

INEQUALITY IN NAGALAND: A CASE STUDY OF 'ADVANCED' AND 'BACKWARD' TRIBES

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Abstract: This paper explores the inequality in Nagaland in terms of unequal development, social position and other related development activities which contribute to differentiate between the two that is 'Advanced and 'backward' tribes. Social inequality is omnipresent, prevalent and resistant to social policies aimed at bringing about a substantial measure of equality in practice. Inequality is in fact inevitable and its presence is felt, not only in capitalist society where there is massive inequality of wealth and income, but also elsewhere in tribal society where there is no regulation of economic markets.

This study would also analyze how the advent of Christianity has led to the emergence of class divisions in certain contexts as there is a generation gap of different tribes. Today, Naga society is polarized into sections of stratified positions of so-called 'advanced' and 'backward' tribes in Nagaland. The designation of 'Backward Tribes' has been tagged on the people who inhabit the eastern districts of Nagaland which borders with Myanmar in the East. And thereby the paper focuses on the four districts in Eastern Nagaland namely Mon, Longleng, Kiphire and Tuensang,

The paper is an attempt to look at how inequalities have multidimensional angles and therefore there is a need to understand in all aspects of social, political, economic and cultural inequalities. The emerging polarized society in this small state is a question of ill-governance of how some sections of people used their hegemonic power over the subaltern subjects. The study is primarily concerned with the challenges which generally observe that the society consists of equality and inequality actually do not exist in a tribal society. However, equality is a value and inequality is an empirical fact which exists in the modern society. And therefore locating the demand of its separate statehood as a result of unequal access to

developmental issues in Eastern Nagaland in India. Thus, the question arises whether one needs to look at state's functionaries or other possible means to which this particular section of people succumbed to their rights to have access to development.

The classification within the Naga tribes has been made with the view to give preferential treatment to those tribes who were lacking in certain spheres. However, the idea of developing and having equal share in all perspectives with an overall and an inclusive manner has met with little success. Nagas in Eastern Nagaland continue to remain 'backward' and less developed when compared with other districts and tribes of Nagaland.

The study also focuses to understand the State policies keeping in mind that Eastern Nagaland does need some special treatment and considerations in the development context specially. While I attempt to explain that genuine state policies positively led to access equal opportunity in the distributive aspects. Ensuring the capability of the backward sections, the state should attempt to bring equal status of human living conditions at least to the possible ways.

Basically, the paper is interested to unfold three categories: unequal development, how Christianity played a vital role in imparting education to advanced tribes and now how they are dominating the minority tribes as a result of demanding its separate state in Eastern Nagaland.

Keywords: Class division, inequality, state policies, tribal society, eastern Nagaland.

INTRODUCTION

Though Nagaland, like all tribal societies, has popularly been viewed as an egalitarian society, it is also important to analyse on the basis of emerging stratification. The paper aims to explore the emergence of class differentiation or rather disparity which is directly related to the

economic changes in this present phenomena. This is necessary because as Karl Marx points out acquisition of economic wealth and position enables the holder to gain power and acquire political influences: because 'better the economic condition, larger the space to exercise his power in the society'. The innumerable disparities and other related development activities which contributes to differentiate between the two that is 'Advanced and 'backward' tribes. This would be correlating with some of the existing data and reports of Nagaland.

When Nagaland was carved out of Assam to be a separate State, certain areas from other regions were also included in the newly formed State. Tuensang district was part of North East Frontier Agency (NEFA), which later was included in Nagaland and form a part of Eastern Nagaland region. The areas in Eastern Nagaland, the Mon and Tuensang districts, were classified as 'Un-administered Areas' during the colonial period. This structural demarcation during the colonial period also led to the continuation of this region being categorized as the 'Backward Areas'. In terms of education and Christianization process, Naga tribes in Eastern Nagaland were late receivers of Western religion and education, as compared to other Naga tribes in Nagaland. However, even after four decades of Statehood, people in Eastern Nagaland remain to be lacking behind in every aspect in comparison to other tribes in the state. Such inequalities indicate that there have been problems in governance and development policies in this tiny State of North-East India.

Social status in the context of present Nagaland

Status refers to the relative rank that an individual holds; this includes rights, duties, and lifestyle, in a social hierarchy based upon honor or prestige. As Bryan Turner observes that "all human societies are characterized by some form of social stratification in terms of class, status and power."¹ The observation continues why are these distinctions and classifications where one is defined either one way or the other or why even being prevalent in tribal society?

Today Nagaland has been stratified in terms of 'class distinctions' within the tribes, more specifically differentiation of 'advanced tribes' and 'backward tribes'. Historical writings on Nagas have shown us some aspects of traditional Naga society and how changes have occurred with the contact of outside world, which also subsequently led to the adoption of modern lifestyles. The denotation or the tagged of

'Backward tribes' has been classified by Government of India as a measure for bringing equality in the society. However, the state government has 'neglected' these communities in their governance and policy implementations, which has consequently resulted in class-like divisions amongst them.

While the impact of Christianity and Education do play a vital role in the creation of stratification to some extent, it is reinforced by the process of uneven development. Christianity and development are as two models that brought tremendous changes in the Naga society which came as a double entity that benefitted many people during 1970s. For the early converts to Christianity, it was an opportunity not only to internalize the ethics and ideology of Christianity but also to avail extensive education. Therefore it is also interesting to look at how the coming of Christianity intervenes in the class stratification because it only benefited some parts of Nagaland. For instance, the first tribes to receive Christianity are Ao, Angami, Sema, Lotha and Rengma tribes and interestingly they also constitute the dominion tribes and occupy the largest opportunities in present day Nagaland.

The works of Christian missionaries and introduction of modern education to Naga society also led to distinctions between 'educated tribes' and 'less-educated tribes' to some extent. Nagaland is not a classless society in contemporary times; it is far more stratified and socially different from one tribe to another. One may argue that the state plays a significant role in the emergence of class in the society. Though the state has significant role in employment generation and up-liftment of the disadvantaged sections, the benefits are rarely distributed equally leading to vast inequality between the people.

Tribal societies are generally considered as cultural isolates, separated in time and space from mainstream society. This geo-historical specificity lent a distinctive quality to the tribal communities in North-East region. Even after sixty years of democratic rule and its integration to India's federal polity, North-East retains a remarkably strong regional identity. It would, however, be wrong to assume that North-east is a homogenous entity characterized by common social or political factors. While there are many common elements that the indigenous populations share with each other, the present picture of the North-east is one of sharp contrasts and contradictions.

¹. Turner, Bryan.S, 1986, *Equality*, Tavistock Publications, London.p.25.

Theoretical underpinnings

Although inequality measures are widely used in sociological research, very few sociologists have contributed to the extensive debate on the measures of inequality that waged among economists and statisticians during the early 1970s.² The criterion degree of inequality is average difference in status between two pairs relative to average status. Another way of looking at inequality is that it refers to the extent to which a status resource is concentrated (Blau, 1977:31).³ The modern version of the ethical approach to inequality measurement was pioneered by Tony Atkinson (1970). He pointed out how the choice between different summary measures of inequality must necessarily involve normative judgments and argued that these normative qualities should be given priority in the choice among specific indices.

As Pederson understands inequality in terms of Relative Deprivation by elaborating the concept of inequality as a common place for sociologists to assume that people are concerned about their relative groups, which means the distributional resources, standing vis-à-vis other people, be it in their immediate environment or other groups in their social structure. Similarly Marx also observed that “our desires and pleasures spring from society; we measure them, therefore, by social and not by objects which serve for their satisfaction” (Lee Rainwater 1974). This explanation puts to shape that because they are of a social nature and also they are of a relative nature.

Similarly, Marx observed that society exists as a class as long as it consists of “antagonistic” relations of production. The disappearance of unequal relations of production leads to the emergence of classless society. The larger debate to disassociate from the distinction is to have an equal resources and distribution because economic power gives wealth also resources and the authorities to control over which men enabled them to exercise political power. Each class of people tended to associate and interact with its own kind and have characteristic outlook and sets of ideas about the world. Thus Marx considered class not simply an ‘economic phenomena’ but a social one, for the position in the system of production determines all his other relationships. The

major institutions of society reflect the interests of the dominant social class. Dahrendorf argues that we can speak of class only where there is inequality in regard to the control over person and not merely in regard to the possession of things. For him “Class is always a category for purpose of the dynamics of social conflict and its structural roots, and as such it has to be separated strictly from stratum as a category of purposes of describing hierarchical systems at a given point of time” (Dahrendorf, 1959: 76).⁴

Harold Laski observed inequality as the rule of limited numbers because it secures freedom only to those whose will is secured. Equality, therefore, means first of all the absence of special privilege.⁵ This questions the reality of minorities because in every step a special package is given which than challenges the very essence of equality. Also one can contemporaneously argue that inequality is the result of modernity and sharp division of labour in society. In Aristotelian sense, “in all states there are three elements: one class is very rich, another very poor and the third is a mean.” and then comes the assessment of the relevance of these divisions for government and politics⁶ (Aristotle: 1912). Rousseau is one of the few first original thinkers who came forward with a sociological explanation of inequality. He tried to explain equality on the basis of natural law. In the state of nature, he says there was complete equality of all, there existed a situation in which no one was superior to anyone else either rank or status. John Locke believed that man in the state of nature was enjoying ideal liberty, free from any social restraints. Therefore, inequality emerged due to man’s divorce from the state of nature.

A thoroughly deprived person, leading a much-reduced life, might not appear to be actually poor in terms of the mental metric of desire and its fulfillment. Recognition of the class analysis also plays a key role in Marx’s theory of exploitation, according to which, “The contrast between people working hard and getting little income while others toil little and enjoy high income is one that has moved social critics to theorize the dichotomy in

²Pedersen, Axel West (1974), “Inequality as Relative Deprivation: A Sociological Approach to Inequality Measurement”, *Acta Sociologica*, Vol. 47, No. 1 (March, 2004), p. 31.

³(Blau, 1977:31), as quoted in Pedersen, Axel West, *Ibid.*, p. 32.

⁴. Dahrendorf, R, (1959: 76) as quoted in Pandey, Rajendra, p. 223.

⁵ Rainwater, Lee, 1974, *Social Problems and Public Policy: Inequality and Justice*, Aldine Publishing Company, Chicago. p. 27.

⁶. Aristotle (1912) as quoted in Pandey, Rajendra, 1982, “Social Inequality: Features, Forms and Functions”, Anuj Publications, Lucknow, p. 15.

different ways.⁷ Dahrendorf (1969:17) poses four relevant questions about the problem of inequality, these are: (1) Why is there inequality among men? (2) Where do its causes lie? (3) Can it be reduce, or even abolish altogether? (4) Do we have to accept it as a necessary element in society?⁸

Thus social inequality is multi-dimensional and dynamic, it is not monolithic. But here, one may argue that property, education and political power do contribute to the marking of social positions in the society. Inequality is not opposite to equality theoretically as well as empirically. It is a relational phenomenon, and not an absolute one. It has to be seen in relation to one another at the levels of individuals, families and groups. Family, for example, consists of both relations of inequality and equality among its members.

Two schools of Thought on inequality

Functionalists and non-functionalists'

According to functionalist theory, every society has different social positions, all of them not being of equal value. For them inequality of rewards is necessary in a differentiated society in order that the more difficult or important occupations, those demanding long training in special skills or involving heavy responsibilities, can be effectively carried out. In all societies two factors are always involve that is, importance of different positions in the society and the value of qualifications needed for their performance determine the unequal distribution of income, prestige and power. Also it is necessary because in absence of inequality, the society cannot allocate the different roles to its members.

This school of thought also argues that "the stratification is a device by which societies ensure that the most important positions are conscientiously filled by the most qualified persons" and the positions most remunerative in terms of income, status, and power are those which have the greatest importance for society and, require the greatest amount of training. This way of positioning the society where it is stratified for the better functioning which would basically have less impact and does not seem to

qualify especially in the case of socially backward sections.

This explanation substantiate that the most qualified persons or the most deserving ones fill the most important positions is not effectively applied to all people especially those from the deprived and marginalized section of society. Despite their skilled and deserved capabilities, they have little access to the opportunities as they are often enmeshed in politics, which means political power does effect the social position. Since those who have accumulated wealth, prestige and power tend to perpetuate their grips on these benefits and pass them on to their offspring and wards who harvest these rewards.

Non-functionalists perspective on Inequality

Dahrendorf, a conflict theorist, makes an improvement over the functionalist theory of stratification and presents a more balanced view. According to him "inequality always implies the gain of one group at the expense of others, thus every system of social stratification generates protest against its principles and bears the seeds of its own suppression" (Dahrendorf, 1968:177-178). He further argued that the origin of inequality is thus to be found in the existence in all human societies of norms and behaviour to which sanctions are attached (1968:169). The origin of social inequality lies neither in human nature nor in a historically dubious conception of private property. It lies in certain features of all human societies, which are necessary to them. The conflict school of thought holds the view that stratification in society is the result of domination of some and subjugation of others.

'Advanced' and 'Backward' tribes in Nagaland

Presently there are 17 recognized tribes each having a specific geographical area and out of which six are considered backward tribes in Nagaland who inhabits Eastern Nagaland. They are Khamniungan, Chang, Phom, Sangtam, Konyak, and Yimchunger. These tribes are considered as the most discriminated and undeveloped in Nagaland. Their concerns are rarely figured in any discussions or policy making in the state level. Today however there is a new awareness among them exemplified by the demand for a separate State for Eastern Nagaland and new identity assertion.

⁷. Sen, Amartya, "Inequality, Capabilities and Need", *Science and Society*, Vol.59, No. 4 (Winter 1995-1996), p. 564.

⁸. Dahrendorf (1969:17), as quoted in Sharma, K.L, 1997, *Social Stratification in India: Issues and Themes*, Sage Publications, New Delhi. p.17.

Table 1. Nagaland Map



Table 2: Representation of Employment Status in Government Jobs

Population census 2011 with job representation						
Name of a State	Sl.No	Name of a district	Total population district wise	Grand total population	Advanced /Backward tribes population	Govt. employees against total population
NAGALAND	1	Peren	94954	19,80,602	(Advanced tribes) 14,08,504	97%
	2	Mokokchung	193171			
	3	Zunheboto	141014			
	4	Wokha	166239			
	5	Dimapur	379769			
	6	Phek	163294			
	7	Kohima	270063			
	8	Longleng	50593			
	9	Kiphire	74033		(Backward tribes) 5,72,098	3%
	10	Tuensang	196801			
	11	Mon	250671			

Source: Employment Census: Nagaland State Govt. Employees as of 28th February 2011 of Eastern Nagaland under Eastern Nagaland People’s Organization (ENPO) Konyak, Phom, Chang, Sangtam, Yimchunger, Khiamniungan Published & Printed by Eastern Nagaland People’s Organization (ENPO) HQ: Tuensang

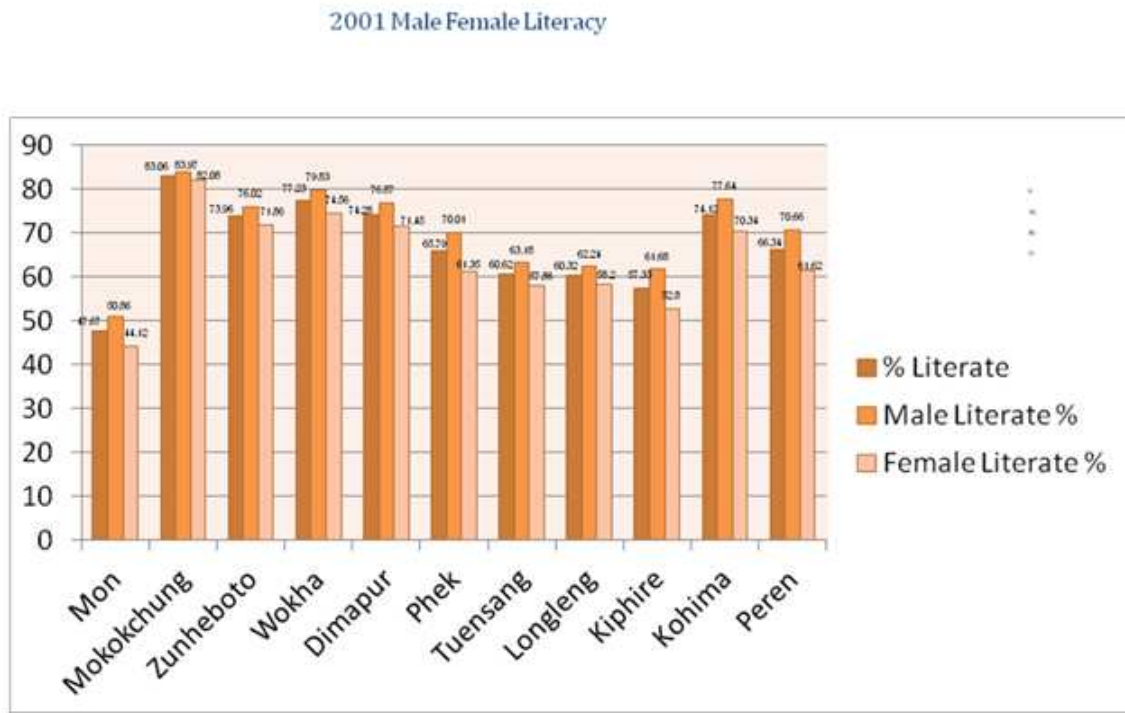


Figure 1: 2001 Male and female literacy rates

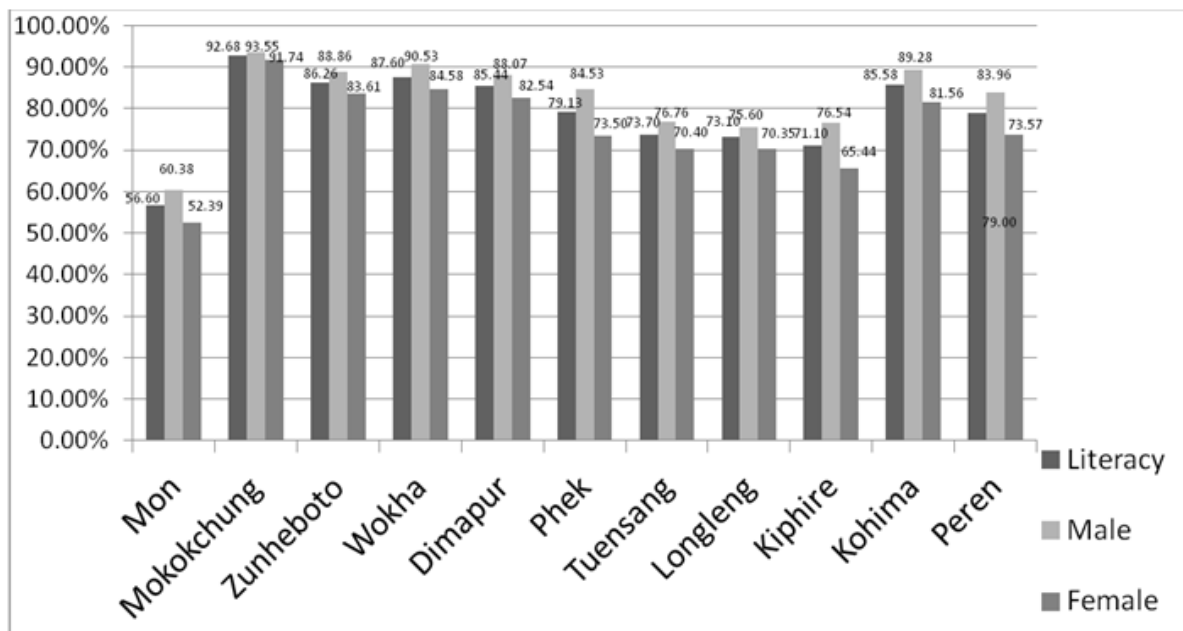


Figure 2: 2011 Male and female literacy rates

Source: (<http://updateox.com/india/district-wise-male-female-literacy-rate-in-india-2011-census/>)

As it is witness day today debate of this present phenomena, and at the same time the status of Eastern Nagaland was found out that it was less than 3% of the backward tribes (Eastern Nagaland) are employed in the government jobs while the total population constituted nearly 45 % of the indigenous inhabitants as per Employment Census (Nagaland State Govt. Employees)⁹. The ongoing Statehood demand claims that almost all the decision making or policy matters, the elites amongst the Naga tribes, for instance the majority tribe like Ao, Angami, Sema, Chakhesang, presence is always high and played the determining role. Although, Konyak tribe constitute the major tribe in terms of population, it never has enough space to represent themselves in decision making bodies. In 2001 census report Konyak population is 2, 50,671 with the literacy rate of 47.67%, whereas Ao population is 1,93,271 with 83.06% literacy rate.

Analysis

With different approaches and theories, there is a substantiated element of generalizing society into two categories. And the unanswered questions always click on as why there should be distinctions or even disparity in a given context especially in a small state? The theory explains that inequality should have the absence of special privilege and favor the most qualified person to fill the top position. However when one is not given the opportunity how one is expected to filled the desired position? There is a necessity for better infrastructure and job opportunities so as to produce good literacy rate and equal distribution as it is shown in the above table where the four districts namely Mon, Tuensang (consist of six tribes) Longleng and Kiphire are ranked much lower than the rest of the districts and hardly there is any improvement from 2001 and 2011 report on literacy rate and job representation as per the given table. The comparisons of the job representation, 2001 and 2011 literacy rates have been made so as to draw an analytical conclusion that adequate distribution and recognition is required. Whether interms of job opportunities, wellbeing, livelihood, access to education, gender ratio there is a certain steps to be taken so as to uplift the weaker section in the Eastern part of Nagaland.

Conclusion

⁹ . *Employment Census: (Nagaland State Govt. Employees)* As of 28th February 2011 of Eastern Nagaland (Under Eastern Nagaland People's Organization (ENPO) Konyak, Phom, Chang, Sangtam, Yimchunger, Khamniungan Published & Printed by Eastern Nagaland People's Organisation (ENPO) HQ: Tuensang

Though the distinctions have been created unintentionally between the tribes yet it is the state government who should be intervening to fulfill this gap. After analyzing the existing given data we see there is an urgent need to have good governance in the state. Hence, good governance is the key to equal recognition and distribution and demanding for a separate state called "Frontier Nagaland" by Eastern Nagaland People's Organisation (ENPO) which was initiated since 1975 and actively from 2005 is genuine.

There is no doubt that the government has been putting an effort to uplift the six tribes through Development of Under-Developed Areas (DUDA). This department (DUDA) being the only major step taken by Nagaland government so far, apart from this there has not been any development concerns which the government should have done it.

Analyzing the nature of the problem, this paper has so far drawn upon a variety of methodological and disciplinary approaches in order to understand the changing scope of social inequality in Naga society. This study is of the view that inequality is an emerging issue in Nagaland that draws attention especially which would require to have an in-depth research. As society is not stagnant rather go for changes therefore Naga society too experiencing the social change in terms of class that is economic condition. Therefore, social inequality in Naga society has much to do with the social context and status of different communities in Nagaland. Scholars have written a lot on the issues on Naga politics, conversion to Christianity, and modernization of the Nagas, yet no studies have been done on the question of social inequality.

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