

GENDER RELATIONS IN NAGA SOCIETY

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CERTIFICATE

This Dissertation entitled " GENDER RELATIONS
IN NAGA SOCIETY " by AWUNGSHI GIMSON for the Degree
of Master of Philosophy is an original work and has
not been previously submitted for any other Degree
of this or any other University.

We recommend this Dissertation be placed before
the examiners for evaluation.

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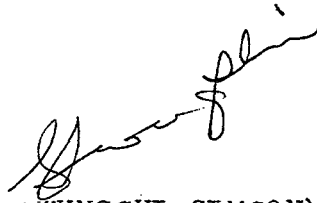
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INTRODUCTION:

Literature on the Nagas is gradually increasing. There are some excellent monographs of several Naga tribes by authors like Christoph Von Fliirer - Haimendorf, J.P. Mills, J.H. Hutton and others. However, these monographs deal with particular tribes only. The word 'Naga' is a generic term and is used to refer to over 16 major tribes and several other sub - tribes. There are, however, very few books which have dealt with the Naga tribes as a whole. Many authors have been constrained by the lack of recorded materials concerning several tribes as well as the unwieldy nature of the work to attempt writing on the Nagas as a whole. They have usually found it more convenient to work on selected particular tribes.

I have also felt the same constraint. And so, even though my topic is "GENDER RELATIONS IN NAGA SOCEITY", it has not been possible to incorporate all the Naga tribes in this study. Attempts have been made, as far as possible, to make the study fairly representative of all the Naga tribes. It will, however, be obvious as one moves along through the study that more emphasis has been given to the major tribes like the Angamis, Aos, Semas, Tangkhuls and so on. This has been necessitated not by personal preference but by the simple fact that there is more literature available on these tribes.

Literature on women in Naga society is almost non-existent. This particular area still remains unexplored. This is one of the reasons why I have attempted to make a study of the gender relations in this particular society. A brief description of the contents and arrangement of the study follows.

Chapter I deals with some of the theoretical perspectives concerning the nature and bases of gender inequality. Particular emphasis is given on reproduction and the structure of production relations as sources of gender inequality.

Chapter II gives a description of the Naga social structure. It examines how men and women are situated in the social structure and analyses the various Naga customs and practices to see their implications on gender relations.

Chapter III discusses the various Gennas and how the observance of these gennas serve to promote a sense of inequality between the sexes. The myths related to gennas are also seen as ideological bases for legitimation of the gender asymmetry.

In chapter IV an attempt is made to explore the people's concept of reproduction. Their ideas of

reproduction as embodied in the story of creation serve to justify the existing social order as proper and natural.

Finally, chapter V, which also serves as conclusion, sums up the whole study. It also includes a short discussion on social change and the corresponding changes in gender relations.

Chapter I

GENDER INEQUALITY : SOME PERSPECTIVES ON ITS NATURE AND BASES

Inequality, in one form or the other, has been a feature of every known society. As members of particular social classes men and women face the predicaments of their unequal position in the social hierarchy. The division of society into different social classes cuts across sex lines. Women of the ruling classes may enjoy privileges denied to men and women of the submerged classes. But within each class women have been at a disadvantage as compared to men. Men, whether dominant or themselves dominated, have always tried to keep their women in subordination. Women as a collectivity have been more victimized and discriminated against among the unequals in society.

FUNCTIONAL PERSPECTIVE

The unequal relations between men and women and the sexual division of labour have been explained by structural, functionalists as a normal feature of every society.¹ They see the subordination of women

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1. Rekha Pandey, 'The Shifting Paradigms, of Primordial Unit of Social Reality and the Swerving Ideologies on Women's Situation in Society : A Cognitive Analysis' in Sociological Bulletin, Vol. 36, No.1, March 1987, p. 106.

and the sexual division of labour as beneficial for society. Hence, what is functional and universal cannot be abolished.

Those who consider the sexual division of labour as universal turns to biology to explain their position. The anthropologists Tiger and Fox assume that human beings behave in accordance with the human biogrammar, that is, a genetically based programme which predisposes mankind to behave in certain ways.² Although men and women are similar in many respects, there are important differences between them. Compared to women, men are more aggressive and dominant. Male dominance is seen as a 'sex linked characteristic'. By comparison, women are programmed by their biology to reproduce and care for children. The male and female are biologically disposed to different sexual divisions of labour.

Peter Murdock, another anthropologist, also sees biological distinction between men and women as the basis of the sexual division of labour in society. Unlike Tiger and Fox, he simply suggests that biological distinction, such as the greater physical

2. Ibid, p. 107.

strength of men and the fact that women bear children lead to gender roles out of sheer practicality.³

The sex-based division of labour which arises from biological differences is in turn considered as rooted in the functional necessity. Parsons observes that there are two universal basic functions of family: 'the socialization of the young' and 'the stabilization of adult personalities'.⁴ And, within the family, women are primarily responsible for these two functions. Parsons turns to biology to assign women the responsibility of performing socializing functions. .

CULTURAL EXPLANATION

Some scholars have refused to accept the sexual division of labour and the inequality between men and women as arising from biologically based differences. They offer a cultural explanation for the same. They argue that gender roles are not inevitable, and that particular tasks are not assigned exclusively to one sex or the other. Since norms, values and roles are culturally determined and socially transmitted, the norms governing gender roles must be a product of culture rather than biology.⁵ Individuals learn their

3. Ibid, p. 108

4. Cited in Rekha Pandey, op.cit.

5. Ibid, p. 111.

respective male and female roles in and through society. The sexual division of labour is supported and justified by a belief and value system which states that gender roles are normal, natural, right and proper.

Ortner⁶ claims that the cause of the 'universal devaluation of women' is not biology but the way in which every culture defines and evaluates female biology. In every society, a higher value is placed on culture than on nature; culture is the means by which man controls and regulates nature. The universal evaluation of culture as superior to nature is the basic reason for the devaluation of women. Women are seen as closer to nature than men and, therefore, as inferior to them. Ortner argues that women are universally defined as closer to nature because their bodies and physiological functions are more concerned with the "natural processes surrounding the reproduction of the species",⁷ namely, menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth and lactation.

6. Sherry B. Ortner, "Is Female to Male as Nature Is to Culture" in M. Z. Rosaldo and L. Lamphere (eds.) Women, Culture and Society (Stanford: Stanford University, 1974).

7. Ibid, p. 75.

MARXIAN PERSPECTIVE

Engels traced the oppression of women to the historical onset of private property. Private property necessitated strict control over women's sexuality to ensure that inheritance be guaranteed to the offspring of the male owner of the property. Male dominated monogamous marriage, which involved the economic dependence of the wife upon her husband, provided this control. Monogamous marriages were developed to protect the institution of property, bringing to an end previously existing communal family systems. The change in family type, in turn, brought about changes in the sexual division of labour which added to women's oppression.⁸

Engels states that, "the predominance of the man in marriage is simply a consequence of his economic predominance and will vanish with it automatically".⁹ But so long as the family continues to be the economic unit of society, the position of women cannot be fundamentally changed. He sees the family as an instrument of perpetuating women's subordination.

8. Frederick Engels, The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State in the Light of the Researches of Lewis H. Morgan, (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1948), pp. 93-94, p. 105.

9. Ibid, p. 117.

Marx and Engels believed that beginning of women's liberation could be witnessed in the nineteenth century capitalist society. They argued that the demand for female wage labour would raise the status and power of proletarian women within the family. True equality between the sexes, however, could only be achieved in a socialist society in which the forces of production were owned communally. The onerous duties of housework and motherhood would no longer be performed by individual women since all work was the responsibility of the community. Engels wrote : "Private housekeeping is transformed into a social industry. The care and education of children becomes a public matter".¹⁰

WOMEN AND REPRODUCTION

There seems to be near consensus among scholars engaged in cross-cultural research on women on the centrality of reproduction and relations of production concerning women's position in society.¹¹ Some scholars see women's role in reproduction as primary, and as universally causing some degree of female dependence and subordination, while others see production relations as primary.

10. Ibid, p. 108.

11. Eleanor Leacock, "Women, Power and Authority" in Leela Dube et al (eds.), Visibility and Power (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 107.

Meillassoux¹² considers women's reproductive functions as the source of their subjugation by men. Since women are the main agents of genetic reproduction, wherever the fruits of reproduction, children, are directly coveted (as labour), women are brought under subjugation in order to establish control over the progeny. Meillassoux contrasts societies where the cycle of reproduction is short and does not gear itself to previous generations or to those that follow (eg. food gathering and hunting societies) with those societies where the economic cycle extends over a long period and there is inter-generational dependence. He asserts that it is in the latter situation that women have to be protected, guarded, and subordinated so that men can get control over their progeny.

IDEOLOGICAL BASE

Meillassoux emphasizes on how ideology is utilized for the subordination of women. He uses ethnographic material to show how myths are used towards this end.

Several myths in Africa, and perhaps elsewhere, tell of ancient times when women had power over nature, wild animals obeyed them and they were the mistresses of the world. Then, one day, they committed some mistake and

12. Claude Meillassoux 'The Pregnant Male' in Leela Dube et al (eds.), op.cit.

all the animals fled away and they lost their power. Men took it over and have wisely kept it since. Every sixty years the Dogon celebrate the victory of the males over women by wearing false breasts to dance the Sigi. Through this myth the present social inferiority of women is explained and justified; women had their chance but lost it.¹³

Dube¹⁴ also shows how the social arrangement (gender asymmetry) is justified as a kind of natural arrangement through the ideology of human reproduction expressed in the metaphor of the 'seed and earth' which symbolizes the respective contributions of the father and the mother. By expressing specific cultural understandings regarding the process of biological reproduction, it provides the ideological bases for legitimation of crucial principles of kinship and their operation in respect of property and production.¹⁵

According to the metaphor of 'seed and earth' to express the process of human reproduction, man provides the seed (contained in the semen) - the essence - for the creation of the offspring. 'The seed determines the kind: the child's identity is derived, thus, from the father in so far as group placement is concerned.'¹⁶ In this metaphor, the

13. Ibid, p. 15.

14. Leela Dube, 'Seed and Earth' in Leela Dube et al (eds.), op.cit.

15. Ibid, p. 23.

16. Ibid, p. 22.

woman is likened to the field or earth. Her role is that of the nourisher. She has to nurture what the womb has received, with her own blood. This act of nurturance is not over at birth; later the mother nourishes the child with her milk. The close tie between the mother and child is understood and recognized, but it is underscored in a number of subtle ways.¹⁷

The use of the metaphor of 'seed and earth' to refer respectively to the male and female contribution in biological reproduction has certain implications. First, an essentially unequal relationship is reflected in and emphasized through the use of these symbols, and second, the symbolism is utilized by culture to underplay the significance of woman's contribution to biological reproduction.¹⁸ The more or less invisible contribution of the father contrasts sharply with the clearly identifiable and sustained contribution of the mother. But the symbolism achieves almost a reversal of the two in terms of their significance and helps the former to overshadow the latter. Though the mother is indispensable, she cannot give social identity to the offspring. The children derive

17. Ibid, p. 23.

18. Ibid, p. 38.

legitimacy from their father. While trying her down to the supreme duty of motherhood, this symbolism is instrumental in denying her the natural right over her own children and in creating and sustaining an ideology in which strategic resources of both types - material as well as human - remain in the hands of men.¹⁹

It is significant to note how the two partners are situated in the process of reproduction. Man has the seed in his body; the woman, on the other hand, is the field. The two partners are not at par with one another in so far as the process of reproduction is concerned. The offspring belongs to the one who provides the seed. The man also owns the field because man usually sows only in his field.

By equating the woman's body with the field or the earth and the semen with the seed, the process of reproduction is equated with the process of production and rights over the children with the rights over the crop.²⁰

Dube's propositions, however, need to be examined in a cross-cultural perspective. There are

19. Ibid.

20. Ibid., pp. 41-42.

different interpretations for the same metaphor and the same act (process of reproduction). The Khasi²¹, a matrilineal society in north-east India, for instance, trace the source of life to the mother's blood. The father's semen is likened to 'pus' which can be drained out from one's body whereas the mother's blood which is a life giving force could never be separated from oneself. Blood is transmitted from mother to child, either male or female, and it is on this commonness of blood that the descent principle is based and the clan formed.

PRODUCTION RELATIONS AND GENDER ROLES

Leacock,²² on the other hand, attempts to grasp the nature and bases of gender relations by considering the dimensions of power. She holds that it is the structure of production relations which is central to the structure of women's decision-making (power) in any society.²³ In her view, historical changes in production relations underlie fundamental changes in the structure of reproduction and in its economic and cultural significance.²⁴ She sees the changes in production relations as bringing about changes not only

21. Ibid, p. 32.

22. Eleanor Leacock, 'Women, Power and Authority' in Leela Dube et al (eds.), Visibility and Power (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1986).

23. Ibid, p. 107.

24. Ibid.

in degrees of female authority and power but also in the forms taken by authority and power and in their relations to one another.²⁵

Leacock draws evidence from foraging and horticultural societies to illustrate that it is the economic structure that is responsible for the egalitarian gender relations obtaining in these societies. The economic structure of these societies is such that individual well-being is directly and immediately dependent on group well-being. All produce is shared and no one can be well fed while others go hungry. This generalized sharing is, in turn, based on open access to all basic resources, on the universal ability to obtain and process food, and on the direct participation of all abled persons in the production and distribution of food and other basic goods. Within this structure there is no dichotomy between 'public' and 'private' sectors of the economy, and the division of labour according to which each sex has its own specialities kinds women and men in reciprocal exchange relations without leading to female dependence on males in individual families.²⁶ Wife-husband reciprocity is cross-cut by numerous other reciprocal relations so that, in terms of

25. Ibid, p. 110.

26. Ibid, p. 111.

fundamental structure, each individual is directly dependent on the multi-family group as a whole and not constrained by dyadic lines of dependence.²⁷

Leacock draws attention to how in contrast with egalitarian economies, producers and consumers were sharply differentiated/divided in the early urban societies of the Orient and Mediterranean. In these societies the economic structure was based on the division of labour and a market system. With the change in economic structure was the concomitant decline in the position of women in relation to that of men, women's productive activities became associated with the household domain; their legal and social status was redefined in terms of subservience to, and dependence on male household heads; and their sexuality was brought under strict control.²⁸

With industrial capitalism the transformation of production for use to production for exchange is all but total. The character of production in industrial capitalism requires a mobile 'free' labour force, in contrast to a labour force that is bound to land or estate-households and is required to contribute

27. Ibid, pp. 111-112.

28. Ibid, p. 117.

labour and produce to landowners and state or church enterprises. Both workers as a class and women as a gender are able to gain greater formal legal rights than in pre-capitalist stratified societies.²⁹ They have wider occupational choices and some slight possibility of individual upward mobility. Nevertheless women remain subordinate to men in respect to both power and authority.

The relation between capitalist production and female subordination is a complex one. Various studies have revealed the importance of women's subordination for capitalist economies. Although supposedly dependent upon men, women in fact serve as 1) underpaid labour in the public work force - 'marginalized' labour to be drawn upon or cast aside according to economic exigency, and as 2) unpaid labour in the household domain, reproducing and servicing themselves and the male labour force.³⁰ Women's subordination is therefore, to the advantage of the capitalist system.³

To sum up, Leacock holds that it is the changeover from production for consumption/subsistence

29. Ibid, p. 126.

30. Ibid, p. 127.

to production for trade/exchange which marks the turning point relating to a more inferior status and less autonomy for women. In other words, it is the structure of the relations of production that determines women's position vis-a-vis men in society.

What exactly is it that differentiates women from men? This is a question frequently asked when dealing with the source of gender asymmetry. One answer which keeps coming up is that it is the woman's ability to reproduce which differentiates one from the other. By logic then, women ought to be in a superior position since they hold the key to the continuation of the human species. What could be a source of power for women becomes instead something which makes them vulnerable and powerless. This is achieved through controlling their sexuality.

The structure of economy and production relations are important determinants of gender relations. In societies where production is for subsistence and where the sexual division of labour is based on the principle of reciprocity, there is more or less egalitarian relations between the sexes. However, in societies based on market economy there is a private/public dichotomy in the sexual division of labour. This becomes a source of gender inequalities.

The whole issue of gender inequality, thus, seems to centre on two main themes, that is, reproduction and structure of production relations. These two themes will be further explored in the context of the Naga society in order to examine the gender relations obtaining in that society.

Chapter II

NAGA SOCIAL STRUCTURE

The word 'Naga' is a generic term and is used to refer to the various tribes of the present state of Nagaland, the tribes of Nocte, Wancho, Tangsa, etc. of North East Frontier Agency (present Arunachal Pradesh) and their congeners in Manipur state and in the Somra tract of Burma.¹ These tribes, inspite of their multiplicity of languages and a political system broken down almost to the village unit, have something in common which makes them recognisable as a people.

THE VILLAGE

The village is the natural unit of organisation for Naga polity, religion and economy.² It is an autonomous unit and independent of tribe.

In olden days the villages were isolated from and hostile to each other. This was so mainly because of the practice of head-hunting and the absence of any trade relations. Because of this kind of hostility among the villages, the villages were invariably always located on hilltops which would give them a commanding view of the surrounding areas as they had to be on

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1. M. Alemchiba, A Brief Historical Account of Nagaland (Kohima: Naga Institute of Culture, 1970), p. 21.
 2. M. Horam, Naga Polity, pp. 60-61.

constant vigil against any surprise attacks from their enemies. Thus, the two main considerations in choosing a village site were availability of water nearby and easy defense.

Each village had elaborate defense arrangements. Different tribes had different methods of making their villages secure against the enemy.³ The Angamis used masonry walls while hedges of living cane were used by the Konyaks. The Lothas had outer and inner defense lines for their villages. The former was usually a ditch full of hardened bamboo spikes. A rough wooden plank was used to cross this during the day. At night or during war this was removed. The inner defense consisted of a fence of thick bamboos and sticks with spikes interspersed generously. The Sema village defense system resembles the kind found in Lotha villages but both cannot compare to the elaborate precautions displayed by the Angami villages. Besides stone walls there were ditches surrounding the village in which spikes were planted and covered with a light layer of earth.

Paths leading upto villages were narrow and had high banks on either side covered with overhanging heavy and thorny creepers. The enemy could enter the

3. Ibid, pp. 62-63.

village only in single file. Then there was the village gate with strong doors hewn out of a single piece of solid wood. Each village had two such doorways, one at each end of the village. They were fastened from inside and could withstand heavy attacks from outside. They were opened only twice in a day, in the morning to enable the villagers to go out to the fields and in the evening to allow them to return.

✓ A village may have any number of households - from as few as ten to as many as a thousand. Each household in a village belongs to a particular clan and each clan occupies a particular area in the village called Khel.⁴ In every khel there was a Morung or bachelors' house. This dormitory for the young is called 'Champoo' by the Lothas, 'Arichu' by the Aos, 'Dekha Chang' by the Semas, 'Longshim' by the Tangkhuls, 'Kichuki' by the Angamis and so on.⁵

✓ It is in the Morungs that the boys get all the lessons of community living. In the absence of formal schools, the Morungs serve as a training ground for all the lessons that the youth must learn before starting to live independently.

4. Ibid, p. 64.

5. Ibid, p. 65.

Morungs are out of bounds for women. If a woman enters ~~if~~ she renders the whole village unlucky. Whereas girls are strictly prohibited to enter the young men's dormitory, young men, on the other hand may visit the girls dormitory.⁶ This indicates a restriction on women's movements.

In the ensuing pages an attempt will be made to discuss the social structure of the Naga society and to see how men and women are situated therein.

KINSHIP AND MARRIAGE

The social relationships deriving from blood ties (descent) and marriage (affinity) are collectively referred to as kinship. Kinship is universal and in most societies plays a significant role in the socialization of individuals and the maintenance of group solidarity.

In simple societies the importance of kinship is paramount. Where a person lives, his group and community membership, whom he should obey and by whom be obeyed, who are his friends and who are his enemies, from whom he may and may not hope to inherit and to whom pass on his own status and property - all these matters

6. Ibid, p. 72.

and many more may determined by his status in a kinship system.⁷ In fact, in some societies the kinship relations may be so extensive and significant that in effect they constitute the social system.

Kinship performs two important and related roles in society.⁸ First, it provides a way of transmitting status and property from one generation to the next, and second, it serves to establish and maintain effective social groups.

In almost all societies, when a person dies he leaves something behind, whether this be status, such as headship of a family or local group, or moveable or immoveable property, like land, livestock or money. After his death these must pass to someone else, and in all societies there are rules for this transmission. These rules of transmission differ from society to society according to the differing kinship systems. In the Naga society (patrilineal), descent is reckoned through men and hence status and property (particularly land) is passed on in the male line.

7. John Beattie, Other Cultures (London:Rowtlege & Kegan Paul, 1966), p. 93.

8. Ibid, pp. 96-97.



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Kinship is further used to establish and define distinct corporate social units. In simple societies¹² it is essential for everyone to be a member of a co-operating, closely knit group of people, upon whose aid and support he can depend in such vital activities as hunting, agriculture and herding, and war. Men must form co-operating groups if they are to survive, and kinship is the means most readily and universally available for doing this. For the Nagas the 'clan' is the corporate social unit. The clan is formed on the principle of unilineal descent. The members of a clan believe themselves to be descended from a common ancestor.

✓ Naga society is patrilineal and male ascendancy is complete with them.⁹ The essential feature of the Naga family is that its members are descended from the eldest male resident in the house, the mother being, under the rule exogamy, brought in from another clan, an entirely different group of families. The family is constituted of a number of clans. These clans are composed of families, comprising, groups of agnatic kin. The clans are believed to be descended from a common ancestor by whose name, in many cases, the clan is known.¹⁰ The clans are strictly exogamous.

9. T.C. Hodson, The Naga Tribes of Manipur, (Delhi: B. R. Publishing Corporation, 1974), p. 70

10. Ibid, p. 71.

✓ Monogamy is the general practice though polygamy was prevalent in certain tribes like the Tangkhuls¹¹ and Semas.¹² Cross-cousin marriages are usually encouraged. The reason given is that such marriages conduce to domestic concord owing to the relationship between the parents of the couple, who see that their children behave well to one another.¹³

Marriage for the Nagas is a relatively permanent union between two individuals and is to be differentiated from the temporary unions which custom allows the young of both sexes to form.

Marriage (monogamy being the usual form) reserves one woman for one man. Rigid chastity is demanded of married women which is in contrast to the laxity of the pre-nuptial relations of the sexes. Moreover, marriage is characterized by the strict principle of clan exogamy, whereas a girl's pre-nuptial lover can be from her own clan - a man whom she may not marry.

Marriage brings about a change of status for both the partners. There is from the date of marriage

11. Ibid, p. 94.

12. J.H. Hutton, The Sema Nagas (Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 135.

13. Ibid, p. 132.

a liability to the full obligations of membership of the clan which was not there before.¹⁴

The family structure too changes with the marriage of its members. At marriage the sons set up separate households for themselves. In keeping with the principle of patriliney the daughters move into another clan. After getting married the ideal wife has to devote her whole attention to her husband and his family. As lady of the house she can now participate in the rites of the "Feast of Merit". There is an upgradation of her religious participation as it were. From marriage onwards the boy is considered a full tribesman. As head of the new household he now has to perform the religious duties on behalf of his family on the occasion of gennas. The word is used in two ways. First, it means something forbidden. Second, it refers to a sort of holiday on which no work may be done by the people of an entire. This will be taken up in detail in the next chapter. That marriage marks social maturity is evidenced by the fact that theft by a married man (full tribesman) is severely punished, while

14. T.C. Hodson, The Naga Tribes of Manipur, p. 78.

an unmarried man might steal grain net yet housed with impunity.

Marriages are effected on the strict principle of clan exogamy. The law of exogamy rests on the same kind of sanction as gives validity to the various prohibitions which are classed together as gennas (taboos). It may therefore be regarded as a fundamental law, and constitutes the essence of their social fabric.¹⁵

✓ An interesting feature of Naga marriage is the institution of bride-price. The bride price varies considerably from tribe to tribe. Nagas consider bride-price as the symbolic expression of the recognition of a girl's social and economic worth. A Naga girl is an economically productive member. She contributes substantially towards the welfare of the house. Bride-price is therefore paid as token compensation since by marriage all her services are to be transferred to the boy's family. Some have interpreted bride-price as reflecting poorly on women's status because they feel that women are being purchased like commodities. But this is not true, at least in the Naga society. It should be kept in mind that a

15. Ibid, p. 89.

woman's ties with her kin are never totally severed even after marriage. Marriage (and bride-price) do not bind a woman permanently to her husband. In case of incompatibility a divorce can be worked out. Should the husband unjustly maltreat the wife, the duty of revenge rests with the wife's natal clan.

DIVORCE

Divorce, in Naga society, is easy and is fairly common. Dr. Brown¹⁶ remarks that, "In the event of either married party wishing a divorce, the rule is that, should the consent be mutual, there is no difficulty, the couple simply separate. If the wish for a separation comes from the woman, and the husband is agreeable, her price is to be returned; but if the man wishes to send away his wife, which he may do with or without her consent, then he is not entitled to it".

✓ The procedure for divorce looks simple and fair enough, but a closer scrutiny reveals the unequal position of men and women concerning their options and the accompanying consequences.

"If the wish for a separation comes from the woman, (1) and the husband is agreeable, (2) her price

16. Cited in T.C. Hodson, The Naga Tribes of Manipur, p. 97.

is to be returned,".

- (1) The implication is that even if a woman desires a separation the husband's consent is necessary without which the divorce cannot be effected.
- (2) In cases where the move for divorce is initiated by the woman, not only is the husband's consent required, but what is more important the woman is required to return the bride-price which was paid to her kin at the time of marriage. The situation being so, men and women are not on par with each other in their choice of opting out of marriage. Men definitely have more freedom of choice. Women, on the other hand, are considerably restrained by the necessity of having to return the bride-price were they to initiate the move for divorce.

This picture would become clear once we closely examine the rule attached to bride-price when the move for divorce is initiated by men. According to this rule "if the man wishes to send away his wife,

- (1) which he may do with or without her consent
- (2) then he is not entitled to the bride-price"

- (1) Here, we see a striking contrast in the case of the decision to separate being made by the man. The divorce can be done with or without the wife's consent. There is no parallel obligation on the part of the man to obtain the other party's consent as is the case when it is the woman who wants the divorce.
- (2) When it is the man who asks for the divorce he is not entitled to get the bride-price back. This is a grand statement which makes it seem as if the man is really forfeiting something, but this is not so. The bride-price is paid as token compensation in recognition of the girl's social and economic worth and the loss of services which the girl's family would suffer on account of her marriage. It should be kept in mind that after marriage the woman performs services for the husband's family which would otherwise have accrued to the woman's natal family. The bride-price, therefore, is not something due which can be reclaimed later on. It has been compensated for by the wife's services. However, it would be wrong to suppose a one to one relationship

between the bride-price and the woman's services. This would tantamount to considering women as commodities. The bride-price is token compensation and not the actual worth of the woman. The point to be noted is that the man, by divorcing his wife and thereby not being entitled to get the bride-price back, is not really forfeiting anything. He is just stating to forego something which is not due to him anymore. The fact is that the man is making a decision which concerns his wife without taking her will or consent into consideration. His supposed forfeiture of the bride-price does not in any way set the balance right.

INHERITANCE AND SUCCESSION

Rules of inheritance relate to a mode of acquiring property and of succeeding to office which is occasioned by events, such as death, which cause a discontinuity of possession. Property, for the Nagas, primarily consists of land and movables.¹⁷

Primogeniture is the usual accepted rule of succession to village office, but there is great

17. J.H. Hutton, The Sema Nagas, p. 155.

variety in the usages regulating inheritance to land and other property.

Among the Aos all sons inherit more or less equally¹⁸ though the eldest may get a little more than the others. The Tangkhuls give the eldest son the lion's share of the property including the house, while the rest of the sons get an equal share.¹⁹

Among the Maos a special share is given to the eldest son, but the house is usually reserved for the youngest son. This practice is similar to that of the Angamis²⁰ where the youngest son inherits the house plus an equal share of the rest of the property portioned out by the father among his sons while he was still alive.

Whatever the variations in the mode of inheritance among the various tribes, there is a principle which runs consistent in all of them. This principle dictates that women cannot inherit land or immovable property. The Naga law of inheritance permits only males to inherit immovable property. Females have no such right. Hutton records it thus:

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18. J.P. Mills, The Ao Nagas (Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 190.
19. M. Horam, Naga Polity (Delhi: B.R. Publishing Corporation, 1975), p. 92.
20. J.H. Hutton, The Angami Nagas (London: Macmillan & Co., Ltd., 1921), pp. 135-6.

"Although women can possess movable property in absolute ownership, they cannot, however, possess land unless they have bought it, and even then they do not seem able to bequeath it as they please, for the sons or other male heirs will claim the land in virtue of the disability of women to inherit or possess it".²¹

Widows are well provided for and girls may receive property as gift from their parents at marriage, otherwise they have no legal share. A widow is entitled to use her husband's lands and house during her lifetime, but in case of her remarrying, she has no right to her previous husband's land or house.²² Since women cannot succeed to immovable property, in default of sons, the property goes to the nearest male relatives. In case there are no close male relations, the kindred inherits, and failing the kindred, the clan.²³

Given the fact that Naga society is primarily based on agriculture, the Naga Law of Inheritance is incongruous with the usual notion that Naga

21. J.H. Hutton, The Sema Nagas, p. 186.

22. M.Horam, Naga Polity, p. 92.

23. J.H. Hutton, The Angami Nagas, p. 136.

society is an egalitarian society. Land is the main force of production, and the collective deprivation of women of this productive component clearly indicates a dichotomy in the power-scale between the sexes. Land and power are phenomena which reinforce each other. A deprivation of the former is bound to result in the seclusion from the latter.

ECONOMY

Agriculture is the mainstay of the Nagas. The most common form of cultivation is that of slash - and - burn (jhum cultivation). This type of cultivation is well suited to the mountainous country of tropical zones where the rainfall is substantial. It cannot, however, support a very dense population, but where land is plentiful and cultivation could alternate with long periods of fallow, the yield from slash-and-burn cultivation is not necessarily inferior to that attained by more permanent forms of tillage.

The Tangkhuls and Angamis practice wet cultivation and terraced cultivation. The Angami has an elaborate system of terracing and irrigation by which he turns the steepest hill sides into flooded rice-fields.²⁴

24. Ibid, p. 72.

The principal crops of the Nagas are rice, millet, maize and Job's tears. Alongwith paddy other crops such as taro, pumpkin, beans, etc. are grown.

✓ Rice is by far the most important and also the most highly valued crop. Furer-Haimendorf²⁵ records that among the Konyak Nagas the sowing of rice and millet was done exclusively by men, but women working in a line behind the sower, covered the grain with earth. The planting as well as the harvesting of taro was exclusively women's work. Using digging sticks and small dao, they dug holes, and in these they planted the tubers. A man would have been ashamed even to carry taro to or from the fields.

It is interesting that men and women should be associated with particular crops. And it is no coincidence that men are associated with the crop which is most important and highly valued. This is one of the many subtle ways in which the idea of male superiority is perpetuated. It promotes the notion that all the important things in life are the prerogatives of men.

Besides agriculture, animal husbandry form an important aspect of Naga economy. The usual livestock

25. Christoph V. Furer-Harinendorf, The Konyak Nagas (Helt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969), p. 32.

consists of mithun, buffaloes, cows, pigs, goats, dogs and fowls.

In so far as domestic crafts are concerned there is a rigid division of labour between the sexes.²⁶ While in agriculture men and women co-operate in many tasks, women are never seen making baskets, carrying wood, or working metal, and men take no part in spinning, weaving, dyeing yarn, etc.

Basketry is an important craft, for baskets are required for the transport and storage of most commodities. People setting out for work on the fields invariably transport their implements in a basket; at harvest time the crop is brought home in large conical baskets, and in the granaries rice is stored in big flat-based, coarsely woven basket bins. Baskets are also the only receptacles for the storage of textiles and valuables, and bamboo mats serve as seats and as convenient ground cover for such operations as the drying of rice and vegetables.²⁷

Just as basketry, blacksmithry etc. are domains of men, so are weaving, pottery, dyeing, etc. the domains of women, Weaving is done exclusively by women

26. Ibid, p. 17.

27. Ibid.

and it forms an important industry. Women weave clothes for the whole family. This essential commodity is not easily available as there are no commercial enterprises. The entire household is therefore dependant on the female members for their clothing.

The commodities manufactured by men and women are of equal value. If baskets and agricultural implements are essential, so also are clothes and potteries. In the absence of a market economy based on money, barter is the principal method of trade. In this barter system there are no particular standard value attached to a particular commodity. The exchanges take place on the basis of mutual consent between two parties according to their requirements. There was, however, a currency of a sort in conch shells and iron. Iron was used by AOS as currency in the form called "Chabili", a piece of thin iron, roughly key-shaped and about eight inches long. These were however, tokens only, and had no intrinsic value and as such were not popularly used.

Furer - Haimendorf²⁸ has suggested that a clear division of labour between the two sexes favoured the mutual respect of men and women. The husband is recognized as the head of the family and the owner of the marital home, for the house stands on a site

28. Ibid, p.80.

belonging to his lineage, within the limits of his word, and his clansmen have helped in its construction. It is his duty to maintain the house and the granaries and to provide or replace the furnishings. He produces or purchases all wooden and metal implements as well as the baskets required in the household. The wife prepares and cooks the food and weaves all textiles not purchased from other villages. Just as a man owns his weapons and working implements, so a woman has her personal cooking utensils, looms, and textiles.

✓ The sexual division of labour is usually regarded as a source of gender inequality. The general idea is that the sexual division of labour brings about the private/public dichotomy whereby women are confined within the house and relegated to household chores. The work done by the woman in the house is underscored in a number of ways and she is made supposedly dependant on the man who is considered the real earner. The family has also often been seen as perpetuating gender inequality. The argument is that the family is not a homogenous unit. All members do not stand in equal relation to each other. This being so, the family itself becomes a mechanism for fostering gender inequalities.

Let us examine the Naga situation in the light of the foregoing contentions. The sexual division of labour among the Nagas does not really bring about a private/public dichotomy. It is true that there is a division of duties whereby men perform the heavy work and women the lighter ones. But women are not relegated to household chores only. They also participate in agricultural tasks in cooperation with men. Moreover, they are economically active by making pots and weaving clothes. As regards the family the father is recognized as the head of the household. However, as the family is also a productive unit a woman's influence on economic decisions is considerable.²⁹ The woman, being an economically productive member, occupied an important place in the family. It is not, therefore, economic dependance which prevents women from being placed on par with men in Naga society. The inequality between the sexes can be discerned only in more subtle forms like gennas (taboos) rituals, customs, etc. which exclude women from certain activities like participating in religious ceremonies and politics.

POLITY

In Naga polity, the village is the unit of organization. Every village forms a distinct political unit. Villages are generally ruled by chieftains. And if at one

29. Ibid.

end of the scale there is 'kingship', e.g. among the Konyaks, on the other there are tribes like the Angamis who do not have any chiefs worth the name, their villages being held together by an extremely loose form of democracy.³⁰

In some tribes chieftainship is hereditary whereas in some others the chiefs are either elected or selected for a definite period of time. In the former the law of primogeniture is usually/generally observed. In the latter a simple procedure of selection is followed. A meeting* of all adult males of the village is held on the village green. There is no secrecy in the method of selection. The elders of the different clans, after a certain amount of discussion, come to the point and suggest the name.³¹ The suggested name is usually the unanimous choice of almost the entire village.

Before the official meeting of the selection, the candidature of a person has already been discussed round the family hearths, on the way to the fields, in the village sitting/out places and certainly during the gossip hours. Therefore, the name suggested at the selection meeting is almost usually the unanimous choice of the village. In cases where there is some dissent, the issue is settled by a majority of for or against the candidature. Here, hands are

30. M. Horam, Naga Polity, p. 73.

* Women are always excluded at such meetings.

31. Ibid, p. 75.

raised and counted to decide the issue. Only the heads of households can participate in this thereby automatically excluding women.

Though the power to govern is vested in the chief, his authority is not absolute. He rules with the aid of elected Councillors. The election of Councillors is popular and it is customary to give representation to all the clans residing in the village. Clan heads usually become Councillors. These Councillors, with their chiefs form what is known in the Tangkhul dialect as 'Hangvano', in the Ao dialect as 'Tatars', in the Sema dialect as 'Chochomi', and in the Lotha dialect as 'Pangti'.³²

Naga polity is conspicuous in its total exclusion of women's participation. Where chieftainship is hereditary, it is the eldest sons who succeed to office. Succession by daughters is not tolerated or accepted. It is unheard of. In cases where the chiefs are elected or selected, women are not allowed to participate in the process. The Councillors who aid the chief in governing the village are usually the clan heads. And clan heads invariably are all males, the Naga society being patriarchal and patrilineal.

The decisions taken by the chief and the Village Council affect all members of the village including men and

32. Ibid., p. 70.

women. Since women have no place in the political set-up they do not have any say in the decisions being taken. This clearly puts them at a disadvantage with men. The inequality between men and women in Naga society seems to be most pronounced and obvious in this area.

The only role that women have in determining the power structure of the village seems to be the political alliances they bring about between villages through marriage, especially if the women are from chiefly clans. The rule of exogamy demands that men marry from outside their clans. Though people usually marry within the village, there are times when brides are taken from another village. If the brides happen to be from the chief's clan the union serves to promote friendly relations between the villages. There are instances where such marital unions are arranged in order to form political alliances between several villages so as to counter the threat of political hegemony of a strong village or another political group of villages as the case may be. Here, women are instrumental in maintaining a balance of power in a particular area.

CHAPTER III

GENNAS AND GENDER ASYMMETRY

Before the advent of Christianity, the religion of the Nagas could be described as 'animism'. They believed in a host of spiritual beings, both benevolent and malevolent. All natural phenomena which were beyond their comprehension and control were ascribed as being the handiwork of these mysterious powers.

The religious organisation of the Nagas is simple. There is usually a village priest¹ who is called the 'Yangvao' by the Tangkhuls, 'Yimsosang' by the Aos and 'Phichii-u' by the Angamis. The village priest plays a predominant part in the various gennas and predicts good or bad omens. Besides the village priest, the village chief and the head of the family also perform religious duties. The village chief can officiate on behalf of the village, and the head of the family can perform religious duties on behalf of his household.

All religious activities are accompanied by a genna whereby the normal course of life is temporarily disturbed. Genna may be understood in two senses. Firstly, it means anything that is forbidden or prohibited. Secondly, it refers to a sort of holiday (day of festivity) on which no work is being done by the people of an entire

1. M. Horam, Naga Polity, pp. 74-79.

village. Thus if a man says that his village is observing genna he means to say that owing to the occurrence of a village festival or some important occasion his people are abstaining from their normal duties and enjoying a kind of holiday.

Gennas are social means consciously directed to the realization of well-recognized social ends. There are village gennas, household gennas and also gennas based on the classification of society by age, sex, and social duties.²

Village gennas are observed at important stages of the agricultural cycle such as sowing, transplanting and reaping. The appearance of epidemics also occasions a genna, whose purpose is obviously prophylactic. The occurrence of unusual events such as eclipses and earthquakes also make it necessary to observe a genna. Some village gennas are therefore of regular periodic occurrence while others are held only after the occurrence of some abnormal event.

On the occasion of these gennas the male element is separated from the female element of society, thus affecting a resolution of society into its components. The two sexes cook and eat apart and sexual intercourse is forbidden. This seems to be related to the concept of defilement

2. T.C. Hodson, The Naga Tribes of Manipur, p. 184.

associated with the female sex. And defilement is associated with danger. Therefore, warriors, when preparing for and returning from a raid, are forbidden sexual intercourse, a prohibition which leads to the inference that as they are specially liable to danger, all acts that increase their liability to danger must be avoided.

Gennas serve to emphasize the distinction between men and women which in turn re-inforce the division of society by sex lines. That society is divided along sex lines can be observed by the food taboos imposed on women but not on men. The idea behind these taboos is that the quality of the thing eaten pass into the eater. So, unmarried women are not allowed to eat the flesh of goats and that of all male animals. The explanation given seems to be that since goats are known for their sexual proclivity this quality is not desirable in unmarried women. As regards eating the flesh of male animals it is assumed that this would hamper the reproductive function of women. There seems to be an attempt on the one hand, to ensure that women's reproductive function remains intact, and on the other, to restrict their sexuality.

In keeping with the belief that the quality of the thing passes on to the eater, men are usually averse to eating the flesh of female animals. But in their case, the abstention is by choice and not force upon them by social taboos.

Birth of children occasions a household genna. Among the Tangkhuls³ and the Semas,⁴ the household observes genna for six days for a male child, and five days for a female child. The head of the household sacrifices a fowl of the same sex of the child. The fowl is then eaten by the mother. During the period of the genna, strangers are not allowed to enter the house, and the parents of the child do not leave the house except to answer the calls of nature.

The association of the number six with boys and five with girls is also found among the Ao Nagas. J.P. Mills⁵ writes how at the time of birth the father cuts the umbilical cord with a bamboo knife. Six such knives are prepared by the father before the child's birth, one being thrown away if the child proves to be a daughter. The after-birth is washed and disposed off in the following manner. The father places it in a basket lined with leaves, and some distance behind the house, but exactly in line with the hearth, makes a sort of pen rack about six feet high of crossed sticks

3. Ibid, p. 177.

4. J.H. Hutton, The Sema Nagas, p. 233.

5. J.P. Mills, The Ao Nagas, pp. 264-65.

and bamboos. For a boy he uses three sticks and three bamboos (totalling six) and for a girl two sticks and three bamboos (totalling five). On this he places the basket flanked with six (or five, if for a girl) imitation snares made of slips of bamboo.

Incidentally, the Nagas associate the number six with good luck and five with bad luck. The significance of this distinction may be gauged in the manner in which the two numbers are used in the aghupfu genna* where six symbolizes the victor and five the vanquished. In subtle ways this seem to imply a sort of positive and negative connotation for the male and the female child respectively.

Gennas, therefore, re-emphasize the distinction between men and women and often succeed in underscoring women's position in various ways. However, the concept of gender asymmetry among the Nagas is also embodied in their myths and legends. A close examination of the myths related to gennas would reveal this fact. A myth is the story of the first doing of some act that validates some claim in social

* The Sema Nagas observe the aghupfu genna after a successful head-hunting raid. The successful hunters each kill a chicken and tiny scraps of the fowl's flesh are set apart for the ghosts of the enemy. Eleven minute scraps are laid out on two crossed leaves, six pieces in the name of the victor and five in that of the victim. This is important for ensuring victories in the future too.

relations; it explains why what is done today is the right thing to do.⁶

It is said that myths and rituals reinforce each other; that ritual is the expression of myth. In Naga society rituals are occasioned by gennas. Among all the gennas, the Angamis consider the Terhenyi genna as the most important. This genna lasts for ten days and celebrates the bringing of the harvested crops home. On this occasion, ceremonial dress is worn and dhan (paddy) is founded.

The Terhenyi genna itself is embodied in myth. The myth as recorded by Hutton⁷ is reproduced below:

Once upon a time an old woman lived at Merema village with an unmarried daughter. One day, when going home from her fields a terhoma called Ziso followed her and put his hands over her eyes from behind. The old woman said "who are you? Go away!" But Ziso said, "I will not let you go unless you promise me your daughter in marriage". So she promised and was released, but looking around saw no one. A few days later the same thing happened again, and again she promised, going home

6. Lucy Mair, An Introduction to Social Anthropology,

(Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1984), p.255.

7. J.H. Hutton, The Angami Nagas, pp. 201-203.

very sad at heart.

Now one day the daughter went with her companions to work in the fields, and as she was coming home she lagged behind the others. Suddenly Ziso caught hold of her and took her to his lair and she lived with him as his wife.

A year later she came back to her mother's house and said to her, "My husband is a very handsome and wealthy man; come with me and ask of him whatever you will, and you will receive it. But I tell you this now; there is a small basket hanging on the right-hand side of the middle room of his dwelling, in which all kinds of animals are kept. Ask for nothing save only that basket". Then, taking some husks of corn, they set out for the daughter's house, dropping husks along the road for fear of the old woman's losing her way home again.

After staying some days with her son-in-law, the old woman said she must go home. Then Ziso said, "Tell me, mother-in-law, what would you like, and I will give it." And the old woman answered, "Many things I would like, but I cannot carry them, so I will ask only for that little basket hanging in the middle room, for me to keep my yeast

in". But Ziso was troubled at her saying and said, "Mother-in-law, do not ask for that but ask for something else." But the woman answered, "I am an old woman. I cannot carry heavy things." Then Ziso gave her the small basket, saying, "Don't open the cover in the road or anywhere until you reach home. Then put a fence about it, and shut the door when you open the basket, and don't go out for five days." So the old woman started home with the basket.

But about halfway the old woman found the basket very heavy, and herself longing to open it. So she took off the lid, and behold! Animals of every kind, mithun, boars, birds, mice and every sort of beast and flying thing, and those which were able to fly and run swiftly came forth and fled, and those unable to get away were again shut in by the old woman as she put back the lid. Then she came to her house and shut the door and opened the basket, and the animals which remained-mithun, cows, pigs, dogs and fowls-came out of the basket, and she kept them in the house with the door shut for five days and they all became tame. These animals are called the woman's share" (thenyuma ri) and may be given by a man to his daughter; the

wild beasts are spoken of as the "man's share" (Thepvuma ri).

The following year the old woman's daughter and her son-in-law came to visit her and found her house filled with domestic animals. And Ziso said to his mother-in-law, "Kill these fat bulls and eat them in my name". And so this festival is kept every year and called Terhengi (Terho-ngi; 'the spirits feast'), for Ziso was a spirit.

The myth of the spirit's feast has an important bearing on the Naga law of inheritance. The myth mentions the "woman's share" (mithuns, cows, pigs, dogs and fowls) which may be given by a man to his daughter. This is in opposition to land which may go only to the male heirs. Thus, in Naga society, women can succeed only to moveable property. The myth indicates that the present social condition arises from the old woman's action. The old woman was given clear instructions by Ziso, the spirit, not to open the cover of the basket until she reached home. However, halfway through the journey the old woman was so curious to see what was inside the basket that she removed the lid. In the process many animals fled and she could retain only the mithun, cows, pigs, dogs and fowls. These animals are referred to as her share.

She could have had more, but had to forego the others because of her mistake.

This myth provides an ideological base for justification of the laws of inheritance. Women had their chance of getting more property. They lost that chance through their own mistake. And now, they have to be content with their share of moveable property. Land, which is the main force of production for the society's economy, must of necessity be in men's possession. As demonstrated by the myth, women cannot be trusted with important things. And hence, the Naga law of inheritance stipulates that women can succeed only to moveable property and not to land which is the most important productive resource of the society.

The Terhengi genna is observed every year just after harvest. By being linked to a myth, the observance of this genna not only serves to validate the idea of gender inequality among the people but also gives an ideological base to it. This ideological base in turn, provides the explanation for legitimation of the social order, in this particular case, the Naga law of inheritance. There is thus, an interplay of myth, ritual and reality.

The Naga law of inheritance which allows only men to inherit land has significant implications concerning the gender relations in the society. It is bound to affect the power scale between the sexes. As agriculture is

the mainstay of the people, the importance of land cannot be over-emphasized. It is the main force of production and those who have access to it will naturally have an advantage over those who do not. Because men own land and women do not, their relationship reflects disparities in various ways. A Naga woman is an economically productive member. She weaves cloth for the whole family and also makes pots for their daily use. These are essential commodities and in the absence of market alternatives her contributions are indispensable. Besides these, she also participates in agricultural tasks. In fact, in times of war, the woman shoulders all the responsibilities of maintaining the house as well as tending the fields. And yet her importance is underscored on the premise that the land on which she works belongs to the man. Since the man owns the land she is made dependant on him even if she does all the work of making the land productive.

The Naga law of inheritance which reserves land exclusively for men is, therefore, a principal factor which promotes the idea of inequality between men and women. All aspects of Naga life are closely interlinked with agriculture. Any inequality that is inherent in the agricultural production will also naturally permeate into other activities.

CHAPTER - IV

REPRODUCTION : SYMBOLIC CONNOTATIONS

Reproduction, ' the most essentially female function of all '¹, is usually considered to be the basic feature which differentiates women from men. Even if men can do everything a woman can, they still cannot concieve and give birth. And, whatever men may do about it women remain the main agents of genetic reproduction.² This being so, women ought to be in a superior position in relation to men, but in most societies of the world this has not been the case. What could be a source of power for women, paradoxically, becomes something which makes them vulnerable and powerless. This is so because men gained domination over women through the control of their sexuality and the right they claim over the progeny.

Dube³ has shown how the symbolic connotations of biological reproduction among the Hindus (as expressed in the metaphor of 'seed and earth') serve to justify their existing social order as a kind of natural arrangements.

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1. Helen Callaway, 'The most Essentially Female Function of All: Giving Birth' in Shirley Ardener (ed.) Defining Females (London: Groom Helm, 1978), P-164.
 2. Claude Meillassoux, 'The Pregnant Male' in Leela Dube et al (eds.) op. cit., P-16.
 3. Leela Dube, ' Seed and Earth' : The Symbolism of Biological Reproduction and Sexual Relations of Production' in Leela Dube etal (eds.) op. cit.

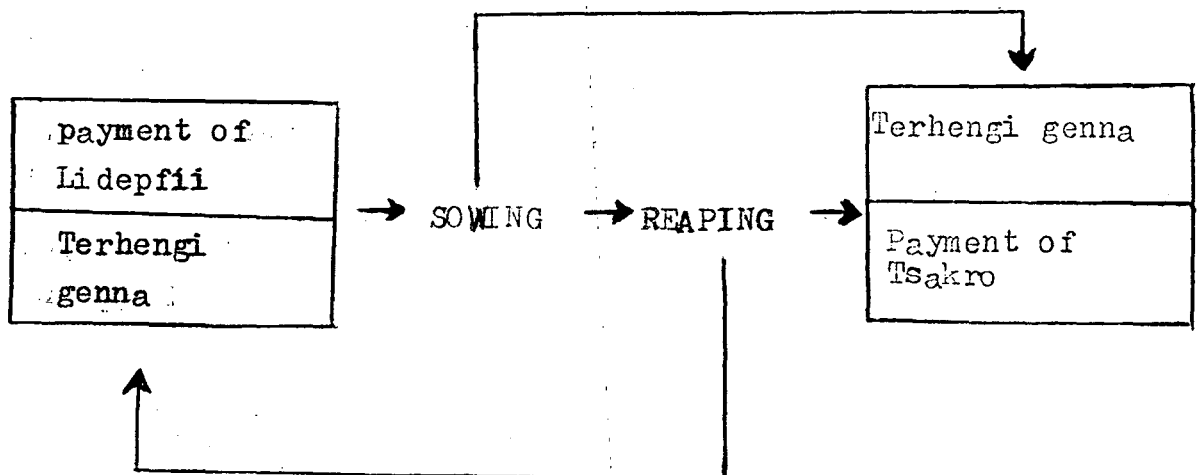
In Naga literature there is no mention of this metaphor which directly refers to the process of biological reproduction. However, the Naga concept of reproduction and their idea of the respective contribution of the male and female parents in the process of reproduction is clearly expressed in their story of creation and agricultural practices.

Hutton⁴ has recorded a usage connected with agricultural operations among the Angami Nagas according to which a man is selected for sowing and a woman for reaping. The "Tsakro" is the old man whose duty it is to begin the sowing; until he has formally inaugurated the sowing of the crop it is forbidden for any man to sow. The "Lidepfi" is the old woman who in a corresponding manner inaugurates the reaping of the crop. For both the Tsakro and the Lidepfi it is genna to work in their own fields for thirty days, the period during which the ceremonies of first sowing or reaping are performed. For the services rendered each of them receives a sort of payment from the produce of the land and at the appointed time sends four or five men of the clan to which he or she belongs to collect a contribution of a small basket of paddy from every house in the clan. The Tsakro collects his payment after the Terhenqi, the Genna which follows the harvest, and the Lidepfi collects hers after the Sekrenqi genna which precedes the sowing.

4. J.H.Hutton, 'The Angami Nagas', P-189.

It is interesting to note that a man should be selected for sowing and a woman for reaping. Hutton has remarked that this could possibly be connected with the "spending" and "storing" functions which have been attributed to the male and female in nature respectively.

Of particular interest is the way in which the man and woman collect the payment for their services. They do not collect their payment immediately after performing the service. The man collects his payment just after harvest and the woman collects hers just before sowing. There is a cyclical pattern in the process of sowing, reaping and payment. Graphically the process may be illustrated as follows:-



In analytical terms this process has a close similarity with the Naga marriage rites and their concept of the process of human reproduction. Here, the principal actors are the man who sows and the woman who reaps.

Obviously, one cannot reap without something being sown first. So, what is implicitly stated here is the predominance of men over women. It is true that women do the nurturing both when the child is within the womb and after birth but it is men who own the child. The role of men in initiating the process of reproduction is capitalised upon to justify men's domination over women and their control over the progeny.

Just as the man collects his payment for sowing after the harvest is over in the process of human reproduction too man reaps the fruit of his conjugal act after the birth of the child. Control over the progeny is the payment for his service of sowing. On the other hand, the woman for performing the service of reaping (nurturing and reproduc-ing) gets her payment just before sowing. If we consider sowing as the act of consummation at marriage, then, the payment which the woman receives just before sowing is the bride-price paid to her family. Bride-price is usually paid as token compensation in recognition of a girl's social and economic worth. In this particular context, bride-price can also be interpreted as the payment to the woman in anticipation of her fertility and the contribution which she would make for the perpetuation of the man's line of decent.

Interpreted thus, it becomes clear that men and women are not equally posited in the process of reproduction. The role of men is overplayed whereas the contribution of women is subtly underscored. In so doing, the symbolic connotations of reproduction serve to justify the social order as being natural and proper.

The concept of creation is another factor which throws light on the relations between men and women in the process of reproduction. Hodson⁵ writes that a common feature of the beliefs held by various Naga Tribes is that the creation of the world is ascribed to the deity who causes earthquakes. Among the Tangkhuls and Mao Nagas it is believed that the world was once a waste of water with neither hills nor trees and the deity imprisoned below made such huge efforts to escape that the hills emerged. To this the Mao Nagas add the belief that the sky is the male principle and the earth the female, and that an earthquake is as it were their conjugal embrace, whence all fertility, all growth on the earth, has its origin.

5. T.C.Hodson, 'The Naga Tribes of Manipur' - P-127.

The grammatical distinctions of gender among the Nagas reveal a classification of things into opposites: right and left; up and down; sky and earth; and so on. It is no coincidence that in their concept of creation the sky is referred to as the male principle, and the earth as the female. The bigger, stronger and higher things in life are always associated with the male and their opposite counterparts with the female. The sky is above the earth, and the earth is below the sky. Hence, the man is higher up than the woman in the natural scheme of things.

The notion that the female gender is lower than the male is reinforced through various social usages, for example, taboos on food. The Nagas never drink milk. The explanation they give for this food taboo is that to drink milk would be to put oneself on the same level with an animal. Since women are biologically endowed with the function of lactation, they are indirectly being associated with animals and ~~therefore~~ to a lower mode of existence.

Some of the food taboos are based on the belief that the qualities of the thing eaten pass into the eater.

No wonder then that some Naga tribes have such an aversion to the flesh of any female, as, in the absence of those of the male kind, to refuse this type of food altogether. Since femaleness is culturally evaluated as lower than maleness the consumption of female flesh is seen as adulterating a person's maleness as it were. These food taboos, therefore, seem to act as continual reminders of the supposed inferiority of females. Over time they come to acquire a character of almost an ideological kind.

A Particularly interesting feature of the creation story is that the earthquake is likened to the conjugal embrace of the sky (male principle) and the earth (female principle). It is from this embrace that all fertility, all growth on earth, has its origin.

The conjugal embrace (earthquake) principally affects the female (the earth). The earth is torn and rent apart by the earthquake. Similarly, among humans when marriage is consummated the virgin wife's hymen tears and rends apart as she becomes one with her spouse. Further, a married woman has to sever her ties with her natal family and go to live with her husband. And just as the earthquake rends the earth, so also marriage

weakens the ties that bind a woman to her kinsmen. The symbolism of the earthquake as being the conjugal embrace of the sky and the earth seems to provide a base for legitimation of the existing patrilineal and patrilocal arrangement.

Descent, in Naga Society, is always reckoned through the male line. The Nagas have a saying which goes as follows:

" It is mother Earth which gives life to every-thing; it is man that makes heaven or inferno of it ".

Here, the mother and earth are likened to each other in that they both are nurturers and sustainers of life. Though life springs from the mother, it is man that determines what kind (Heaven or inferno) it is going to be. This can be interpreted as referring to the prerogative which man has over woman concerning her status and the social placement of their children. The children derive their social identity from the father. This is the accepted rule of society. When divorces do occur, there is hardly ever any dispute concerning rights over the children. It is just taken for granted that the children will remain with the father. If any of the children is still of

tender age and needs the mother's care, the mother may take the child with her, but as soon as the child is weaned, it must be handed over to the father. In case of the death of the father, the widowed mother may continue to live with her children in her husband's house and make use of his land during her lifetime. If she, however, decides to re-marry she has to forfeit all these. Whether she remarries or not her position concerning her rights over the children remain the same. The children will be taken care of by the husband's clan and their descent will also be reckoned likewise.

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Chapter V

CONCLUSION

In the foregoing chapters an attempt has been made to examine the relations between men and women in traditional Naga society. [The traditional Naga society was a classless society. There was, however, a division of society by sex and age. The division of society along sex lines can be judged from the existence of separate houses for men and women (bachelor's dormitory and girl's dormitory) as well as the food taboos imposed on women but not on men. This division is also strongly manifested in the strict separation of the sexes on occasion of gennas. At many levels men and women stood in unequal relations to each other. This inequality, however, differed from sphere to sphere. It was more pronounced in some areas whereas in others it was less visible.

In the economic sphere there was a clear division of labour between the sexes. Men made baskets and iron implements for agricultural purposes and women made pots and wove cloth for the family's use. All these products were essential commodities and had equal use value. In the absence of money economy and the practice of barter as the principal mode of exchange there was no standard value attached to any particular commodity.

However, there was a division of duties whereby men performed the 'hard work' and women the 'easy work'. But women were not confined to domestic chores only. They jointly participated with men in agricultural tasks. Since agriculture was the mainstay of the Nagas their participation in cultivation is significant. This indicates that there was no sharp distinction made between the private and public spheres in the division of labour between the sexes. In times of war, when the menfolk were engaged with the protection of the village, women were not only solely left with the task of maintaining the household but of tending to the agricultural works as well. This gave Naga women a certain amount of discretion in decision making.]

The above picture would give one the impression that there was egalitarian relationship between men and women. The sexual division of labour arising out of the private/public dichotomy has often been explained as the source of gender inequality. In Naga society, however, there is no available evidence to suggest the dichotomisation of the private and public spheres in their economic life. If the sources of gender inequality were really rooted in this dichotomy then one would contend that its absence ought to have promoted social equality between the sexes. But evidence present in Naga society disproves this contention.

This raises certain theoretical issues. It would mean that one has to examine other areas of social life to locate the sources of gender inequality in their society.

Our data indicate that access or non-access to the forces of production greatly determine gender relations among the Nagas. The Naga law of inheritance stipulated that only men could inherit land. Women were entitled only to movable property. As agriculture was the mainstay of the society, the importance of land cannot be over-emphasized. It was the main force of production and the non-access of women to this productive resource has been the source of their unequal relationship with men. As all aspects of Naga society were closely inter-linked with agriculture any inequality that was inherent in the agricultural production would of necessity also permeate into other spheres. This inequality was also manifested in the sphere of religion where women played a passive role. They had no active part in religious ceremonies. Their only involvement seems to have been the observance of the prohibitions necessitated by the gennas. These gennas served to re-emphasize the distinction between men and women and succeeded in underscoring women's position by the very nature of their prohibitions.

Thus an important source of gender inequality among the Nagas was the male bias in their inheritance pattern. Similarly, succession to public office such as Kingship or chieftainship strictly followed in the male line. Their society being patriarchal and patrilineal ensured that power and property as well as social legitimacy was passed on down the male line. This meant that men had social and jural rights over the progeny. This was facilitated through the control of women's sexuality. Thus, women's sexuality, more specifically, their reproductive function, became a source of their subjugation to men.

Women's subordination to men because of their reproductive power was also the cause of their exclusion from political activities. In the earlier days political activity was characterized by inter-village feuds which involved fierce fighting and head-hunting. Women were left out of these activities so that they could look after the children and tend to the crops. Moreover, it was necessary to ensure the safety of women since the continuation of the village population depended on their reproductive powers. This was the prime consideration for their being left out of political activities. The exclusion of women from political activities continued even after the head-hunting days were over. Women had no place in the political set-up

of the village. Each village had a chief who was assisted by a council of elders. Where chieftainship was hereditary the eldest son (never a daughter) succeeded to office. In cases where the chiefs were elected or selected, women were not allowed to participate in the process. The village elders who assisted the chief were usually clan heads. And clan heads invariably were all males, the Naga society being patriarchal and patrilineal.

What is significant here is that women's reproductive power, for which they were valued and for which they were left out of political activities so as to be safeguarded, ironically, became a handicap for them whereby they were disabled from participating in village politics.

Women's exclusion from politics was also related to their non-ownership of land. As land and power are phenomena which reinforce each other, their deprivation of the former resulted in their exclusion from the latter. Land disputes used to be one of the main causes for inter-village feuds, and other such deliberations. Since women did not own land they were naturally left out of these activities.* With the passing of time this acquired the

* In those earlier days these activities were what constituted political activity.

character of a normal social custom.

To sum up, evidence from the Naga society indicate that it is the structure of production relations and the role of women in reproduction (including the symbolic connotations) which are the real determinants of gender inequality in society.

However, society is never static. It changes with the passage of time. Over the years the Naga society too has undergone **various** changes. With the changes in society the relations between Naga men and women have also taken new dimensions.

If one single factor is to be pointed out for an overall change in the life of the Nagas, it would undoubtedly be the introduction of Christianity among them.¹

Christianity has been an important factor of social change among the Nagas. It liberated them from a negative religion of taboos. This has great significance for women as they were particularly restricted in animism. To a large extent Christianity has done away with the concept of defilement associated with women in the traditional

1. ~~Khri~~ eleno Terhuja. 'The Christian Church among the Angami Nagas' in K. Suresh Singh (ed.). The Tribal Situation in India (Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1972), p. 294.

society. It has also opened up new avenues for women's wider participation in various activities.

Christianity also heralded the advent of education among the Nagas. Education has provided Naga women with alternatives to traditional roles and functions, and has thereby broadened their mental horizons.

Education has also led to marked improvement in the status of Naga women. Educated Naga women are now engaged in government services and other independent household industries and not in cultivation alone.

The spread of education has also brought about changes in the attitude towards women's participation in political activities (considered as an exclusive male domain in the past). Further, the spate of political modernization taking place in the country after independence opened up new vistas for women's participation in the political arena. Thus by 1970 two Naga women entered the electoral fray for the State Legislature. In 1973, the United Democratic Front elected a woman (Mrs. Rano Shaiza) as its president and emerged as the ruling party under her leadership.² Also in the 1977 general elections out of the

2. K. Meru, "The Role of Women and Now", Highlander, Vol. 3, no. 2, 1971, p. 27.

three Lok Sabha seats in the state one seat was won by a woman (Mrs. Rano Shaiza) in preference to a very senior male politician. All these indicate women's increasing political consciousness and also the significant changes taking place in the attitude of the society as a whole toward their participation in such public activities. It is true that most of the women candidates who contested in the general elections lost, but the reason for their failure would be more of a political kind than a social or religious one.

The present trends indicate that gradual changes are taking place in Naga society. However, these changes are still at the superficial level.

Tradition is so deeply ingrained that there still has not been drastic changes in the social structure. It is true that Christianity and education have brought about changes in the occupational structure and people's values and attitudes. Though the various social institutions are going through modifications the basic social structure is still retained. For instance, kinship rules and inheritance pattern still remain unchanged. However, changes are slowly but surely taking place and gender relations are also coming to acquire new dimensions.

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