folklore in the Ao Naga community, passed down through centuries, contributes to helping its people recognize the various ties they have with the natural world. It serves as the chief source of information to tell the unique culture and history of the people. In contemporary society, it continues to play a significant role in imparting traditional knowledge. This paper establishes a connection between Ao folklore and its role in sustaining the ecology in the community. It explores the beliefs of the community's residents and how these impact the behavior and attitudes towards the environment, ultimately perpetuating environmental consciousness. The paper delves into the realm of folklore and the traditional practices and their association with beliefs and also brings out the nuances of women's relationship with nature. Moreover, the problem of sustaining folklore which has become a ground reality due to its oral legacy and meagre efforts in tribal literature are analyzed and the potential role of Ao Naga youths in adopting ingenious measures to sustain this legacy is elaborated further. Recently, the body of churches in these tribal communities additionally practises eco-theology, and this is evident in some of the initiatives they implement to support the tribal aspect of their culture that gives them the inherent part of their identity.

Keywords: Folklore, Ecology, Sustainability, Traditional Ecological Knowledge, Environment Conservation, Tribal Community

Introduction

Within the social confines of the Ao Nagas, understanding folklore entails far more than just oral narratives that are empty entertainment. It consists of myths that detail the history of their beliefs, dances for occasions that are important for them, storytelling to pass on the legacy of their tribe, and tales that combine to form a complete belief system for a social group. The Ao Naga Folklore, passed down through generations, continues to help its people comprehend the various ties humans have with the natural world, as well as how a society has formed and can continue to develop sustainably using this traditional knowledge (Sema, 2018).

Indigenous Knowledge has been a means of survival for indigenous people in developing meanings, purposes and values deeply associated with their land, which determines their own identity (Yacoub, 1998). This knowledge is passed down orally, deeply rooted in the history and context differing from conventional scientific methods that prioritize empirical data. Various indigenous cultures have organized this knowledge into systems according to their own geographical, cultural, sociological, and ideological contexts. These systems are represented in sustainable activities that reflect their profound ecological awareness. The concept of Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) is also closely associated with this, which informs about the relationship with the environment in a spectrum of ways and further offers invaluable knowledge on sustainability. By serving as a living archive of cultural information, values, and social conventions, folklore plays a crucial part in advancing people's understanding. Along with helping to preserve history, it also helps to shape identity and ensure that a community's way of life continues. Through a range of oral traditions, including myths, stories, songs, dances, and rituals, folklore captures the experiences of

generations and provides valuable insights into human relationships, the natural world, and social systems. This study will identify how folklore in the Ao community helps share ancient knowledge that consequently contributes to ecological sustainability.

Methodology

This research employs a grounded theory methodology to explore Ao Naga folklore and its ecological implications, using qualitative data collected through in-depth, unstructured interviews in selected villages of Mokokchung, Nagaland. Non-probability sampling, specifically purposive sampling, was used to select participants who could provide rich, detailed insights into the topic, with data analysis based on inductive coding to identify emerging themes. The study focused on understanding how folklore is linked to the community's cultural practices and ecological knowledge, analyzing both primary interview data and secondary literature to support the findings.

Traditional Practices and Their Association with Beliefs – Traditional Ecological Knowledge

“There are stories, rituals, sacrifices in every step” (L. Jamir, personal communication, January 15, 2023).

In many facets of life, Ao communities are rich in traditional knowledge, which has served as their most authentic and fundamental source of knowledge and helped strengthen the community into what it is today. Because of their reliance on the forest and its resources, they see it as their provider, guide, healer, and protector. Utilizing the resources effectively for their purposes and methods is therefore part of the relationship with nature. This led to the development of well-organized, albeit oral, ecological knowledge and usage, which in turn led to the sustainable use and management of the forest and its resources (Zingkhai, 2015).

Traditional approaches apply in farming, which is the basic means of employment for those in villages. The traditional aspects can be seen in the narrative, ceremony, and sacrifice of the various steps in farming. In some village communities, the process of selecting agricultural land, also known as *Pok*, involves dreaming, while in others, the selection process involves looking for a pile of earthworm faeces to evaluate the quality of the soil and whether it can be used for agricultural purposes. *Pok* is an alternative name for land selection in these communities. The phase of the

moon also plays a role in determining whether the land is productive. After establishing productivity, the selected *Pok* are chosen. *Pok* is an alternative name for land selection in these communities. The phase of the moon also plays a role in determining whether the land is productive. After establishing productivity, the selected *Pok* are chosen. This is how farmers gain understanding by paying attention and using the ways of the natural world to supplement their endeavour of planting. In the series of traditional ceremonies involved, one involves the sacrificial killing of animals to bless the process, after which they continue with the process of creating the *jenti* (granary). Following that, they pray over the seeds, plants, and various forms of flora and fauna. These steps are adhered to secure blessings of harvest, convinced that without, they would be cursed, hence speaks of the supernatural beliefs that are associated with each step in farming. They take precautions to avoid causing any harm to the environment in the areas surrounding their farms because of their agricultural practices. They make efforts to preserve the environment by learning modern methods but additionally, by maintaining the integrity of the traditional

agricultural system through the utilization of the ancestral knowledge that is inherently an integral part.

Traditionality is seen in methods like communal fishing as well, which does not include the use of any pesticides. This method is still followed in some communities, such as the village of Longjang, although it is becoming less common. It is generally agreed that this approach is not harmful to the environment. With the availability of knowledge in regards to sustainability, it would be beneficial for initiatives that promote this ecologically safe means of fishing. In this traditional method, fish are rendered comatose for a few minutes at a time by using the bark of a specific tree (unnamed) that is added into the water bodies. The effect lasts only a few minutes at a time, without causing long term detriments to the ecosystem of these water bodies. Because the remaining fish are unaffected by the substance that is employed, they can go back to their thriving environment without being completely eradicated. This prevents the species from going extinct, while maintaining the integrity of the water body as well. Using *jangpet*, local long wild leaves, as a form of pesticide is a traditional approach that may be carried out

more easily in the home. They would grind it up and then distribute it around the field. It is an extremely potent powder that drives away insects and other unwanted critters. The method that is used to disseminate it also includes a type of worship and prayer before making use of the leaf. Killing *tewa* that was used as soap, and *jangpet* were also utilised in the process of eliminating curses. People used to cast them across bodies of water with the phrase “let all the curses imposed be flown away by the waters”. These plants were also thought of as peace plants at the time since the resulting chant meant negativity dissipating.

In all these accounts about the relational symbiosis of sorts between communities and nature, we see a balance that has survived hundreds of years and the influence of westernization. The ecological knowledge explicitly plays a vital role in ensuring a sustained relation between the people in these communities and the nature that they gatekeep inadvertently.

Women's Relationship with the Natural World

“Tesangwala asked a big stone, rolling down, to pause while she was passing by and it obeyed her” (M. Imchen, personal communication, January 15, 2022).

As is the case with most tribal women, Ao Naga women have long held the belief that they have a special relationship with the natural world. A result of their great capacity to appreciate nature in its most complete form, Ao Naga women are able to benefit from the abundance of pleasures and advantages that nature has to give (Bhattacharya, 2022). This intrinsic connection can be seen in stories in which the presence of female characters serves to create an atmosphere that is warmer and more affectionate.

In the story of *Tesangwala Alung*, a pregnant woman gave an order to a giant stone as she passed by, and the stone obeyed her by rolling down and stopping as she approached. Her name has been given to the stone that can be found to this day in the exact same location, defying gravity as it had done in the lore. Another tale about two orphan sisters, *Rusangla* and *Rutula* tells how they were visited by the creator of nature, *Aolichaba*, who was disguised as a human and had tested the sisters. After hearing about how compassionate and generous they were even though they had nothing, he blessed them twice over.

The perspective of the relationship between women and nature are not

just told in tales but also practised. The communities of the Ao tribe believe that if a pregnant woman's husband goes hunting or fishing in the forest, the mother or unborn child will suffer or die; or if the husband kills an animal, the child will be born with the features or traits of that animal/with the same wound as the slaughtered animal. This myth is commonly spread in Ao households to discourage hunting. Another intriguing factor is the alignment of fertility and abstinence from hunting, inadvertently protecting the animals that may be procreating during such seasons and preserving the population of those species. Hence, the destruction of the fauna which is a vital part of the ecosystem is protected with this belief that it will hurt the hunter's wife and child. This also presents a very distinct image of how women and nature are intertwined. Women and the natural world are inextricably linked, and as a result, women are subject to the same consequences as males when they act selfishly and harm the natural world.

Another popular myth describes a childless woman who, in her desperate attempt to conceive, surreptitiously raises a caterpillar away from her husband. Soon after her husband departs for work, she

conceals the caterpillar in a wooden box and breastfeeds it as if it were her own child. After discovering the box one day when he gets home, the spouse becomes inquisitive. The caterpillar, which is the size of a typical baby when he opens it, shrieks out to him, “Aba,” or “Father,” as soon as he does. He kills it out of sheer horror and contempt, leaving his wife in deep sadness. Today, that caterpillar is known as the *Aba Mesen* in Ao dialect, and it is stated that it squeaks if it detects a female presence. Although this narrative may appear to be rather unpleasant to some, it cannot be ignored that it talks about how women can be more affectionate towards nature and men’s blindness in comprehending this link, which led to his violent act.

This intrinsic relationship is also seen in present day Ao women. While collecting data, a female respondent recounted how males routinely visit her home and discuss their hunting adventures. She claimed that it broke her heart because she realized that they hunt them for enjoyment rather than necessity unlike during her forefather’s time. The tribal mindset across the world (for example, the Inuit from Canada) share this value that life should mean something and thus when that life is taken, it

should be for necessity/survival. The noted claim of this woman, like many from her community, roots itself in a need for preserving the natural world without ruining the struck balance created between the community and the ecosystem. She also notes how her husband is the one who hunts, thus implying that it is not normally practised amongst women. It is possible that the fact that she is a woman makes her more sensitive to how these creatures are treated. Though traditionally patriarchal and patrilineal, like most Naga tribes, the Ao Naga people have held women in high regard for their ability to produce new life and for being the custodians of significant cultural information and spiritual values within the community from pre-colonial times. Ao Naga women, with their sympathetic connection to nature, have been the flag-bearers of this “responsibility” towards the region’s flora and fauna (Sengupta, n.d.). Thus, we see a clear link between women and nature that seems to have been dictated or narrated in the tradition of these communities as well.

Sustaining Folklore and the Consequent Conflicts

While it is common knowledge that Ao Naga folklore is still expansive in its body, and rich in its subject matters, there is undeniably a risk

that it will become less prevalent in the generations to come. A vast majority of today's youth are oblivious of the implications that come with knowing such myths and truths, and they continue to be ignorant of them. Few people have recorded the local folklore, which has only been passed down orally from generation to generation, and even fewer people are trying to do so. The complexities of sustaining Ao folklore is multi-pronged and there are many aspects to consider.

The nature of how these folklores are recorded and disseminated also plays a role in its lack of preservation in the modern day, despite technological advancements (which are not being used efficiently). A large part of folklore comes from the oral accounts of elders, especially in villages, many of whom continue to pass on their knowledge in this oral manner. Considering the current scenario, limited attempts are being made and few worries about the need of resuscitating the rich information that comes through folklore. In light of this, hearing such claims from locals who believe it to be so is upsetting. In this sense, what options are available? "We ought to write songs that are heartfelt, down-to-earth, and patriotic about the environment" (T. Ao, personal communication, February 20, 2022).

As a result of exposure to folklore in the form of tales, songs, and dances, the elderly have gained a profound appreciation for the natural world, and they regard this knowledge as their most valuable and priceless wealth. Even through more modern means, such as the use of social media and content creation, an appreciation for the natural world will still be imparted or recorded for the younger generations.

Conflict of religion

Westernization has the cost of whitewashing narratives into binary of good and evil, wherein the tribal practices that were considered savage or barbaric were forced to disappear almost entirely.

Conflict emerges among different perspectives of the different individuals and groups on their traditional way of life. Many people believe that while Christian missionaries had a tremendous impact on Naga society, they also had a role in the loss of certain important aspects of Naga custom and culture. The customs and culture of the Naga were largely unknown to the missionaries. The disappearance of *morung* suffered immense social, cultural and architectural loss. Naga folk music, folk-lore, folk-dance, festivals and many other social activities were considered to be part of the

animistic society and purposely undermined (Nukshirenla & Dhanaraju 2019). Now, with their conversion to Christianity, their forefather's way of worship has ceased but the villagers still hold some of these beliefs and revere the sacred places. And till date, the land and forest surrounding such areas is still maintained and preserved by the villagers. They believe that they are historical relics, traces of who they were in the past. Although they are still Christians, others keep these ideas because they are subconsciously embedded in them and feel obligated to respect them. It is crucial to point out that Christianity itself incorporates nature as a very important factor which has been created by the God almighty and demands human beings to co-exist with the natural world. "Theologians generally argue that humans and the world around us share equal values because we were created by the same God/designer and we need each other to survive, this is where the idea of coexistence comes in" (C. Kichu, personal communication, January 23, 2023).

The concept of Eco-theology assists us in respecting the values of the created environment around us as an undivided body created by God and strongly supports the idea that humans were created to coexist

with all living things rather than to dominate them. Church leaders today incorporate specific activities into their church calendars to promote the importance of ecology. For example, the entire month of June is designated as World Environment Care Month in the Mokokchung Town Baptist Church yearly calendar. There is also *Tetsü Oshi Terenlok* (mother tongue) day, and sometimes youth service programmes include Cultural Sundays, both of which aim to promote the AOs cultural identity.

As a result, we can see the efforts of the once animistic people, who are now Christians in majority (about 93.44% of Mokokchung population as per the 2011 census and population data of 2023) to instill Christian ideals in their action towards nature while simultaneously revitalizing components of their cultural past that support their identity today.

Conclusion

Ao Naga folklore contains valuable traditional ecological knowledge that has contributed to the community's ecological sustainability, with sacred forests and areas still preserved amidst modern towns. Despite the early influence of Christian missionaries who sought to abandon old customs, Ao people have recognized

the importance of their cultural heritage, especially the narratives that emphasize fear and respect for nature, ensuring a harmonious relationship with the environment. These stories highlight ecofeminism and the nurturing connections between women and nature. The ongoing preservation of folklore, particularly through literature, church efforts, and education, is

crucial for sustainability. In-depth studies on the integration of folklore with ecological sustainability can help global understanding of ecological phenomena, and the promotion of folklore through modern means, like audiobooks, school curriculums, and eco-theology, can engage a greater appreciation for ecological harmony.

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Machine Learning-Based Classification of Economically Important Herbal Plants Using Google Teachable Machine

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Abstract

Accurate plant identification is crucial for sustainable utilization and its conservation, particularly in biodiversity-rich regions such as Northeast India. Traditional methods rely on expert knowledge and physical herbarium collections, which can be time-consuming and prone to human error. Machine learning (ML) offers a promising alternative, automating species recognition through image classification. This study explores the application of Google Teachable Machine (GTM) for classifying economically important herbal plants, namely Aloe vera, Amla, Hibiscus, Neem, Pepper, and Mint. A total of 920 images were utilised, following strict selection criteria to enhance model accuracy. Images were preprocessed based on clarity, background simplicity, lighting, and varied angles. GTM, a user-friendly, codeless ML tool, was employed to train a deep learning model for plant classification. The dataset was automatically split into training (80%) and testing (20%) subsets, ensuring robust evaluation. Findings highlight GTM's potential as an accessible and efficient tool for plant species identification, offering rapid classification without extensive computational resources. This study underscores the significance of AI-driven approaches in botany, particularly in regions lacking plant taxonomists, and provides a foundation for future applications of ML in herbal plant research.

Keywords: Herbal plants, Google's Teachable Machine, Codeless neural network, Convolutional neural networking

Introduction

Precise plant identification is indispensable, and enables for its sustainable utilization and conservation (Ganesh et al., 2025, p. 1). Traditionally, this process involves expert evaluation, field visits, and the creation of herbarium

collections — methods that are often time-consuming, resource-intensive, and prone to human error, particularly when handling large datasets (Gowthaman & Das, 2025, p. 2). Another added challenge is the unavailability of plant taxonomy experts on-site, leading

to difficulties in accurate plant identification. This is particularly relevant in the Northeastern states of India, including Nagaland, which host a diverse range of endemic plant species (Deb et al., 2019, p. 1; Keretsu et al., 2022, p. 1).

Machine learning (ML) has emerged as a transformative technology that can significantly enhance plant identification. As a subset of artificial intelligence (AI), ML enables computer systems to learn from datasets—including images, audio, and videos—and operate autonomously (Onan, *et al.*, 2016, p. 232; Onan, 2019, p. 293). By leveraging complex algorithms, ML-based models can automate plant classification, making the process faster and more efficient as compared to traditional methods (Nunavath & Danilin, 2024, p. 1; Gowthaman & Das, 2025, p. 1). Among the various ML techniques, neural networks are gaining popularity as they mimic the human brain, recognizing patterns and making accurate predictions without requiring predefined rules (Montesinos et al., 2022, p. 1; Delos, 2019, p. 3208).

While early ML models required advanced programming skills, particularly expertise in coding languages, recent advancements have made these tools more

accessible. Google's Teachable Machine (GTM) is one such platform that simplifies deep learning by offering a codeless, user-friendly interface, allowing researchers to train models without programming expertise (Wong & Fadzly, 2022, p. 1097). This democratization of machine learning may make plant identification more efficient, reducing reliance on manual classification while ensuring greater accuracy and scalability.

GTM is a cloud web based tool that enables users to create ML models without any coding experience. The GTM has inbuilt metrics for model assessment and also allows for exporting the models for further modification (Wong & Fadzly, 2022, p. 1101). Thus, GTM ability to create customized models using user-generated datasets is one of its key advantages. Unlike cloud services such as Google Lens, which depends on external sources and pre-trained databases for image recognition, GTM allows users to train models based on specific plant samples, ensuring greater accuracy and control over classification results. Thus, while services such as Google Lens, while useful for general plant identification, may provide inconsistent or unreliable results due to its reliance on publicly available images, which may contain misclassified or regionally

irrelevant data. This limitation makes it unsuitable for scientific research that requires precise, reproducible, and context-specific identification. Keeping in view that GTM, in contrast, enables researchers to develop tailored models by incorporating high-quality, standardized images under controlled conditions, such as consistent lighting, backgrounds, and angles. This controlled dataset approach minimizes classification errors and enhances accuracy (Malahina, 2023, p. 280). Additionally, GTM's cloud-based infrastructure ensures rapid model training and deployment without the need for high-end computing hardware, making it a practical solution for researchers with limited computational resources (Wong & Fadzly, 2022, p. 1101). Given these advantages, this study explores the application of GTM in the classification of herbal plants, assessing its accuracy, efficiency, and suitability for botanical research. By leveraging deep learning through a codeless platform, researchers can streamline species identification while mitigating the challenges posed by conventional methods and general-purpose recognition tools.

Methodology

- Herbal plant dataset:

A total of 920 images were collected

for training and testing purposes. The selected plant species included Aloe vera, Amla, Hibiscus, Neem, Pepper, and Mint, all of which are economically significant herbal plants. The dataset was sourced from Pushpa and Shobha (2023), specifically from their Indian Plant Dataset available on Kaggle repository.

- Image Selection Criteria:

To ensure optimal model performance, careful consideration was given to image selection. The selection criteria were based on the recommendations of Wong and Fadzly (2022, p. 1100), which emphasize factors that improve machine learning accuracy in image classification tasks:

1. Clear Representation of the Plant Specimen – Images containing blurry or indistinct plant features were excluded to ensure the model could accurately detect and classify each species.
2. Minimal Background Complexity – Images with cluttered or highly textured backgrounds were removed to prevent background interference, as complex backgrounds may lead to false feature recognition by the model.
3. Adequate Lighting Conditions – Only well-lit images were

selected, avoiding overly dark or overly bright images that could affect model performance.

4. Multiple Angles and Perspectives

– A variety of images showcasing different angles of the same plant species were included to improve model robustness and generalizability.

- Google's Teachable Machine (GTM):

GTM is a web-based machine learning platform accessible at www.teachablemachine.withgoogle.com, designed to simplify the creation of machine learning models based on TensorFlow (Figure 1 in page 109). One of GTM's most notable features is its codeless implementation, which eliminates the need for programming expertise, allowing users with limited or no coding experience to develop and deploy machine learning models. GTM provides an intuitive interface where users can upload image datasets and categorize them into distinct classes, forming the basis for supervised learning models. The classification process is structured into three key steps: (1) data collection and labeling, where images are grouped into specific categories; (2) model training, which involves defining hyperparameters such as the number of epochs, batch size, and learning rate; and (3)

model evaluation, where accuracy and classification performance are assessed based on the training data. Once the model is trained, GTM offers multiple export options, including TensorFlow.js, TensorFlow Lite, and TensorFlow SavedModel, enabling seamless integration into various applications. The TensorFlow.js format is particularly advantageous for web based deployment and mobile applications, facilitating real-time inference with minimal computational resources. Additionally, GTM allows users to fine-tune their models post-training, ensuring improved accuracy and adaptability to new data. The simplicity and accessibility of GTM make it an ideal tool for rapid prototyping and real-world deployment of machine learning models in various domains (Wong & Fadzly, 2022, p. 1100).

- Data Splitting and Processing in Google Teachable Machine (GTM):

GTM automatically splits the dataset into training and testing subsets to evaluate model performance. Typically, the training set is used to teach the model how to recognize plant species, while the test set is used to assess its accuracy on unseen data. This split ensures that the model does not merely memorize the images but instead

learns to identify patterns that generalize well to new inputs. The ratio of data splitting in GTM is typically 80% for training and 20% for testing, although this can be adjusted manually if needed.

- Convolutional Neural Network (CNN):

GTM leverages Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs) to enable efficient image classification without requiring users to manually implement complex deep-learning algorithms (Toivonen et al., 2020, p. 308). CNNs are a class of deep neural networks specifically designed for processing structured grid data, such as images (Zhang, et al., 2018, p. 1842). The CNN architecture in GTM consists of multiple layers, including the input layer, convolutional layers, pooling layers, and fully connected layers, each playing a crucial role in feature extraction and classification as depicted in Figure 2 in page 109 (Malahina et al., 2024, p. 534). The input layer receives raw image data, which is subsequently processed by the convolutional layers. These layers utilize filters to extract important features such as edges, textures, and patterns from the input images. The application of multiple convolutional layers allows the network to learn hierarchical feature representations, enhancing its ability to differentiate between

various image classes.

Pooling layers, typically using max-pooling or average-pooling techniques, follow the convolutional layers. These layers reduce the spatial dimensions of the feature maps while retaining essential information, thereby improving computational efficiency and mitigating the risk of overfitting. Pooling helps the network focus on the most relevant features, making it robust to variations such as image rotation, scaling, and noise (Zafar et al., 2022, p. 8644).

The final stage of the CNN architecture is the fully connected layer, which serves as the classifier. This layer transforms the high-level feature representations learned by the convolutional and pooling layers into class predictions. By leveraging backpropagation and optimization algorithms, such as stochastic gradient descent (SGD) or Adam, the network adjusts its weights iteratively to minimize classification errors and enhance accuracy (Malahina et al., 2024, 532). Overall, GTM's integration of CNNs provides a user-friendly yet powerful approach to image classification, bridging the gap between sophisticated deep learning techniques and accessibility for non-experts. The ability to train and deploy CNN-based models

without extensive programming knowledge makes GTM a valuable tool for educational, research, and practical applications in computer vision.

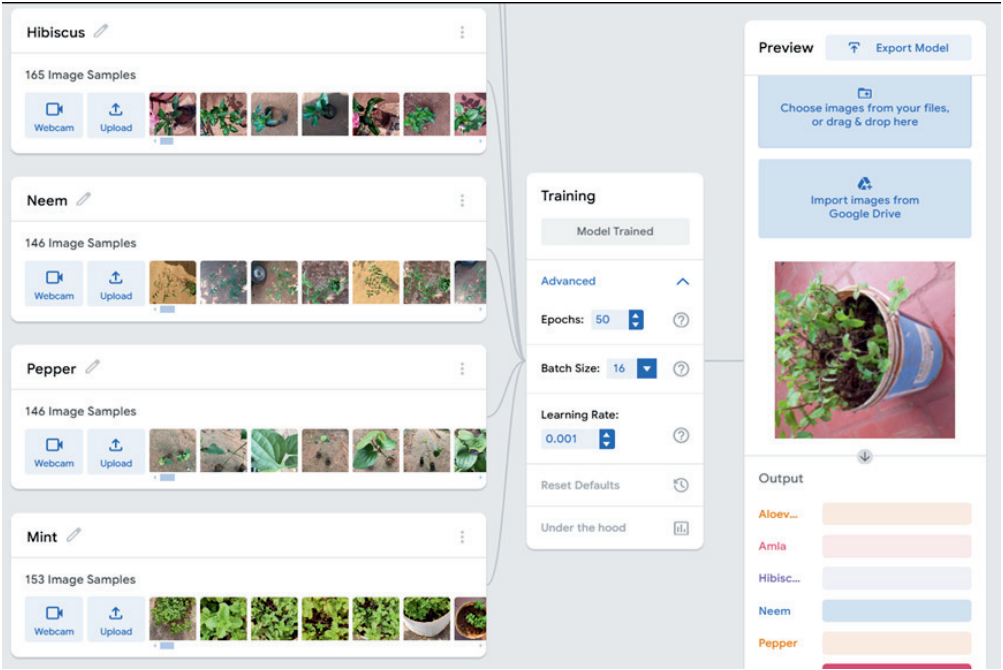


Figure 1: Overview of Google Teachable Machine

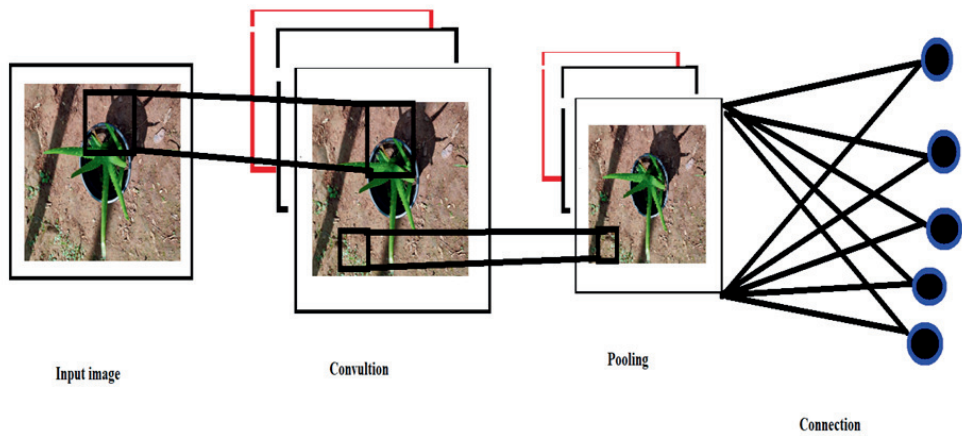


Figure 2: Architecture of the CNN

Result and discussion

To assess the accuracy of the trained model, the built-in evaluation metrics provided by GTM were utilized as per Wong & Fadzly (2022, p. 1101). Figure 3 illustrates the various performance metrics analyzed in this study. These include the confusion matrix (Figure 3i in page 111), which represents the number of correct and incorrect predictions made by the model compared to the actual dataset used in testing. The confusion matrix provides a clear visualization of the model's classification accuracy by showing the distribution of correctly and incorrectly classified images. In the present study, the confusion matrix indicated a high degree of accuracy, demonstrating the robustness of the model's predictive capabilities. Additionally, the accuracy plot (Figure 3iii in page 111) revealed consistently high prediction success rates, while the epoch score (Figure 3ii in page 111) remained low, further affirming the efficiency of the training process. The high model accuracy can be attributed to several key factors, including adequate lighting, a consistent background, and high-quality images used during training.

According to Wong & Fadzly (2022, p. 1104), distinct morphological variations among specimens in an

image dataset can significantly impact classification accuracy. Factors such as specimen color variations under different lighting conditions have been reported to influence prediction reliability. In the current study, the use of a consistent background likely contributed to the high classification accuracy, as inconsistent backgrounds can sometimes be incorrectly identified as distinguishing features by machine learning models (Fadzly et al., 2021). Algorithms such as GTM may inadvertently focus on background details instead of the primary image subject, leading to misclassification. The present study mitigated this issue by ensuring uniform backgrounds, thereby reducing errors in the confusion matrix.

This observation has two key implications. First, when using varied backgrounds in image classification tasks, it is crucial to include a sufficiently large and diverse training dataset to enhance generalizability. Second, maintaining a consistent background improves the reliability of predictions, ensuring more robust model performance. Another critical factor influencing model accuracy is the quality and resolution of the images. While measures were taken to ensure a

uniform background, unavoidable variations in environmental conditions can still pose challenges, particularly when images are collected from diverse field locations. To address this, images in the dataset were captured from

multiple angles with minimal background interference, improving classification robustness. Additionally, the use of uniform image resolutions across all samples ensured optimal image quality, reducing potential discrepancies in feature extraction and classification.

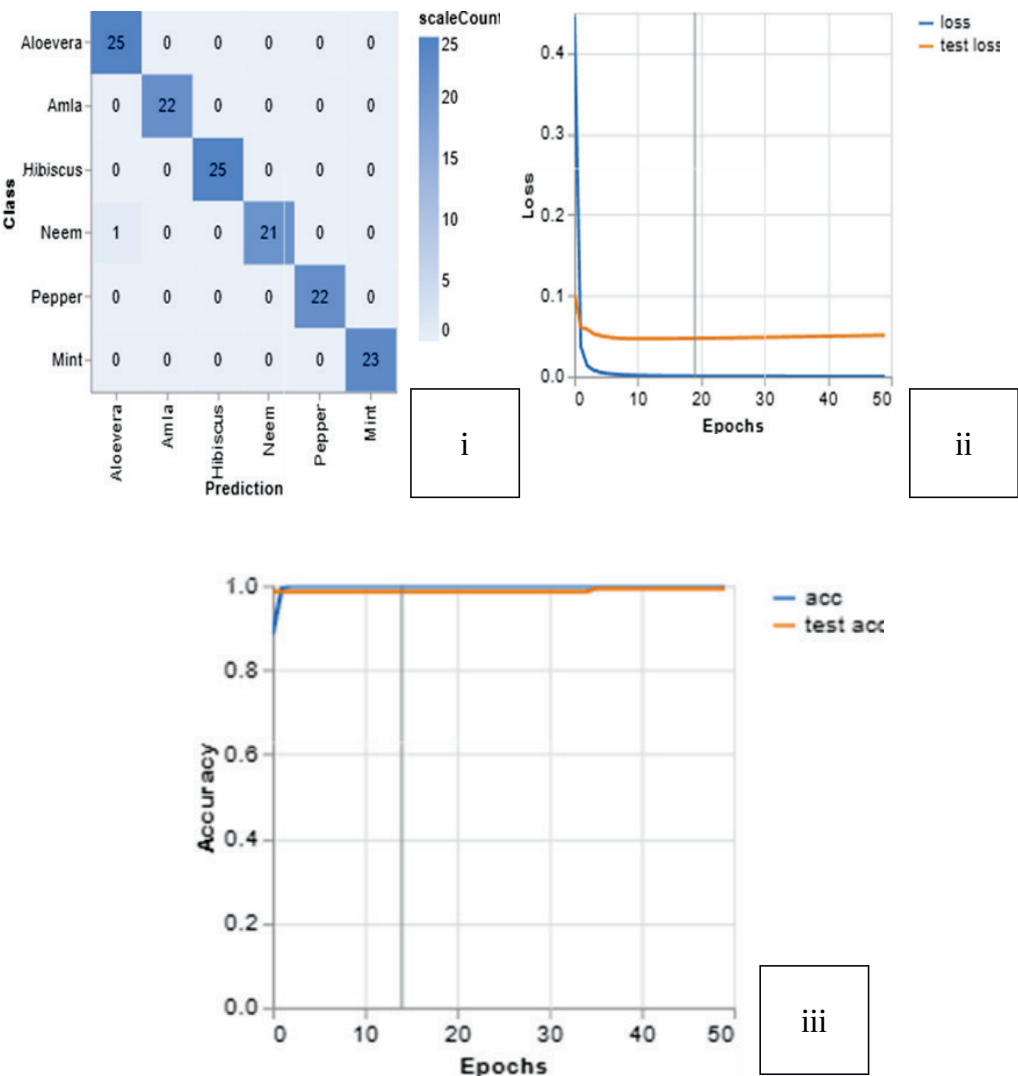


Figure 3: (i) Confusion matrix (ii) Loss per epoch (iii) Accuracy per Epoch

Accuracy per Class

A detailed breakdown of accuracy per class is presented in Table 1, page 112. The results indicate that most plant species achieved an accuracy of 1.00, except for Neem, which exhibited a slightly lower accuracy of 0.95.

The slight decrease in Neem’s classification accuracy (Table 1, page 112) may be attributed to variations in morphological features, such as leaf shape and texture, which might have introduced minor inconsistencies in the training process (Wong & Fadzly, 2022, p. 1104). Nevertheless, the overall high classification accuracy across all classes confirms the reliability and

robustness of the trained model.

Machine Learning vs. Human Identification in Herbal Plant Recognition

Humans and machines utilize different strategies for plant species identification. While human recognition relies on evolved visual perception, machines replicate this cognitive process using artificial neural networks. These contrasting approaches present distinct strengths and weaknesses. A primary limitation of machine learning models, such as Google’s Teachable Machine (GTM), is their dependency on training data. The accuracy of these models is directly determined by the quality and

Class	Accuracy
Aloe Vera	1
Amla	1
Hibiscus	1
Neem	0.95
Pepper	1
Mint	1

Table 1: Accuracy per Class

diversity of the images used during training. Hence, their performance may fluctuate with the introduction of new data. Further, without additional algorithms or specific input refinements, machine learning models can face challenges in adapting to real-world variations (Wong & Fadzly, 2022, p. 1109). One of the key constraints of GTM is its requirement for extensive and diverse datasets to ensure optimal accuracy (Malahina et al., 2024, p. 532). Nonetheless, GTM offers significant advantages in terms of efficiency when handling large datasets. Training traditional machine learning models on local hardware typically requires substantial computational power, particularly for deep learning applications. While high-performance GPUs can mitigate these resource demands, they come at an added cost. GTM addresses this issue by utilizing cloud-based virtual machines, enabling rapid and resource-efficient model training without the need for advanced hardware. This cloud-based system allows users to train models quickly, free of charge, and with minimal computational strain (Wong & Fadzly, 2022, p. 1109).

Previous research (Wong & Fadzly, 2022, p. 1107) has emphasized the role of deep learning in managing large datasets, effectively

overcoming some of the challenges faced in plant identification studies. Unlike human experts, who may experience fatigue when manually analyzing numerous plant samples, machine learning models can swiftly and accurately process vast amounts of data. As computational advancements continue, well-trained models will be capable of identifying, classifying, and sorting plant species almost instantaneously. Furthermore, once a model is trained, it remains reliable over time, provided that the morphological traits of the plant species remain consistent. An additional benefit is the ease of sharing trained models with other researchers, promoting faster and more efficient plant identification in scientific studies.

Conclusion

The present study highlights the effectiveness of Google's Teachable Machine (GTM) as a codeless deep learning tool for herbal plant identification. By utilizing convolutional neural networks (CNNs), GTM demonstrated high accuracy in classifying plant species, emphasizing the importance of well-structured training datasets. Factors such as consistent backgrounds, image quality, and adequate lighting played a crucial role in achieving reliable predictions. The study

further underscores the advantages of machine learning models over traditional human-based identification, particularly in terms of speed, scalability, and efficiency in handling large datasets. Despite its advantages, GTM has inherent limitations, primarily its reliance on predefined training data. The model's accuracy is contingent upon the diversity and quality of input images, making it less adaptable to real-world variations without additional refinements. Nevertheless, the cloud-based training environment of GTM provides a cost-effective and accessible solution for researchers,

eliminating the need for high-performance computing resources. As artificial intelligence continues to evolve, integrating deep learning models into botanical research can significantly enhance species classification, reduce manual workload, and improve data processing efficiency. Future research should explore the integration of more diverse datasets and hybrid approaches to further refine plant identification accuracy. By leveraging such advancements, machine learning can become an indispensable tool for scientific studies in plant taxonomy and biodiversity assessment.

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Higher Education in Nagaland: A Comparative Analysis of Higher Education among Different Districts

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Abstract

The first higher education institution in Nagaland was started in 1959, and since then, education in Nagaland has made a tremendous stride in academic and professional courses. Education is the birthright of every individual, and the same cannot be denied to anyone on any ground. The credit for the inception of formal education in Nagaland goes to Christian Missionaries who came and educated the people so that these people could become preachers who would spread the faith of Christianity to other parts of the Naga Hills. Nagaland is a small state in India with approximately sixty higher education institutions offering higher education. Most of these colleges/institutions are under Nagaland University, the only central university in the state. However, these higher education institutions are unevenly spread in different districts as some districts are crowded with lots of institutions, and some have few institutions and cannot cater to the students' needs. This paper attempts to comparatively analyze the higher education in Nagaland in light of the quantity and types of institutions regarding streams such as arts, science, commerce, and teacher training institutions such as B. Ed. and M. Ed. courses.

Keywords: Higher education, Nagaland

Introduction

Higher education occupies a prominent place in our education system as it is this stage responsible for providing human resources that will play a vital role in the development of India. This stage of education is also responsible for generating knowledge and information for the advancement of education and the nation, and it is no wonder that the very first commission in India after independence was about higher

education, i.e., University Education Commission 1948. Higher education in India developed tremendously during British rule, but it flourished during the ancient times as per the accounts of Kautilya, Huen Tsang etc., bear testimony to this fact. India has one of the largest higher education systems, just after USA and China. Higher education in India has witnessed tremendous expansion in the past and present decades. India aimed to achieve a Gross Enrolment Ratio of 30 by

2020, and although the current GER stands at 27.3 presently (AISHE 2020-21), we have failed to achieve the target GER. However, the expansion of higher education is an indication that India as a country is trying her level best to achieve the target enrolment rate, but "one disconcerting consequence of this indiscriminate expansion, however, has been a decline in the quality of higher education" (Mishra, 2017, p. 4346). Nagaland has a total of sixteen districts, but for the analysis, only eleven districts have been considered with newly formed districts taken under the old districts.

Higher Education

Higher education is also called tertiary education which is offered after +12 education; hence it is also called post-school education. It is a post-secondary education that includes undergraduate and post-graduate colleges, universities, etc. Higher education is advanced stage of education and "is a final stage of formal learning that occurs after completion of secondary education. Higher education includes teaching, research, exacting applied work and social services, and activities of universities" (Siddiqui, 2019, p. XVII).

Higher education in India is often credited to British rule, but higher

seats of learning such as Takshashila (6 century B.C.) Nalanda 5 A.D. to 12 A.D.; Vikaramshila bears testimony that higher education flourished even during ancient times as accounted in the description of its basic aim in ancient India, which was to initially impart spiritual, and mental skills to the students (Khan, 2016). However, owing to foreign invasion, higher education in India declined drastically. With the arrival of the British in India, higher education received a boost, and the first modern college (Calcutta) was founded in 1781, followed by the Sanskrit College of Banaras in 1792 and the Hindu College of Calcutta (1817) – all of them established by the East India Company. At the time of independence, there were as many as twenty universities and several hundred affiliated colleges in India. The first Open University was opened in 1982, followed by Indra Gandhi National Open University in 1985.

There are fifty-four central universities, four hundred sixty-four state universities, one hundred twenty-eight deemed universities and four hundred thirty-two state private universities (University Grants Commission). According to the All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE 2020-21), higher education has an enrolment of 4.13

crore students with a Gross Enrolment Ratio of 27.3, and there are as many as 43,796 colleges in India (AISHE 2020-21). In India, the University Grants Commission is responsible for quality and standards in higher education, the National Council of Teacher Education looks after teacher education, and the All India Council of Technical Education is responsible for developing and planning technical education.

The Naga Society

“When you go home, tell them of us and say, for your tomorrow, we gave our today” (Inscription from Kohima War Cemetery, personal observation).

Nagas do not have a written history; however, their account has been handed down from one generation to another through oral history. Due to this lack of written records, much history has been lost. Since the Nagas did not give themselves the word Naga, many claims of the word's origin are very much disputed. There are accounts like the one given by Mowu Gwizan, who claimed that the term Naga is derived from the Chinese word *Natcha* because the Chinese call the Nagas *Natcharemi* meaning Naga people, and the word *Naka* which means perforated ears (Nuh, 2002). In his book *Geographia* in 150 A.D.,

Claudius Ptolemy made the earliest reference to the Nagas, in relation to the area that has been referred to as the “Realm of the Naked” (VII.2.18). Regardless of the term's origin, or lack of reliable historical account, the Nagas today have created their own culture and identity around this word.

Before the arrival of Christian missionaries, headhunting was widely practiced by all the tribes, and they led a pagan life. However, “with the arrival of the American Baptist Missionaries to Naga Hills on 18h December 1972, there is a turning point in the lives of the Nagas” (Shukla & Zetsuvi, 2010). Although the progress of conversion was plodding, owing to the aggressive attitude of the Nagas, the missionaries were successful in bringing the Nagas into the fold of Christianity. Currently, more than 95% of Nagas are Christians. With the acceptance of Christianity as their religion, the Naga society has undergone a tremendous change. The emphasis of the introduction of western education and Christianity as the two main impacts upon Nagas have also been noted by Nuh in the book *The Naga Chronicle* (2002).

Contextually, at present, there are 16 districts in Nagaland with 15 recognized tribes:

Districts - Kohima, Zunheboto, Tseminyu, Mokokchung, Dimapur, Niuland, Tuensang, Kiphire, Chumoukedima, Mon, Longleng, Shamator, Phek, Peren, Wokha, and Noklak.

Tribes - Angami, Konyak, Sangtam, Ao, Lotha, Sumi, Chakhesang, Phom, Tikhir, Chang, Pochury, Yimkhiong, Khamniungan, Rengma, and Zeliang.

According to the 2011 census, Nagaland has a population of 19,78,502, a sex ratio of 93:1, and a literacy rate of 79.55%.

Brief History of Education in Nagaland

Nagas did not have formal learning centers, but children were taught through three institutions like family, Morungs, and festivals. In Naga society, before the arrival of formal education by the Christian Missionaries, the Morung occupied a significant place; the Morung is a large structure located generally at the heart of the village where men slept and kept vigil at night against enemies' attacks. Each tribe has its own Morung, which acts as a learning center among the Nagas. In the Morung, young people were provided with instruction and trained without formal schooling. Today due to the modernization in every aspect of life in Naga society, the significance of the Morung is

slowly vanishing. Still, every village has a separate space dedicated to the Morung.

With the arrival of the British in Naga Hills and Christian Missionaries, formal education took its shape. Nagas had a taste of formal learning way back in the 19th century as the very first school was established by Dr. E. W. Clark and Mrs. Clark in Mulongkimong, Mokokchung in 1878, and later he opened another eight schools in Ao areas. In Impur, in 1898, a training school was opened. The government opened a primary school in Wokha in 1904. Sangtam have had their formal since 1930s (Shukla & Zetsuvi, 2010).

Higher Education in Nagaland

Operational definitions of the relevant terms in this context can be:

1. Higher Education: It is defined as institutions offering courses in regular nodes, such as arts, sciences, commerce, and teacher education institution offering B.Ed., and M.Ed. courses.
2. Teacher Education: Teacher education in this analysis refers to B.Ed. and M.Ed. courses that are offered to prepare secondary education teachers and DIET institutions and B.Ed. college teachers.

Higher education in Nagaland arrived very late as compared to India. The first college in Nagaland was Fazl Ali College, Mokokchung, established in 1959.

As seen in Table 1, page 121, Nagaland state has four (4) university that offers higher education in regular mode. There is only one central university and three private universities. All three private universities are in Dimapur. Nagaland University is a central university with three campuses in Kohima, Lumami, and Medziphema.

Sl. No.	Name of University	Type
1	Nagaland University	Central University
2	Institute of Chartered Financial Analyst of India (ICFAI)	Private University
3	St. Joseph's University	Private University
4	North East Christian University	Private University

Table 1: List of Universities in Nagaland

Table 2, page 122-25, shows 13 government colleges that offer higher education in Nagaland. These colleges are in various districts within Nagaland, each with at least one government college. Fifty-one colleges offer B.A. courses, eleven colleges offer B.Sc. courses, and sixteen colleges offer B. Com. courses. Out of the 60 colleges, there are six colleges currently offering master's courses along with bachelor's courses. Only one college offers a degree in vocational courses, and only two colleges offer BBA (Bachelor in Business Administration). Out of these colleges there are only three autonomous colleges in Nagaland.

In Table 3, page 125, we see that there are eight B.Ed. colleges in Nagaland. Out of these eight B.Ed. colleges, there are only two government B.Ed. colleges in Nagaland, and the rest are private institutions. Only Nagaland University offers an M.Ed. degree in Nagaland. These colleges are located in three districts in Nagaland, i.e., Kohima, Dimapur, and Mokokchung, and the rest of the districts have no B.Ed. colleges in their respective districts.

Then in Table 4, page 125, we see that there are approximately 60 colleges in the 11 districts in Nagaland. Dimapur has the highest

number of colleges with 25 colleges, Tuensang district has three followed by Kohima with 16; colleges; Phek, Peren, Mon and Mokokchung occupies the third Wokha have two colleges each, and position with five colleges, Kiphire, Longleng, and Zunheboto have one college each.

Sl. No.	Name of College	Type of Institution	Affiliation
1	Alder College	Private	NU
2	Bailey Baptist College	Private	NU
3	Baptist College	Private	NU
4	Capital College of Higher Education	Private	NU
5	C- Edge College	Private	NU
6	Christian Institute of Health Sciences and Research	Private	NU
7	City College of Arts and Commerce	Private	NU
8	City Law College	Private	NU
9	College of Arts and Technology	Private	NU
10	Cornerstone College	Private	NU
11	Dimapur Government College	Govt.	NU
12	Don Bosco College	Private	NU
13	Eastern Christian College	Private	NU
14	Fazl Ali College	Govt.	NU
15	Immanuel College	Private	NU
16	Japfu Christian College	Private	NU

17	JN Aier College	Private	NU
18	Jubilee Memorial College	Private	NU
19	Kohima College	Govt.	NU
20	Kohima Law College	Private	NU
21	Kohima Science College	Govt.	Autonomous
22	Kros College	Private	NU
23	Livingstone Foundation International College	Private	NU
24	Loyem Memorial College	Private	NU
25	Model Christian College	Private	NU
26	MGM College	Private	NU
27	Modern College	Private	NU
28	Mokokchung Law College	Private	NU
29	Mon Vale College	Private	NU
30	Mount Mary College	Private	NU
31	Mount Olive College	Private	NU
32	Mount Tiya College	Govt.	NU
33	Norman Putsure College	Private	NU
34	North East Institute of Social Sciences and Research	Private	NU
35	Oriental College	Private	NU

36	People's College	Private	NU
37	Patkai Christian College	Private	Autonomous
38	Peren Government College	Private	NU
39	Pfütsero Government College	Private	NU
40	Phek Government College	Govt.	NU
41	Pranabananda Women's College	Govt.	NU
42	Public College of Commerce	Govt.	NU
43	SD Jain Girl's College	Private	NU
44	Saku's Mission College	Private	NU
45	Salestian College of Higher Education	Private	NU
46	Salt Christian College	Private	NU
47	Sao Chang Govt College	Govt.	NU
48	Sazolie College	Private	NU
49	Shamatore College	Private	NU
50	St. John's College	Private	NU
51	St. Joseph's College	Private	Autonomous
52	St. Xavier College	Private	NU
53	Tetseo College	Private	NU
54	Tuli College	Private	NU
55	Unity College	Private	NU

56	Wangkhaog Govt College	Government	NU
57	Yehmi Memorial College	Private	NU
58	Yingli College	Government	NU
59	Zisaji Presidency College	Government	NU
60	Zunheboto Govt College	Government	NU

Table 2: List of Colleges in Nagaland

Sl.No.	Name of College	Institution Type	Affil.
1	Bosco College of Teacher Education	Private	NU
2	Modern Institute of Teacher Education	Private	NU
3	Mokokchung College of Teacher Education	Govt.	NU
4	Mount Mary College Teacher Education	Private	NU
5	Salt Christian College of Teacher	Private	NU
6	Sazolie College of Teacher Education	Private	NU
7	State College of Teacher Education	Govt.	NU
8	Unity. College of Teacher Education	Private	NU

Table 3: B.Ed. (Bachelor of Education) Colleges in Nagaland

Sl.No.	Name of District	Nos. of College
1.	Dimapur	25
2.	Kiphire	1
3.	Kohima	16
4.	Longleng	1
5.	Mokokchung	5
6.	Phek	2
7.	Peren	2
8.	Mon	2
9.	Tuensang	3
10.	Wokha	2
11.	Zunheboto	1

Table 4: List of number of colleges in terms of district excluding B.Ed. colleges

Discussion

The state of Nagaland, one of India's smallest states, occupies a very strategic position in India. Since independence, the state has made a tremendous stride in many fields, including education. When we take the number of institutions in Nagaland, it has 60 colleges offering higher education in B.A., M.A., B.Sc., M.Sc., B.Com., M.Com., B.Voc., Social Work degree, eight colleges offering B.Ed., and one central university offering M.Ed. degree and three private universities. The state has 13 government colleges offering different streams; the rest are private colleges, one central university, and three private universities.

Considering the number of colleges in Nagaland, we have 13 government and 47 private colleges. These colleges are dominated by arts streams, followed by commerce and science streams. Considering this scenario, more colleges offering science streams should be established, be it government or private colleges. NEP 2020 also emphasizes making education multidisciplinary, so more colleges should be encouraged to provide multidisciplinary education instead of concentrating on a single stream. It must also be mentioned that the NEP 2020 has envisioned that "by 2025, at least 50% of learners

through the school and higher education system shall have exposure to vocational education, for which a clear action plan with targets and timelines will be developed" (NEP 2020). In this connection, Nagaland has one college offering B.Voc. course, so more colleges should take steps towards opening courses in vocational courses.

Looking at the number of colleges across different districts, some are crowded with colleges, whereas others have very few. Most educational institutions in Nagaland are concentrated in Dimapur and Kohima and there is not a single B.Ed. institution in the eastern regions of Nagaland. In this connection, more colleges should be opened in districts with fewer institutions, as students in these districts have no other option but to flock to other districts to get their education. In this connection, some low-income families struggle to send their children to other districts to study owing to their poverty, and in a worst-case scenario, some students must drop out. There is also not a single institution apart from Nagaland University offering M.Ed. degrees in Nagaland, so more institutions offering M.Ed. courses should be established, or the existing ones should upgrade to offer M.Ed.

courses.

The National Education Policy 2020 emphasizes on giving more autonomy to educational institutions so in this regard, such institutions should try to acquire autonomy status for their institutions as currently there are only three autonomous institutions in Nagaland.

Growing Concern of The Rise of Private Institutions in Nagaland State

The scenario of higher education in Nagaland is dominated by private players as private institutions outnumber government colleges and universities in the state. Singh in his book *The Naga Society* talks about how there are two types of higher education colleges/institutes, which is, aided and unaided. The aided colleges/institutes are supposed to get 95 percent of the teachers' salary bill reimbursed. The unaided ones have no access to government funds (Singh, 2013). They must run their institutions on students' fees and donations from other fields. In the worst scenario, these institutes run only on tuition fees of students, and in some instances, due to lack of funds on the part of private institutions, standards fall. Some private institutions have cases of gross malpractices that creates a poor and

grim image of private higher education in the context of India. Since tuition fees are high for almost entire professional education, and most find only professional education to be useful, higher education in this line of understanding, is now out of the reach of the poor (Singh, 2019). Indiscriminate expansion of educational institutions will lead to a decline in quality of education and self-financing higher education institutions have become a place where money power has replaced the merit of students. The system also shows that there will be room for further gap between the rich and the poor" (Choudhary & Tiwary, 2019). Along with the production of so many graduates every year, unemployment in the state keeps on rising, so the question emerges whether these graduates have been equipped with the requisite skills to face the job market demands, and seeing as how unemployment is one of the major issues in the state, it is right to assume our education system is a degree centered education and this will adversely affect the context of human resources in the country (Choudhary & Tiwary, 2019).

The quality of education depends on national policies, which in turn depend on the quality of teachers, and the quality of teachers depends

on the quality of teacher education. Teachers in private education institutions are paid significantly less compared to government institutions. Still, they are required to do more work, and their job becomes stressful, impacting the service they provide to their students. So, no matter how developed the institutions might be, the teacher delivers the curriculum to their students, so teachers' welfare and security must be the first priority of our educational system. And as discussed above, the quality of teachers depends upon the quality of teacher education. In Nagaland, there are B.Ed. colleges that train prospective teachers and serve teachers, but these institutions equip teachers to teach in school education. No institution offers M.Ed. courses in the state except Nagaland University, the only central university in Nagaland. So the state also needs institutions offering M.Ed. courses, as one university is not enough to accommodate the students.

Out of the total colleges/institutions in Nagaland, many of the colleges/institutions are affiliated to Nagaland University which might create an extra burden of affiliated colleges and in addition to revenue crunch, absence of autonomy and extra burden of affiliated colleges, the general universities are marred

by the obsolescence, outdated syllabus, and lack of interdisciplinary approach (Padmasundari & Easo, 2010). Padmasundari & Easo also elaborate on how the aim of education should be to develop a complete human being, and make the system globally competitive and relevant while meeting the needs of Indian industry and security as a whole (Padmasundari & Easo, 2010).

Conclusion

Higher education is one of the most critical stages of education as this is what generates new knowledge and information that is used for the advancement of education, and for the country. In Nagaland, the higher education system is mainly dominated by private institutions, mostly affiliated with Nagaland University. Most of the state colleges are private-based, creating a privately dominated education system. These colleges are unevenly distributed across the districts. No matter the type of institution, it must be kept in mind that every institution must cater to the needs of individuals and produce citizens who are equipped with 21st century skills knowledge, as these are the people who will carry the society forward.

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Democratic Participatory Orientation in Nagaland Amidst Insurgency: An Overview

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Abstract

The notion of democracy is widely used and debated in social science. The literature on democratization is complicated by disagreements over its definition, measurement, and various approaches. The study of democracies usually focuses on their democratic institutions and structures. Institutions and structures within society are essential for democratic survival and development. However, the development of a stable and effective democratic government depends upon more than the structures of government and politics: it depends upon the orientation that people have to the political process – upon the political culture. Public support for democracy is a complex orientation to measure; it is a powerful indicator of a society's level of democracy. These democratic principles and values are ethos that regulates the extent, level and involvement of participants in a democracy. Citizen Participatory orientation is at the heart of democracy; indeed, democracy is unthinkable without the ability of citizens to participate freely in the governing process. In Nagaland the situation is quite different because of the fact that Naga insurgent groups demand postponement of elections, boycotting of the polls, solution-not-election, and issuing threats. All these negate the values and principles of democratic participation. The study becomes a matter of interest in a state that has been besieged by decades of armed conflict and unrest over the Naga people's right to self-determination. Despite the complex interplay of insurgency, identity politics and traditional social practices in Nagaland, there remains a notable paucity of scholarly research examining democratic participatory orientations in this unique context. This gap in literature limits our understanding of how democratic ideals are negotiated, adapted, or challenged amidst ongoing conflict and deeply rooted customary structures. By addressing this underexplored area, this paper aims to provide valuable insights for scholars, policy makers, and practitioners seeking to understand the nuanced dynamics of participatory democracy in conflict-affected, culturally distinct regions like Nagaland.

Keywords: Democracy, concept, models, citizen, orientation, insurgency, values, principles, Nagaland

Introduction

and contested concepts in social science". (Baviskar, Siddhartha, & "Democracy is one of the most used

Malone, p. 4, 2004)

“Indeed, one of the complications of the democratisation literature is the disagreement on the definition and measurement of this concept and the debate on the different models” (Dalton & Shin, p. 3, 2003). When examining democratic orientation, it is crucial to first grasp the fundamental principles of democracy and identify the specific democratic model being implemented. Another important aspect is that public support for democracy is a complex orientation to measure; it is a powerful indicator of a society’s level of democracy. These democratic principles and values are ethos that regulates the extent, level and involvement of participants in a democracy. Citizen participation lies at the core of democracy; in fact, democratic governance loses its essence if individuals lack the freedom to engage in political processes. In Nagaland the situation is quite different because of the fact that Naga insurgent groups who demand postponement of elections, boycott of the polls, solution-not-election, and issue threats. All these negate the values and principles of democratic participation. The study becomes a matter of interest in a state that has been besieged by decades of armed conflict and unrest over the Naga people’s right

to self-determination and constitutional special provisions protecting the social practices of the Naga people.

This paper tries to define democracy as it is practised among popular democratic countries and identify different models of democracy and the concept of democratic orientation with an in-depth literature review. The study will focus on a core dimensions; participatory orientation amidst insurgency. It would be an interest to examine how deeply democracy has taken root among the people and also examine the extent to which people emphasize an attitude of support or rejection for democratic principles and values.

Defining Democracy

There is widespread disagreement on the definition and measurement of concept of democracy, in spite, various definitions and understandings are to be found in the discourses that for centuries, from Aristotle until today, have dealt with the subject (Lauth, Hans-Joachim, & Schlenkrich, 2020).

Joseph Schumpeter characterizes democracy as being fundamentally rooted in an institutionalized system designed to facilitate political decision-making, whereby individuals attain governing

authority through a process of vigorous competition aimed at securing electoral support from the citizenry (1942). Building upon earlier democratic theories, Dahl subsequently identified eight institutional prerequisites for democracy: (1) universal adult franchise, (2) eligibility of all citizens for public office, (3) unimpeded political competition among office-seekers, (4) regularly conducted elections meeting international standards of fairness, (5) constitutional protections for political organization, (6) legal safeguards for free speech, (7) pluralistic media environment, and (8) government structures responsive to electoral outcomes and citizen preferences (Dahl & Robert A, 1971). The conceptualization of democracy remains contested in political theory. Gordon Graham observes the term's popular appropriation as a synonym for ideal governance, noting its evolution into "the most desirable form of government" in public discourse—a normative rather than descriptive designation (Graham, p. 91, 1992). This colloquial understanding contrasts with procedural definitions advanced by scholars like Michael Saward who operationalizes democracy as "responsive rule" predicated on institutional mechanisms including free/fair elections and universal

suffrage rights (Saward, p. 468, 1996). Saward's framework emphasizes the structural prerequisites for governmental accountability, positioning electoral processes as essential transmission belts between public will and policy outcomes (1996).

Milbrath's participatory democratic theory posits that genuine popular sovereignty – governance of, by, and for the people – fundamentally requires an engaged and politically active citizenry. His argument rests on the normative democratic principle that collective decision-making produces superior outcomes to elite-driven processes. When political participation becomes restricted to certain segments of society, Milbrath warns, policymaking inevitably skews toward serving the interests of the politically active at the expense of marginalized non-participants (Milbrath & Lester, 1965). Milbrath's participatory theory makes two interrelated claims about democratic governance: first, that the classical ideal of popular rule remains unattainable without sustained citizen involvement in political processes. Second, that restricted participation generates representational distortions, as policy decisions made by active subgroups cannot adequately

incorporate the interests of politically disengaged citizens. This analysis suggests that unequal participation patterns inherently produce unequal policy outcomes (Milbrath & Lester, 1965).

While acknowledging the conceptual challenges in formulating an exhaustive definition of democracy, Sorabjee maintains that democratic systems can be empirically identified through their operational characteristics. His analysis particularly emphasizes institutionalized electoral processes – characterized by regularity, fairness, and freedom – as the primary diagnostic features of democratic governance. At the core of this framework lies the principle of unfettered suffrage, where citizens exercise voting rights without coercion or intimidation (Sorabjee, 2006).

Heyne demonstrates that citizens' normative conceptions of democracy are not formed in a vacuum, but rather emerge through direct engagement with their political system's institutions. The author identifies two key formative mechanisms: (1) the gradual internalization of regime-specific democratic norms through political socialization, and (2) the experiential learning that occurs

through active participation in democratic processes. Together, these factors condition popular expectations regarding democratic governance (Heyne & Lea, 2016). A democracy that is ineffective in ensuring equal voice may also generate discontent in the populace, which can erode the social contract that democracy is based upon. Research suggests that participation and democratic rights are strongly related (Welzel, 2014). Even more striking, other research demonstrates that the quality of democratic governance is positively related to the level of citizen participation and the equality of participation by social status (Dalton, 2017).

Models of Democracy

Contemporary democratic systems exhibit significant variation in their institutional architectures. Among the most influential analytical frameworks is Lijphart's paradigmatic distinction between majoritarian and consensus models of democracy, systematically developed in his landmark study "Patterns of Democracy." This typology has generated substantial scholarly discourse regarding the relative merits and consequences of these competing democratic formulations (Lijphart, 2012). Some other distinct models like participatory versus spectator or

active versus passive democracy are identified (Andersen, Goul, & Torpe, 2000). Each of these models has its own proponents and opponents. No conclusive empirical evidence, however, has shown the consistent outperformance of one particular model by another.

Lijphart examined the relation between “structure” and “performance” of democracy and concluded that the consensus model is a “kinder and gentler” model of democracy. He argues that in a fragmented society, the majoritarian model of democracy is conflict-prone and hence the consensual model should be practiced (Lijphart, p. 2012). Norris also assessed the relation between democratic institutions and quality of democracy, and mainly supports the Lijphartian approach (Norris, 2008). Linder and Bachtiger assert that the consensus model (power-sharing) is crucial for democratization in developing countries in Asia and Africa. Moreover, they examined the influence of the cultural trait of familism on the level of democracy and conclude that this cultural factor would play a more pivotal role (negatively) than economic factors for these societies (Linder & Bachtiger, 2005).

To Heyne, in a participatory

conception of democracy, to the contrary, participation is valued for its own sake and is considered the core of a democracy. Involvement in politics is assumed to foster political efficacy and democratic skills and to generate concern with collective problems, and citizens are thus supposed to have opportunities to deal more profoundly with political issues in deliberative ways (2016). Based on the classical Athenian democracy, this type of democracy was brought forward by Rousseau, and later on picked up by modern proponents of participatory and deliberative democracy such as Barber (1984). Further, a social democratic approach to democracy also considers political outcomes like social equality as essential for fair and meaningful democratic participation. A government thus has the duty to guarantee the resources that are necessary for the use of these rights as well as an equal allocation amongst the citizens (Held, 1987, as cited in Heyne, 2016, p. 3).

Institutional democracy is built on the foundations of civic democracy, which is older. The two are interdependent, but they have become detached. That happens when institutions have lost confidence in the citizenry. As Elinor Ostrom demonstrated in her Nobel prize-winning research,

there are things that citizens working together must do to empower institutions and their skilled professionals. That is because there are some things that can only be done by citizens or that are best done by them (Mathews, 2021).

Min-hua Huang, et al., says a great debate about the meaning of democracy quickly rises between two different models of democracy: “procedure vs. substance” (2013). Procedural democracy refers to the idea of Western liberal democracy that democracy is about establishing a political system in which the change of government is carried out through free and fair elections and the principle of rule of law is deeply rooted. Substantial democracy refers to a shared belief that democracy is not just about the procedure but should be about the government outputs that satisfy peoples need. This point of view prioritizes the importance of the substance of democracy and believes that each country has the right to apply its own procedural arrangements that could be equally democratic as those being applied in western (Huang, et al., 2013). “In line with the theoretical framework, we expect that the exposure to a definition of democracy increases respondents’ democratic understanding, and subsequently,

their democratic support.” (Ananda & Bol, 2020).

Rudebeck identifies a core theoretical tension in democratic scholarship between two competing conceptual approaches. The first, termed the minimalist model, predominates in contemporary political science and narrowly defines democracy through its basic institutional and procedural requirements, e.g., constitutional rules and electoral processes. The second, characterized as substantialist, adopts a broader, multidimensional framework that encompasses both procedural and substantive democratic qualities (Rudebeck, 2016). Contemporary democratic theory exhibits a clear epistemological divide between competing conceptual approaches. While minimalist conceptions – exemplified by Huntington’s (1991) procedural emphasis – dominate mainstream political science, substantialist alternatives like those advanced by Held (1996) and Sen (1981) advocate for more expansive criteria incorporating social and economic dimensions. Dahl’s work (1982, 1989) occupies a unique theoretical position, engaging dialogically with both paradigms to develop his polyarchal model.

Democratic theory offers plenty of different and often opposed

conceptions of what government by the people are supposed to mean and how it is to function. For proponents of the minimalist perspective, democracy is merely a means of protecting citizens against arbitrary rule. The main aim of this type of democracy is to elect skilled representative elites capable of making public decisions, and protecting individual liberties, and elections serve to express and aggregate people's interest. Having its roots in classical republicanism and the liberal model of democracy established by Mill or Tocqueville, modern versions of a minimalist democracy can for instance be found in Schumpeter's economic model of democracy (Schumpeter 1942) and in pluralist models, i.e. from Dahl (1971, 2).

The holding of competitive, free and fair elections is essential to the meaning of democracy. But electoral democracy represents a minimal threshold for defining democracy. Thus freedom of expression, freedom of the press, and freedom of association are essential elements of democracy (Huntington, 1991).

The Concept of Democratic Orientation

The concept of democratic orientation encompasses adherence to the values and institutional

principles that define democratic governance (Sianko, 2012). A nation's democratic foundation can be gauged by how deeply its citizens believe in democratic principles (Inglehart & Welzel, 2005). A functioning democracy relies on a politically engaged and democratically minded populace (Dalton & Shin, 2003). Successful democratization depends not only on commitment of government authorities to carry out democratic reforms but also on "the normative and behavioral predispositions of ordinary citizens" (Tessler and Gao, p. 2009). These democratic principles and values are ethos that regulates the extent, level and involvement of participants in a democracy. They are values that facilitate democratic development. The study of democracies usually focuses on their democratic institutions and structures. Institutions and structures within society are essential for democratic survival and development. However, "...the development of a stable and effective democratic government depends upon more than the structures of government and politics: it depends upon the orientation that people have to the political process – upon the political culture" (Almond and Verba, p. 1963).

As Patrick emphasized, democracy

is not an autonomous system that runs independently. Its effective operation, he asserted, depends on two critical societal factors: a baseline of public literacy regarding democratic theory and a collective dedication to upholding its fundamental doctrines (1996). Thus there is almost unanimous agreement on the importance of democratic orientation among people for democratic viability.

It means that there is more to democratic institutions and structures. Equally critical are the informal norms and daily political behaviours of citizens, which serve as essential catalysts for democratic maturation and institutional strengthening. It is hard to imagine democratic institutions will survive without a serious lack of support for democratic principles and values. It is crucial that the public support and endorse these values and principles. The foundation of the democratic process is a public commitment to democratic values and principles, and the extent of such orientations is essential for judging the potential for democratization (Dalton & Shin, 2003).

Almond and Verba's seminal comparative study first empirically demonstrated the critical relationship between civic culture

and democratic development, establishing that public attitudes and participatory behaviors significantly influence democratization processes (1963). Easton further analysed how a nation's democratic stability depends on its citizens' commitment to democratic ideals. In his foundational research on how public attitudes shape democracy, he demonstrated that the key factor in preserving democracy through economic, political, or social challenges is the public's intrinsic belief in democracy as a core value (1965).

But what are the democratic principles and values of the general population that are essential for the survival and consolidation of democracy? Different authors have placed emphasis on different principles, values and behaviour patterns. Some researchers focused on public support for a democratic form of government (Dalton & Shin, 2003). Others have identified two key factors crucial for the stability and growth of democratic systems: (a) interpersonal trust and (b) enduring dedication to democratic institutions (Inglehart, 1988). Others have identified five key democratic pillars: minority acceptance, interpersonal trust, public welfare perceptions, active political involvement, and post materialist

value orientations (Inglehart & Wezel, 2005).

Tessler and Gao identified six interconnected dimensions of democratic culture: (1) endorsement of gender equity, (2) social tolerance, (3) interpersonal trust networks, (4) engagement in civic activities, (5) political awareness, and (6) institutional knowledge; their research demonstrated how these mutually reinforcing factors collectively foster pro-democratic attitudes within populations (2009). The other dimensions identify several additional components constituting democratic values, including (a) engagement with political affairs, (b) acceptance of opposing viewpoints, (c) prioritization of individual freedoms, (d) awareness of constitutional rights, (e) conditional approval of protest actions, (f) endorsement of press autonomy, and (g) active involvement in political processes (Dalton & Shin, 2003). For a democracy to thrive, ordinary citizens must actively embrace and uphold fundamental democratic values. The long-term stability of democratic systems relies heavily on public commitment to these principles.

Democratic Citizens' Participatory Orientation

An important dimension of

democratic values is popular participation (Almond & Verba, 1963; Dahl, 1971). They claimed that citizen's participation in political life is an essential component of democratic society. Indeed, the idea of citizen participation in political and social domains is at the heart of democracy. "Citizen Participation is at the heart of democracy, indeed, democracy is unthinkable without the ability of citizens to participate freely in the governing process" (Verba et. al., p. 1995). In a similar vein, some viewed participation as "one of the pillars of a democracy whose functioning relies to a great extent on contributions of its citizens to the democratic process" (Schulz, et al., p. 2, 2010). Some analysts suggest that this is a precondition for a democratic transition (Huntington, 1993). In a similar line, Diamond wrote, "As a system of government that requires the consent of the governed, democracy stands or falls with citizen commitment to its norms and structures" (p. 2008).

People's political participation is an essential democratic value. It constitutes a crucial principle in democracy since it promotes a sense of civic equality among citizens. Theoretically, through political participation, each citizen has an equal opportunity to secure their interests by influencing

governmental policies (Bentwich, 2009). Participation is a constitutive element of democratic politics; enhancing the opportunities for and quality of citizen participation is widely perceived as the hallmark of democratization; and for democratic systems, participation is the most important source of legitimacy (Blühdorn & Butzlaff, 2020).

Political participation is the hallmark of a democratic set-up. It signifies such proceedings like: voting, seeking information, discussing and proselytizing, attending meetings, contributing financially and communicating with representatives (IESS, 1968). Since popular sovereignty is one of the inseparable attributes of democracy, the right to participate is an important aspect of democratic government and an inherent right in the democratic process (Saikia & Baruah, 2012). McClosky posits that in democratic systems, citizen engagement serves as the primary mechanism through which collective approval or disapproval of governance is expressed, and governmental accountability to the populace is enforced (1968).

When we think of citizen participation, we often think of the quality of democracy: the higher the

number of citizens who participate, the better the democratic institutions. Since Alexis de Tocqueville, democracy has been associated with participative attitudes and practices that would seem to reinforce its stability. Later, this association would become the core of Robert Putnam's (1993, 2000) studies on social capital. Aside from Putnam's arguments, the participation of individuals in politics in a wide sense of the term—be it through associations, through a positive predisposition towards politics and taking an interest in it (Deth and Elff, 2004), or through participating in non-conventional ways (Dalton, 1999; Norris, 1999) has been taken as an indicator of the democratic quality of political communities. "The rational is the individual joint participation, in pursuit of common interests, can counter the excess of power of representative institutions" (Ganuza and Francis, p. 479, 2008).

Robert Dahl stated the classic argument for why equality is essential for meaningful democracy: "in making collective decisions, the . . . interests of each person should be given equal consideration. Insuring that the interests of each are given equal consideration, in turn, requires that every adult member of an association be entitled to participate in making

binding and collective decisions affecting that person's good or interest. This principle, in turn, requires political equality, which can only be achieved in a democratic system." (Dahl, p. 639, 1996)

Involving all the public in politics also strengthens the democratic process. Jeffersonian logic argues that political participation produces better citizens. People who participate typically become more informed about political issues. This is why analysts often describe elections as a national civics lesson when the public hears and discusses current policies affecting their lives. Other research suggests that people increase their understanding of the complexity of the democratic process, with both positive and negative consequences (Parry & Moyser, 1992). "If there is a wide gap in who participates, and the loud voice of some drowns out the weaker voices of others, this is not beneficial for those who are not heard or the polity overall" (Dalton, p. 18, 2020).

Democratic Participatory Orientation in Nagaland: Amidst Insurgency

In the context of Nagaland, the study of the nature of democratic orientation among people becomes a matter of interest in a state that

has been besieged by decades of armed conflict and unrest over the Naga people's right to self-determination. A critical consideration involves Nagaland's unique participatory dynamics, where tensions emerge between modern democratic systems and indigenous governance structures. This intersection presents distinctive challenges for democratic consolidation in the region. The Northeast Indian context presents a unique case of institutional duality, where modern democratic structures operate concurrently with traditional tribal governance systems (Amer & Moamenla, 2012). As Amer observes, "In the Northeast, one finds two simultaneous democratic institutions at work – a modern democratic system vis-à-vis a traditional system among the Hill tribes" (p. 14). This institutional pluralism persists despite Nagaland's formal establishment as a state on December 1, 1963, demonstrating the remarkable resilience of indigenous political cultures alongside modern state structures (Amer & Moamenla 2012).

Popular participation in this context becomes culturally embedded, with democratic principles undergoing adaptive reinterpretation to align with existing traditional power

structures. This process creates a distinctive hybrid governance model where formal democratic values interface with indigenous political norms. Most prominently, the existence of numerous underground factions' operating within the state demanding sovereignty contradicts the Indian enforced election which hinders participatory orientation. It would be interesting to examine how deeply democratic principles and values have taken root among the people in the state and the extent to which people emphasize an attitude of support or rejection for democratic principles and values.

In Nagaland, realistically, the core democratic norms and ideas are not followed according to theory. Owing to the fact that peaceful means are rarely applied, Mao Tse-Tung's phrase, "Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun" is popular among the political leaders (1966). The Naga insurgency marked a pivotal turning point in Northeast India's political evolution. Originally administered as the Naga Hills District within Assam, the region's trajectory shifted dramatically with the outbreak of armed rebellion. In response to escalating insurgent violence, the Indian government reconfigured the territory's administrative status, detaching Naga Hills from Assam and placing

it under direct central administration as a Union Territory (Anns & Jha, 2022).

A historical analysis of the Naga independence movement reveals critical junctures that shaped both the struggle for self-determination and democratic processes in the region. The movement's institutional foundations were established with the formation of the Naga National Council (NNC) in 1946, which emerged as the principal political organization representing Naga aspirations. The NNC declared independence on August 14, 1947, simultaneously notifying both the Government of India and the United Nations (UNO) of this decision. Historical accounts indicate the UN acknowledged receipt of this communication (Lhousa, 2004; Zahan, 2022). This was followed by a plebiscite on May 16, 1951, which reportedly demonstrated overwhelming (99.9%) popular support for sovereignty, though the Indian government refused to recognize its legitimacy.

As tensions escalated, the movement transitioned to armed resistance with the establishment of the underground Federal Government of Nagaland (FGN) and its military wing, the Naga Federal Army (NFA), under A.Z. Phizo's leadership. This period witnessed

significant conflict, with scholars documenting extensive military operations and civilian suffering in the region (Lhousa, 2004; Zahan, 2022). The Indian government's response to the Naga movement escalated significantly with the deployment of military forces and the implementation of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA) in 1958. This legislation granted extraordinary powers to security forces operating in the region, marking a turning point in the conflict's intensity.

A temporary cessation of hostilities was achieved in September 1964 through the intervention of a Peace Mission composed of prominent figures including socialist leader Jayaprakash Narayan, Assam Chief Minister Bimala Prasad Chaliha, and British peace activist Rev. Michael Scott. However, the ceasefire ultimately proved unsustainable, leading to the Mission's dissolution in 1967 (Singh, 2007). Following the breakdown of peace efforts, military operations intensified and continued unabated until substantial troop reductions became necessary due to India's involvement in the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War. This period represents one of the most contentious chapters in Naga-Indian relations, with scholars noting significant humanitarian

consequences of the prolonged counter insurgency campaign (Singh, 2007).

The formal establishment of Nagaland as India's 16th state on December 1, 1963, marked a significant constitutional development following the 16-Point Agreement (1960) between the Government of India and the Naga People's Convention. This agreement redefined the former Naga Hills-Tuensang Area (governed under the 1957 Act) as a full-fledged state under the Indian Union, initially administered through the Ministry of External Affairs before being transferred to the Home Ministry (Singh, 2007).

The post-1971 war period witnessed renewed counterinsurgency operations that ultimately compelled rebel groups to negotiate. This culminated in the landmark Shillong Accord of November 11, 1975, where Naga National Council (NNC) representatives unconditionally accepted the Indian Constitution – a breakthrough in conflict resolution. However, the accord proved divisive, with a faction of NNC members rejecting its terms. This schism led to the formation of the more radical National Socialist Council of Nagalim (NSCN) on February 2, 1980, which would

subsequently become the primary insurgent group continuing the armed struggle (Singh, 2007).

As we can see from the table 1, page number 143, the period 1955-1964 was a period of hostilities even after the statehood 1964-1968, there were

NNC non-accordist who do not accept the 16 point agreement and have no or limited cooperation with the government opposed the Indian imposed state Election. During 1968-1997 Nagas were seen to be sandwiched under three corners of two warring factions of NSCN and

Dyad	1955-1975 entrenched threat	1975-1997 strong defection & rise of NSCNs	1997-present fragmented ceasefire
Govt-NNC	Hostilities 1955- 1964, 1968-1975. Limited cooperation 1964-1968	Limited corporation	Limited cooperation N/A
Govt-NSCN Formed 1980	N/A	Hostilities, collapse into NSCN-IM & NSCN-K (1988)	N/A
Govt-NSCN- IM		Hostilities,	Limited cooperation, (1997-till present)
Govt-NSCN- K		Hostilities,	Limited cooperation 2001-2015; return to Hostilities-2015- Present

Table 1: *The Evolution of armed order in the Naga conflict.* From "Ceasefires and State Order-Making in Naga Northeast India," by A. Waterman, 2021, *International Peacekeeping*, 28(3), p. 500. © 2021 by Taylor & Francis.

continued operation of the Indian Army. According to reports, from 1992 to 2000, Naga insurgency claimed over 1,600 lives, both of civilians and Indian Army.

There is always a fear psychosis in the minds of innocent citizens (Zahan, 2022). From the first Nagaland Legislative Assembly election 1964 to 2023 recent election, Naga insurgent groups see it as Indian imposed election and have been opposing it in one way or the other. At times the state political leaders play corrupted politics by involving the insurgent group, or at times the insurgent group itself

support a particular candidate of their choice or party and use threat on the contesting candidate even to withdraw from the candidature. Till today nobody have disprove their diktat know so well the consequences. One could feel the fear psychosis in the minds of electorates on the polling day.

Faced with depleting strength due to relentless counter insurgency operations, NSCN (IM) offered to negotiate for a truce with the government of India on July 31, 1996. We can clearly see the increasing causalities in the table 2, page number 144.

Year	Civilians	Security forces	Insurgents	Total
1992	34	33	29	96
1993	62	43	68	173
1994	110	26	56	192
1995	80	25	108	213
1996	144	48	112	304
1997	104	38	218	306

Table 2: *Insurgency related casualties: 1992-1997.* Reproduced from "A Decade of Ceasefire in Nagaland," by G. Singh, 2007, *Strategic Analysis*, 31(5), p. 820. © 2007 by Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses.

In 1998, on the eve of the polls, the “principal secretary” of the Government of People’s Republic of Nagaland (GPRN), the underground “government” of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Isak-Muivah faction), issued letters which asked candidates of all political parties in Nagaland to sign a proclamation “failing which they will be treated as anti-national” (India Today, 1998). The format of the proclamation was as follows: “The Naga people through their various organisations strongly oppose holding of elections in Naga-inhabited areas. As such I... candidate of.... party will not file my nomination paper in the ensuing Lok Sabha/state assembly elections in view of the ongoing political dialogue between the Government of India and the NSCN (I-M)” (India Today, 1998). Failure to comply, the proclamation implied, would mean capital punishment (India Today, 16 Feb. 1998). They asked candidates of all political parties in Nagaland to

sign a proclamation “failing which they will be treated as anti-national” (India Today, 1998).

As shown in the Figure 1, page number 145 we can see that Electors who did not vote in the 1998 General Election to the Nagaland Legislative Assembly was as high as 53.3 per cent as against 44.3 per cent who voted. During this election regional parties like the Naga People’s Front did not contest these elections and responded to the boycott call of the NSCN. Out of the 60 constituencies 43 constituencies were filed by the INC candidates and hence were declared elected unopposed without a poll. In the other 17 constituencies, the INC candidate had to compete with one or more Independent Candidate. The Independent candidates managed to win 7 of these seats. The Nagaland total voters were 926569 out of which 420714 voted and Rejected votes were 23706, valid votes were 397008, thus 505855 electorates did not vote.

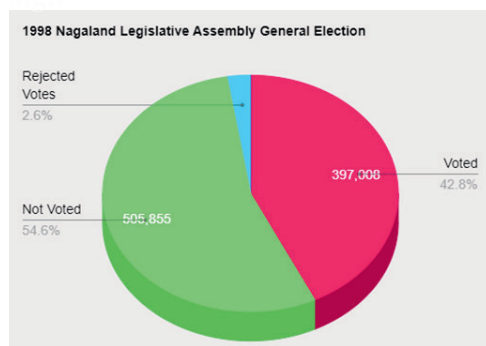


Figure 1: Voter turnout during NLA General Elections 1998.

Note. Adapted from *Elector Statistics 1964-2023*, by Chief Electoral Office, Nagaland, n.d., *Government of Nagaland*.

<https://ceo.nagaland.gov.in>

Table 3 and Table 4 in page number 146 and 147 are the statistics of elections from 1964 to 2023 data available on the CEO Nagaland. The percentage of electors voted may not be authentic data due to the fact

that the boycott call is expressed by the Naga insurgents in every election. While this state of affairs is taken as advantage by the shrewd political leaders and use coup tactics in all the polling stations.

Particulars	1st election 1964	2nd election 1969	3rd election 1974	4th election 1977	5th election 1982	6th election 1987	7th election 1989	8th election 1993
Total electors	124166	176931	395070	398035	596453	582301	582426	812850
Total voters who voted	62659	138673	279573	331461	443972	491924	498822	734942
Total voters rejected	482	265	7674	6267	6267	6982	5526	5198
Total valid votes polled	62177	138408	289899	324994	437705	484942	493296	729744
% of votes polled	50.46%	78.38%	70.77%	83.27%	74.44%	84.48%	85.65%	90.41%

Table 3: Electors from 1964 to 1993.

Note. Adapted from *Elector Statistics 1964-2023*, by Chief Electoral Office, Nagaland, n.d., *Government of Nagaland*. <https://ceo.nagaland.gov.in>

Sl. No.	Election year	Male ER/VT	Female ER/VT	Total ER/VT	%	Polling station
1	NL Gen Election 1998	486953	438878	927007 439280	47.38%	444
2	NL Gen Election 2003	529517 474181	485363 417316	1014880 891497	87%	1583
3	NL Gen Election 2008	666391 573021	635875 549362	130266 1122383	86.19%	1692+88 1780
4	NL Gen Election 2013	608299 541919	590150 538968	1198449 1080887	90.57%	1904+120 2024
5	NL Gen Election 2018	591440 487836	579108 498560	1170548 986396	84.27%	2194+2 2196
6	NL GEN Election 2023	660812 554485	655252 570972	1316064 1125457	86.75%	2157

Table 4: Electors from 1998 to 2023.

Note. Adapted from *Elector Statistics 1964-2023*, by Chief Electoral Office, Nagaland, n.d., *Government of Nagaland*. <https://ceo.nagaland.gov.in>

The 2018 Nagaland state assembly elections became a point of significant contention in the ongoing peace process. The National Socialist Council of Nagalim-Isak-Muivah (NSCN-IM) and allied groups issued formal statements opposing the electoral exercise, arguing it would: (1) undermine the integrity of protracted peace negotiations ongoing since 1997, and (2) create

structural impediments to achieving a comprehensive political settlement. The NSCN-IM's position reflected its longstanding role as primary negotiator with the Government of India's interlocutors, framing the elections as an external "imposition" incompatible with the Naga people's aspirations for self-determination through dialogue. "Therefore, those who advocate for the imposed election, does not stand for the interest of the Naga people. We are seriously critical of such people or group as they do not contribute towards finding lasting political solution," the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (The Hindu, 2018).

2023 General Election to Nagaland Legislative Assembly was taken by surprise when a leader of the NSCN Isak-Muivah faction allegedly ordered people not to vote for Nagaland's BJP president, Temjen Imna Along, a candidate from Alongtaki Assembly constituency of Nagaland Legislative Assembly. NSCN (I-M) leader of Ao region in a letter purportedly signed by him was circulated in villages under the Alongtaki constituency (The Hindu, 2023). Such orders are recent in all the constituencies during elections, but due to fear of threat people do not converse on such information.

Conclusion

The core values of democratic participation as provided in the constitution of India – the right to contest election and right to vote – is desirable to be enjoyed by all. Contrary to this, the scenario in Nagaland is unusual and this context leads to deficit in participation especially due to consistent interference by the underground factions during elections. Lately, the intellectuals of the society have distanced themselves from active participation and the citizens largely the youths are forming an attitude of indifference, opining that their vote does not make any difference – leading to very passive or no participation in electoral process.

A set of political conditions and civil liberties are necessary, according to Dalton and Shin first, to ensure the meaningfulness of elections, and second to ensure that democracy includes more than just elections. If an election is free, but the society is not, then the election is unlikely to have informed voters who openly cast their preferences for future government policy. Thus, a free election presumes a free press, freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, and other political and civil liberties (2003).

Naga solution and existence of peace in this small state can only achieve democratic rights being enjoyed by the citizens. Neingulo Krome, General Secretary of the Naga People's Movement for Human Rights (NPMHR), has emphasized dialogue as the singular viable path to conflict resolution. In his capacity as a prominent human rights advocate, Krome (2018) articulated, "Groups like the NSCN-IM must persist in peace negotiations as the only sustainable solution." He further cautioned against regression, stating, "A return to pre-ceasefire hostilities serves no party's interest. The imperative lies in continuing talks to achieve a mutually honourable settlement" (Interview, Kohima, 2018).

The people of Nagaland want peace. A new, rapidly growing middle class of Nagas with aspirations for a better future is determined to bring prosperity and is beginning to hold the state accountable while distancing themselves from the underground factions. There must be sincerity and commitment from the leaders in the underground set up, the leaders in the state and most importantly leaders at the centre. Naga solution must be accorded top most priority. In tandem, Nagaland's civil society organizations have emerged as critical actors in facilitating parallel

peace negotiations with the Indian government, seeking a holistic resolution to the insurgency. This grassroots diplomatic initiative complements formal talks while addressing local grievances often overlooked in high-level discussions.

The peace process intersects significantly with electoral politics, creating a complex dynamic where political solutions become contingent on democratic cycles. This phenomenon gained particular relevance during India's 2023 electoral season, where the ruling party's campaign rhetoric prominently featured "Elections for Solution" – framing ballot outcomes as instrumental to conflict resolution. Such politicization of insurgency management reflects what conflict theorists term the "electoralization of peace processes," where ceasefire timelines and negotiation breakthroughs become synchronized with electoral calendars.

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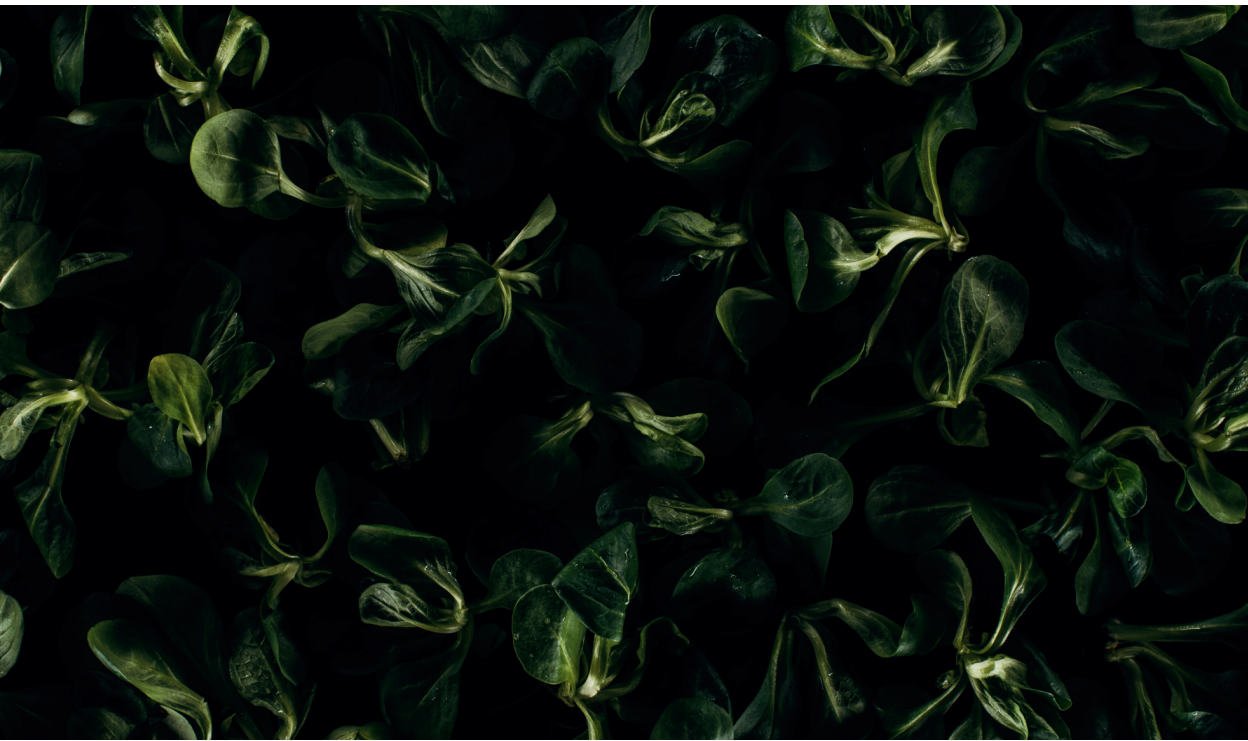
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