

KHIAMNIUNGAN NAGA WOMEN: A STUDY IN GENDER PERSPECTIVES

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the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy in English

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CANDIDATE'S DECLARATION

I, Chongtin S, hereby declare that the dissertation entitled *Khiamniungan Naga Women: A Study in Gender Perspectives* submitted for the award of the Degree of Master of Philosophy in English is a bonafide record of research done by me under the guidance and supervision of Dr. Rosemary Dzüvichü, Professor, Department of English, Nagaland University, Kohima Campus, Meriema, during the period of my research (2018-2019) and it has not been submitted, either in full or in part, to any other university or institution for the award of any other Degree, Diploma or Title.

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SUPERVISOR'S CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that dissertation entitled *Khiamniungan Naga Women: A Study in Gender Perspectives* is a bonafide record of research work done by Ms. Chongtin S, Regd.No. 44/2019, Department of English, Nagaland University, Kohima Campus, Meriema during 2018-2019. Submitted to the Nagaland University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for award of the degree of Master of Philosophy in English, this dissertation has not previously formed the basis award of any degree, diploma or other title and the thesis represents independent and original work on the part of the candidate under my supervision.

Ms. Chongtin S has completed her research work within the stipulated time.

The 20th of July, 2019

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MAP OF KHIAMNIUNGAN (INDIA)



CHAPTER: I

PROPERTY RIGHTS OF WOMEN

INTRODUCTION

1.1 History and the People of Khamniungan

The Khamniungan Nagas are an ethnic group, native to Northwestern Myanmar and Northeastern India. The Khamniungans are divided as Indians and Myanmarese by the McMahon Line of 1913. The Indian Khamniungans are an inhabitant of Noklak town under Tuensang District of Nagaland. The Myanmarese Khamniungans live under Khamti District of Myanmar (Burma).

The name of the tribe was spelled in several ways; the spelling variation was based on dialect differences of different ranges, used as 'Khamngan' by Thang Range, Pathso Range called it 'Khamniunga' and Nokhu Range addressed it as 'Khamniungan.' In the year 1982, under the initiative of the Khamniungan Students' Conference the elders from different villages gathered at Nokhu Village and unanimously resolved the official name of the tribe "KHAMNIUNGAN."

The Khamniungans were introduced to the British as the Eastern Changs. But the British discovered that the tribals' live in "slate roofed houses" which is different from the other Naga tribes. The British enquired the name of the tribe, but there was neither an educated person nor an interpreter among the Khamniungans, so they pointed out a snow-clad Mt. Khelia Kingniu. Thus, the British called the Khamniungans as "Kalyu- Kenyu" (named after the highest mountain in Khamniungan region) which remained the official name of the tribe in the different Naga ethnographic genres from military reports and survey reports to numerous articles, maps and monographs.

The Khamniungan society is basically rural and agrarian by nature. As anthropologists opined, they are fierce 'head hunters.' Their stone- roof houses were built on hill tops for safety and defence. The cultures, affinities, democratic nature, language and animistic religion clearly prove that Nagas have a common origin. The Nagas are said to have migrated from south west China. Yonuo Asoso made a statement about the origin and migration of the Nagas:

The Tibeto-Burman speaking people of the Mongoloid race that were loosely termed as "Nagas" came from Burma and spread gradually like an irresistible tide throughout the present Naga-inhabited mountainous massifs where they entrenched themselves, preserving their customs, beliefs and languages, almost intact when they found good land for cultivation and for animals while some of the allied tribes of the Nagas like Karen, Kachin, Singpho, Chin, Shan and others settled in Burma permanently after they had come from western China (Asoso 66).

As recorded by L. Patun, the former president of the Eastern Region Khamniungan Students' Union in the Golden Jubilee Souvenir of Khamniungan Students' Union, the total population of Khamniungans in Myanmar is about 60,000(Sixty Thousand). The 2011 General Population Census recorded the total population of Indian Khamniungans as 1, 77,900 (One Lakh, Seventy Seven Thousand, Nine Hundred) with 92, 529 male and 85,371 female.

The ancestors depended on the movement of the sun for time. And the days of the month was counted by tying a thread every single day. The Khamniungan traditional calendar according to the Roman Calendar:

January- Hok-ah Lei

February – Shai Lei

March- Pae Miu-Lei Nyiu

April- Tsou Miu Lei Nyiu

May- Jekun Lei

June- Jethap Lei

July- Bi-am Lei (Last month of the year)

August- Shemai Alei (New Year)

September- Pai She Khiam Tha Alei

October- Beoliam Alei

November- Oulei

December- Sham Kan Lei.

Khiamniungans are erstwhile fierce warriors, known widely for handicrafts, cane and bamboo wares, brass and iron works. John Henry Hutton provides the account:

This tribe is noted for its iron-work, its daos and spear-heads being particularly fine, also for red cane helmets and leggings, and for blue cloths with red squares of dogs hair embroidery (Hutton 383).

Wearing colorful and intricate traditional designs they love to celebrate festivals the year through, with much fervor and gaiety. *Khaozaosie-Hok-Ah* is the major festival of the tribe, which is celebrated on 20th of January. A thanks giving feast for the overflowing harvest, a time to build peace between neighboring villages accompanied by lively dances.

Miu is celebrated on the first week of May, a spring festival. *Bi-am* celebrated after the millet harvest on 7th August. *Tsokum* seeks blessings for the harvest, held in the first week of October. It includes community work of road repairs and construction of bridges. Khamniungans are feast-loving community apart from the four mentioned festivals recognized by the government of Nagaland there are a number of other festivals that last for a day or week. The celebration of festivals shaped the community.

1.2 Concept of Gender

The word “gender” came into common use as an alternative to the word “sex” in the United States in the 1970s. Using the word “gender” was a way for researchers and activists to counter that our masculinity and femininity were biologically determined. The term “gender” distinguishes the set of earned expectations, behaviors, and attitudes about being a man or woman from our biologically determined traits- collectively termed our “sex.” Keshab Chandra Mandal argues:

Gender determines what is expected, allowed and valued in a woman and a man in a given context. In most societies there are differences and inequalities between women and men in responsibilities assigned, activities undertaken, and access to land control over resources, as well as decision-making opportunities. Gender relates to how the individuals lives, as a man or woman (Mandal 18-19).

Gender asymmetry is a ubiquitous social phenomenon in human history in all times and climes. Nearly in all human cultures man is posited as a dominant sex and woman as subordinate sex. If men and women are similar, primarily through their identity as social beings, equality applies. This is the case for education and citizenship. There is no difference between man and women voters. Historically, there have been three schools of thought

influencing the definition of “gender.” These include Evolutionary Theory, Social Role Theory, and Social Constructivist Theory. Each is described briefly below.

Evolutionary theory argues that the relative costs of benefits of certain sexual behaviors have produced differences in heterosexual mating practices resulting in distinct gender norms. For example, the reproductive success of women from pre- industrial society depended on investing time in her offspring and on a mate who would provide needed resources, while men’s reproductive success would increase by having many sexual partners (Guo 279). One critique of evolutionary theory is that gender norms can and do change over time.

Social Role theory explains gender as a fixed or static variable; one is either feminine or masculine. Social Role theory denies that there are multiple ways to express femininity and masculinity (Courtenay 1385). One critique of Social Role theory is that in practice, the expression of gender is quite varied, changes over time and between cultures, and can be represented along a continuum of behaviors, roles and expectations (i.e. gender is not a binary variable).

From a **Social Constructivist** point of view, people learn masculine and feminine traits from the experiences they have with family, peers, community, etc (Courtenay 1490). Gender is not innate, but rather something one learns from watching and doing. Individuals are considered active agents in constructing norms of masculinity and femininity. The concept of agency, the part individuals play in exerting power and producing effects in our lives is central to social constructivism (Courtenay 1401). Using the social constructivism perspective, gender can be defined in the following way:

Gender is a socially determined construct describing the characteristics, behaviors, and roles deemed appropriate and expected of men and women (and boys and girls)

by a given society. These characteristics, behaviors, and roles are learned and reinforced through a socialization process that begins early in life and continues throughout the life cycle (Rolleri 2012).

According to American Psychological Association, gender identity “refers to person’s internal sense of being male, female or something else: gender expression refers to the way a person communicates gender identity to others through behavior, clothing, hairstyles, voice, or body characteristics.”

1.3 Laws on Rights of Women

Law is a product of social environment. Law is considered an arm of the state power. Modern state is a welfare state. Therefore, law must serve the welfare of the people. It should be utilized to advance social justice. Since women have suffered the most, law must help them in advancing their cause and in suppressing the mischief. Law is a powerful means for bringing social changes in the society. In our democratic State every citizen, men or women is governed by the constitution. Gandhiji as early as 1931 made it clear that he visualized an India in which women enjoy the same rights as men. There is perceptible vibration of the Gandhian concept of independent India in the preamble as well as the other provisions of the Indian Constitution.

Rights give expression to how all humans participate fully in civil society, defining the idealized norms against which a society may be measured. As expressions of the civic values that operate within any society, rights derive from the marriage of religious, philosophical, and legal principles that address social justice in the context of worldwide struggles to combat oppression and inequality. They do so out of underlying, deep-rooted respect for human life, dignity and diversity. Rights cannot be thought of in isolation from each other. They are part of an integrated vision of what it means to participate in diverse

human experiences. These run from the most basic interaction with the environment to the ways in which people live day-to-day to catastrophic events like war. Rights affect local and intimate human relationships and the global relations that govern the ways human capital and energy are exchanged, manipulated, and exploited. The women rights in India and safeguards well- preserved in the Constitution of India are listed here:

- The state shall not discriminate against any native of India on the ground of sex [Article 15 (1)].
- The state is authorized to make any special provision for women. In other words, this provision permits the state to make affirmative discrimination in favour of females [Article 15 (3)].
- No citizen shall be segregated against or be unsuitable for any office or employment under the state on the base of sex [Article 16(2)].
- Traffic in human beings and enforced labour are banned [Article 23(1)].
- The state to secure for male and female equally the right to a sufficient means of livelihood [Article 39(a)].
- The state to ensure equal pay for equal work for both Indian male and female [Article 39(d)].
- The state is needed to ensure that the strength and health of women workers are not abused and that they are not obliged by economic necessity to enter avocations unsuited to their strength [Article 39(e)].
- The state shall make procurement for securing just and humane conditions of work and maternity welfare [Article 42].
- It shall be the duty of every native of India to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women [Article 51-A (e)].

- One-third of the entire number of seats to be filled by direct election in every Panchayat shall be reserved for females [Article 243-D (3)].
- One-third of the entire number of offices of the chairpersons in the Panchayats at each level shall be reserved for females [Article 243-D (4)].
- One-third of the whole number of seats to be filled by direct election in all Municipalities shall be reserved for females [Article 243-T (3)].
- The offices of Chairpersons in the Municipalities shall be reserved for females in such manner as the State Legislature may provide [Article 243-T (4)].

Though the position of women had developed in the last few decades, however they are still struggling to maintain their freedom and dignity. Presently, Khamniungan women are suffering physically and mentally because of illiteracy and lack of information on legal and Constitutional women rights.

The revised VDB Model Rules of 1980 regarding the composition empowers women of every village in Nagaland:

4. (B) The *number of Women Members* to be included in the Management Committee of the VDB should not be *less than 1/4* of the total number of Members of the Management Committee of the VDBs. Out of the Annual Grant-in-aid to VDBs 25% total allocation of fund is allotted for women's programme.

1.4 Gender Equality

Gender equality is achieved when women and men enjoy the same rights and opportunities across all sectors of society, including economic participation and decision making, and when the different behaviors, aspirations and needs of women and men are equally valued and favored. Gender bias is undermining our social fabric and devalues all of

us. Denial of human rights to women is a tremendous waste of world's human potential. Political, economic and social equality for women will give half the population a chance to live life to the fullest and benefit the world's citizens. Together we can eradicate prejudice and work for equal rights and respect for all.

1.5 Naga Women

The Naga Mothers Association (NMA) was formed in 1984 as a response to the rise of alcoholism, drug addiction and many social evils in Naga society. It is the NMA (The Naga Mothers Association, 1984) and the NWUM (Naga Mothers Union Manipur, 1994) that have taken the lead in reaching out to other Nagas and Non-Naga Women's organisations to promote non-violent resolution of inter-community tension. The Naga Mothers Association, which is the frontal body for women still holds the vision to 'end bloodshed' and continues to reach out to stakeholders, Naga National Groups and the Government of India for peaceful resolutions.

Eastern Naga Women Organisation was established in the year 2008. The Union holds the motto "Emanate Dignity" with its Headquarter located at Longleng. The organisation is a conglomerate representing women from six different tribes namely, Chang, Khiamniungan, Konyak, Phom, Sangtam and Yimchunger. The main objective is to safeguard the rights of women. It has its federating unit in all the six tribes of Eastern Nagas.

Khiamniungan Menyu Hoikam established in the year 2008 at Noklak. Women organisations in all the major towns and villages are its federating units. Since its inception the Union works for the rights of women, conducting seminars on Women Health, Rights of Women, Role of Women in Politics and Child Rights.

1.6 Khamniungan Naga Women

Khamniungan women live in a patrilineal, patriarchal and patrilocal society. The head of the family, clan, village and priest are all exclusively male, a male dominated society. Traditional Khamniungan women were not status conscious and they are apparently happy and satisfied with their subordinate position in the society. Women play a vital role in the family, but their contribution to the society is set aside from the public domain.

In contemporary times, there is a consciousness among women about gender disparities and they are articulating a need for gender egalitarian society. Women involvement in the decision making process is unseen in the traditional administration such as the village councils in most of the villages; women are not even allowed to attend or listen to council deliberations. The discrimination and inequality is still very prominent, women are still fighting to express their right to speech, to vote, to education, to income, to equality and to freedom.

With the dawn of westernization, men professed to acknowledge intellectually or morally but cannot practice in reality, a conflict between public life and private life experience where she is denied any practical power to rule over her family and society. A life concentrated in her family and that even there her influence should be that of persuasion rather than command. There is an enormous gap between domestic ideology of men and the realities of everyday life of women.

For centuries, the Khamniungan traditional society has been one of male supremacy and dominance, where women were projected as inferiors to men, the role of women as pillars of the society was discarded; customs and traditions never gave women equal rights. The traditional idea of women being confined to the household activities has a

huge impact on the thinking and attitude of both the genders against women. Martha Tsumon worded truthfully:

The majority of the rural women remain as disempowered as their mothers. The role of women in our society also remains mostly at the level of that of conscience keeper. Customary law and governance still remains a male bastion. The hierarchy is created with men at the top in all spheres relating to culture or tradition and in matters of importance, the word of the men carry the day. Sadly, this has also crept into some of our churches wherein the traditional structure is replicated and imposed (Tsumon 6).

In almost all societies, women have a greater range of responsibilities, from domestic work, within and outside the homestead; to various agricultural activities they bear a greater work burden. In Khamniungan society women are considered a temporary member of the family. The increasing number of educated people cannot give gains because educated people have barely changed their views on women.

Whatever be her educational qualifications and economic background, she is restricted to over ride her husband's authority and rights. Women are still living on the knife edge, a life caught between the pulse of the new and the rhythms of the old. Women and girls must acquire qualities that are traditionally associated with masculinity: decisiveness, confidence and competence to become gutsiest women in the society.

1.7 Importance of Gender Equality.

Ensuing gender parity has become a great challenge for the world. Women's history has always prided itself on sisterly camaraderie and sharing of ideas and experiences as girls and women. An explosion of studies in women's history reveals, in no part of the world gender parity has been achieved completely in legal, social, political and economic

terms. Women's historical experience is revealed by studying the traditional sources of how the past society fashioned their notions of what it means to be male or female.

Research on women and gender takes into its view how feminine and masculine are differently valued, that still reinforce women's secondary status. Women should be protected and honored at all stages of her life, in every society but they are still caught in the throes of traditionalistic orientation. Traditional sources should be used in innovative ways to reveal the historical experience of women to change the way we approach and interpret nearly every political, ideological, and economic development of the society. In 1945, the United Nations (UN) Charter proclaimed equality between men and women. But the United Nations Development Programme reaffirmed the fact that in no society women are treated equal. In 1960, Simone de Beauvoir wrote: "One is not born but rather becomes a woman." Feminist literature advocates that gender is a cultural construct in a patriarchal society. Heidi Hartman defines:

"Patriarchy" refers to the systematic nature of men's power and is defined as "a set of social relations between men, which have a material base and which though hierarchical, establish or create interdependence and solidarity among men that enable them to dominate women" (Hartmann 14-15).

Building on studies of women, gender is not simply biological but socially constructed. Women's experience differed according to categories – social status, geographic location, rural or urban setting. People's notion of gender shaped not only the way they thought about men and women, but also the way they thought about their society in general. Women across the globe are working for a day, when gender will make no difference, where every single human being in the world can live a dignified life, not based on gender.

1.8 PROPERTY RIGHTS OF WOMEN:

The Khamniungan customary law permits only males to inherit property. Women enjoy the least privilege in this matter. Ancestral property is highly valued and rarely a man sells his share to anyone especially to another village. The society is so stringent in following this system that it does not permit a woman to have a share in the property even in the absence of a male child in the family. A daughter is not entitled to own any of the ancestral property. If the father dies leaving his daughters behind, his property was inherited by the nearest kinsmen who becomes the heir of the deceased father. The youngest son, by the law of inheritance gets the house of the father and movable and immovable properties of the deceased father are shared between the sons.

If a daughter is unmarried she retains the properties of her parents but she is not given the right to sell of the property. The daughters before they are married live with her parents and enjoy their parent's property but once they are married such a privilege ceases. If a woman receives immovable property or otherwise depending on the families, from a father, in the form of gifts during his life time, it remains her property till her death, but for such gifts she had to pay even a nominal price to her father, it becomes her absolute property and she has the right to sell it if she so wishes. Although women are not allowed to inherit property, she can enjoy a considerate degree of independence as she has the right to buy, to own, to manage and to sell property. Some resourceful women bought movable properties, land and mithun through their art of knitting and weaving, such women were highly esteemed in Khamniungan society but in case of divorce those immovable and movable properties belonged to their husband and in case of death, the widow had no right to inherit the property accumulated through her hard work.

Photo credit : Chentei Lam



Noutao (Earring)



Tee – Shelung (Weaving loom)



Dao-shilak (Ornaments)

A woman and her husband could cultivate her parents land “*eiu-pheo*” for a limited number of years but she was not given the right to inheritance. The movable properties of women consisted of ornaments, shawls, mekkelas, weaving implements, baskets and clothes.



Ae – cha mao (The only property for women)

She was the sole owner of the aforementioned properties, and nobody had the right to sell, buy or mortgage her property without her consent.

For a Khamniungan woman, the most precious property was *Lak-Jam*- a necklace made of yellow beads, it was a common practice to bring the necklace to the groom’s house in marriage. *Lak-Jam* was introduced to the Khamniungans by the Konyaks.



Lak-Jam (Necklace)

Thus, the name *Lak* meaning *necklace* and Konyaks were called *Jam* by the Khamniungans. If this particular necklace was damaged, it was considered a crime which would invite heavy fines costing a number of fields. *Lak-Jam* is returned back to her paternal clan after her death. The ornaments and weaving implements of women are highly respected and any damage caused to them was deemed disrespect or considered a crime. Women are considered as temporary members of the family, who remain a shadow and whose identity is derived through the male members of the family, they are considered as weaker sex who

constantly needs protection from the male counterparts because the family title goes to the male members of the family.

However, the Dan Range has different customary practice on rules of divorce. In case of divorce, owing to the husband's infidelity, depending upon the case the wife impose heavy fines, extending up to four to five jhum fields along with other movable property, there is a saying: "During divorce the hearth gets divided into two equal halves." The Customary Law gives authority to the wife to take away any movable and immovable property according to her will and nobody has the right to question.



Thsa (Basket)

But the women of Thang, Pathso, Nokhu and Peshu (Thonoknyu) Ranges do not enjoy such rights. On the day of marriage, the bride comes to the groom's house empty handed, eventually in divorce the wife walks away empty handed. In case of death the

deceased husband returns the necklace, earrings, bangles, weaving implements and other personal belongings brought by the wife in marriage. If during her lifetime, the wife sells off her ornaments to buy things for her family's need in poverty. The deceased husband returned the ornaments to her paternal family, if the ornaments are not returned it is considered *mih*-unsettled case. It cost heavy fines even after generations.



Photo credit : Chentei Lam

Kun (Basket)



Khiaphso (Bangles)

If the father or the mother died in the family of the female child after she had been married off to some other clans. A plot of land was given by the male child to his sister. This practice was strictly observed.

In case of unnatural death, like accident, snake bite, attacked by wild animals, lightning, natural disaster or death outside the house, the first person to touch the death body was honored by gifting a plot of land, or a jhum field by the deceased family. This was awarded in honor of humanity, conferred upon a man or a woman.

The traditional Khamniungan society increasingly limited women from their access to major form of wealth –land. The patriarchal system of society would maintain family

status and power by giving rights of inheritance to the male members of the family. And the property held by women was solely in the form of movable goods. In the traditional society, women take active part in the economic life, they enjoy more freedom and more independence. Though women were not given complete dominion over the property, the husband's property became the property of the wife. Sardeshpande notes:

In regard to parental belongings like ceremonial headgear , ivory armlets, leggings, belt, earrings, spear, dao, beads, bracelets, shields and many other items the eldest or the favourite son gets them. Usually parental favour manifests in the son- daughter-in law who better look after the parents in their old age or infirmity, as indeed is actually the customary duty of all sons. In some villages all sons share parental belongings. Women cannot claim any property. But in many villages the father permits his son-in law to cultivate a portion of land.... Mother's belongings,(except her Khang and Teeshlong) are returned to her parents if they had gifted them to their daughter during her lifetime; if not that is to say if her belongings and ornaments were gifted by her husband then they are left behind for her sons. Her Khang and Teeshlong follow her to her grave (Sardeshpande 27).

The Khamniungan people, being basically agriculturists, traditional beliefs, customs and festivals are all related to the annual agricultural cycle. Patriliney being the norm in Khamniungan society, women had no right over their ancestral property. The denial of property rights to women portray the social position of women, they are alienated from the family without any share of family's property.

Women do not enjoy many constitutional rights of women in the community because the society is firmly built on the customary law of the land. Women are not given the right to

inheritance; their anonymity is still considered as a weakness and deprives them of the right to inherit ancestral land and parents' property.

Discrimination of women is deeply rooted in the families. The old age wisdom that women cannot own a property is in fact the root of social discrimination in Khamniungan society. Because women are not counted as an individual who can live freely in the real sense of the term, they have no right even to inherit her parent's property. Khamniungan customary law limited the wife's ability to bequeath property without the express approval of her husband. Only widows and unmarried women were not restricted to own property and only women were most likely than men to pass property to other women.

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CHAPTER: II

SPINSTERS' DORMITORY OF SOME SELECT NAGA TRIBES

Damhaipou is the girls' dormitory in Khiamniungan society. The traditional institution of learning, where young girls were taught how to weave, make handicrafts, sing traditional songs and other social etiquettes which were expected from a girl child by the society. Damhaipou was built by the bachelors of the village for the girls of marriageable age, if the Lam bachelors were to build the dormitory for the Shiu ladies, there was a selection based on the skills of an individual and quality of a person's voice. Their work from dusk would be accompanied by the folk songs that showed their dedication at work. After its completion, young people gathered at the Damhaipou for the folkdance. This event was particularly special because young beautiful girls whose parents are alive and considered spotless (of pure lineage) were made to join the boys in the folk dance at first and the other girls would later join the circle, a joyous day to dance with the girls because women were not allowed to dance inside the village, they were forbidden to participate in many traditional dance. Building a dormitory separately for girls or Damhaipou was practised by the people of Dan Range. Sardeshpande wrote about Damhaipo in his account:

Girls have their dormitory known as Chamsaicham, where they spent the night, learn songs and dance and many other womanly chores under an elderly woman. At Pangsha both these dormitories are known as Tamhai. In earlier days boys from poh used to visit girls in Chamsaicham.... Dormitories are useful institutions where young boys and girls rub shoulders with their friends, develop their character and personality, learn their arts and crafts, get best possible social and cultural education, and are methodically initiated into the basically strong tribal customary discipline of co-operative living, accommodating other opinions and thoughts, adjusting the self to the

group, and identifying the group as more important than the self. Problems of ego, complexes, immorality, selfishness and shyness are smoothened, and a much more wholesome, mature and polished personality emerges as a social individual (Sardeshpande 35).

Among the Thang, Pathso, Nokhu and Peshu Ranges, there was a common practice, called Spinster's Dormitory. A widow's or a spinster's house and in some villages houses inhabited by old people (above sixty years of age) was commonly used as an institute of learning. Girls and women gathered at the girls' dormitory to learn the ethics of life. Education is the modification of behaviour, of an individual to equip a person with necessary skill, development of desirable habits that enables a person to coexist properly in the environment and in the society.

In the past there were no formal educational institutions, as modern system. The village community-the family, elders and peer groups played a vital role for the development of individuals to satisfy their social, political, economic and religious needs. This informal indigenous education was operative at all stages of human life and very much in interest of the cohesion of the village community.

Girls' dormitory was for young unmarried girls, which served as an agency for all round development of a person. It is through the process of socialization in the dormitory that an individual is moulded into a social being and found their fulfilment within the society. It served as a recreation club, a centre of education, art and discipline. The girls' and boys' dormitory were the centre of activities during festivals and religious ceremonies, and is therefore the social hub of the village.

An important socializing institute and training centre for motherhood. It was compulsory for every young girl to take membership as soon as she reached puberty. The young girls were

taught and trained in various vocations, art and discipline. Girls' dormitory trained them to shoulder the motherly responsibility and become contributing members of the village, clan and community.

Like in any other patriarchal society around the world, most discussions of physical and emotional maturing ages of man did not mention women at all. When men were depicted as gaining authority and power, women were presented as undignified females who are governed by jealousy, vindictiveness and poor work ethics.

Disciplines emanates from the dormitories. In every society, education has been a cherished value, the traditional Naga female dormitory with all its rigidity, virility and discipline- the recognised institution for imparting education to the young people, which was often looked by an elderly spinster or woman. The traditional institute was the best informal institution where young girls practiced, social behaviours, manners and obedience.

Mothers taught the young girls about different issues related to life. The most important values of this agency lay in the moulding of the girl's future, building up her character and facilitating selection of right partners for life. The Khamniungan society was structured in such a way that divorce was highly discouraged, thus young boys and girls were particularly careful in selecting their mates. Though women were forbidden to enter the boys' dormitory, boys were allowed to pay nocturnal visits to the girls' dormitory, which paved way to share knowledge, stories, and to joke, as Khamniungans are fun loving people. They would lavishly spent time with the girls in the dormitory, while the girls learned the art of spinning cotton or sew shawls. A boy or a girl would leave their respective dormitories when they get married or set up a home of their own, which was built by the members of the morung.

The main purpose of establishing a dormitory for young people was to prepare young men and women for their task and responsibilities of life. They were taught to learn different skills, like weaving, embroidery, design work, and were raised to be morally upright and hardworking in every phase of life. A young girl is never at rest, but she is given full freedom to develop her talents and personality. Fashion of dress was frequently changed in girls' dormitory because the young girls would start copying and learning the art of embroidery from the seniors. In the same way new designs were introduced in weaving to bring about improvement upon the old designs and in order to meet the changing requirements. In the girls' dormitory womanhood is shaped by competitive peer groups.



Neh - theauniu (shawl of pure cotton)



Lemching (A plant used for dyeing clothes)

The girls' dormitory is a place where news and views were shared. Old women share their holistic wisdom, skills, knowledge and philosophy of life, which was passed on to the younger generations in the form of poetry, songs, lullabies and folktales all of which was done orally. They also learned the importance of peace making as women were considered peace makers in the society, customary and traditional practices, legendary stories, cultivation and herbal medicines.

It was a place where the young people were trained to develop their individual potentialities such as bravery, endurance and self-reliance. It was compulsory for every member to go through various forms of training like waking up early in the morning *chung-chungwio-kou* (when the first cock crows), *khiam-khio* (fetching water in the nearest stream),

tham-thao (grinding-grain), going to the paddy field and returning home carrying a basket full of firewood before the sun rises, cooking for the family, head towards the field carrying the necessary agricultural implements and food, return home after working the whole day with vegetables fodder, cook for the evening meal, and end the day by knitting and weaving clothes, *e-lem lay* (spinning cotton, stitching, knitting and weaving is collectively termed *e-lem lay*). In the traditional Naga society women folks were the ones to wake up first in the morning and the last person to retire to bed.

They would sacrifice all of their time for the welfare of the family yet they were considered inferior to men, much of their sacrifice would not give gains to them. They lived the life of a subordinate not as an individual. Thus, the girls' dormitory was to nurture the young girls into maturity and womanhood who must be capable of shouldering the responsibility of a family. Young girls were taught moral education, religious philosophy, the spirit of service in community living and resilience in all matters of life.

The education system of the girls' dormitory was both highly relevant and utilitarian, related as it was to the practical experience and needs of the people. The young people were taught and instructed, which helped them in character and attitude formation with civic-mindedness, community ethics, cooperative labour to the society and training to become influential citizens. It moulded young minds to confirm to the Naga way of life, shaped knowledgeable personalities who were practical in all aspects of life.

The members of the dormitory had a moral obligation to ensure that every member in the village was cared for. If any household was stuck by prolonged illness, women help them complete their work in the field and in case of death women stay with the bereaved families till the third day. During delivery, women comfort the mother and assist the family in all the household works. When a member or family in the village suffered misfortune women shared

their crops with the families who failed to have a good harvest, in times of poverty. If anybody's house gets burnt men and women assembled with necessary collected resources or raw materials and contributed labour to build a new house for the family. Women carried water, distributed firewood, and grind-grains for the senior citizens and needy families in the village.

All the services rendered to the poor and needy in the village was done on humane basis. It was contrary to the concept of the dormitory system to accept or receive any cash either from families or individuals for any kind of work or service carried out by its members. By rendering selfless services towards the welfare of the village community, the young people developed a sense of belongingness towards their fellow men and women. The girls' dormitory was like a cultural centre where young girls learnt various arts and crafts, folksongs, folklore, etc.

The traditional institution reared them into adulthood and womanhood. Boys were allowed to visit but decency was maintained at all times. In the traditional Khamniungan society, male and female members of the house cannot stay together under the same roof at the same moment; it was practiced to show respect to the opposite sex. Thus, the dormitory served as an authorised platform for courtship between young girls and boys which would eventually lead to marriage. For men to become a *leng* (warrior) was to defend the village against intruders and be honoured by man, and for women to be the wife of a warrior was the greatest form of honour, thus both boys and girls needed to be trained in the traditional institute to become men and woman of fame and honour.

Women's role in the family, the village and the community were all taught at the girls' dormitory. They learned the ethics of our culture and heritage where values define the social fabric. Young people mastered how to be respectful, polite and socially accepted. Elderly

women suggested the girls to be good and honest; and to think of the common good of others. They were taught the benefits of hard work and diligence, because values that instil character in people bind families together, create harmony in the relationships which eventually builds our society by uniting the communities.

Spinsters' dormitory became the most important educational institute as children began their training for adult life. Even though the society had sharply defined gender roles for women at the Spinsters' dormitory, every girl was to get enrolled in the female dormitory. In order to be socially accepted as girls and women they were forced to become members of the Spinsters' dormitory. Girls were taught skills that they would use in running a household- knitting, pottery, sewing, basketry, dyeing, bead works, care of domestic animals; they were also taught some types of agricultural tasks, folk songs, folk tales, folk poetry, lullabies, legends, fables and different forms of folk art.

Khiamniungan women were taught to be self sufficient in their needs. Weaving was the most important industry because all the people used home spun clothes. Particularly shawls and mekheles used by women were weaved in every family. Every woman knows it, and it was a tradition that every woman should weave clothes for the members of their household. It was believed that the woman who has artistic skills in weaving gets married to the most honoured man in the village. Their family become the richest as she can support the family by selling off her creations.

As a result of this traditional aspect of weaving, every woman weaves clothes at home as it was made mandatory. Every village has got its distinctive design for clothes, particularly the clothes of women, the designs are different, colour-combinations, spacing and borders all differ. This reveals the fact that, women were creative in designing even before the introduction of the modern education system in our land.

One of the important outcomes of the dormitory system was character and attitude formation, moulding young minds to become community-centered. From a very young age, boys and girls were taught to be honest, industrious, become dedicated, with all humility and simplicity. Men and women were taught to be obedient and respectful to their elders, courteous in dealing with the weak and the lowly, generous and hospitable to the poor, self-denying and self-sacrificing at the opportune moments in favour of others, ready to help those in distress. Naga morung or dormitory was rooted on the principle “community first then comes the individual.”

In Khamniungan society women were restricted to a domestic setting- depriving them of the honour and advantages of being born women but they created space for the young generations in traditional society to teach every aspect of social, economic and political life of women. In every household women were called for *Nyei-hae*, on the second day after killing a mithun.

A practice where every owner of the mithun, preserved the best portions of the meat for the women folks of the clan. Like in every society around the globe, it is women who sacrifice her time and take care of children for the continuation of the lineage, and in times of pain, death and sickness, it is women who share the sorrows of the family. Thus, their selfless contribution to the society is highly esteemed and honoured, a day marked exclusively for women and children.

Women of that particular clan would gather carrying *hutha* (firewood in their baskets and some rice). A social gathering for women where they would share insights in creating a harmonious society because it strengthened family ties of the different clans- women were married to. On this special day, young mothers were taught by the elderly women of the clan to live an exemplary life in the new household, to love and respect all the family members

irrespective of their contribution to the society, to treat everyone equally in the family and above all to honour her parents-in-law.

If any married woman defames the name of their clan, the elderly women would threaten her to come back to her paternal house and live the life of a widower. A special day set aside for the sisters belonging to the same clan. On this day they would share their experiences of living with another clan, pour out their secrets and seek advice from elderly woman of the clan.



Neh- thso(Lower garment)



Huk – neng (Cloth for covering legs till the knee)

In the evening as they depart, the hostess offers them meat and *kian-pün* (indigenous curry prepared with slices of kitchen beans, meat and green vegetables). The position of women in the family was highly respected because she had full authority over the economy of the family, she was wholly responsible for the family granary and no rituals could be performed in the absence of women. Thus, this reveals the fact that women in the traditional Khamniungan society enjoyed higher status.

Alei-tsie Tsouhang (Moonlit Dance): Women and girls would gather on the outskirts of the village and dance in the moonlight. A person who knew traditional songs, skilled in handicraft making and having a good character was considered a beautiful woman in Khamniungan society. Elderly women decided the day of the moonlit dance. And the preparation for the night commence with the young girls setting out to collect firewood to be used during the special night.



Khaoneh (Lemching dyed cotton shawl)

The girls carrying cheerful smiles run around the village with the lightest feet, inviting friends from different clans and head towards, like a flock of birds collecting twigs from the big branches of trees in the deep forest, plucking flowers for earrings. At noon, after collecting piles of twigs they return home reciting poems and singing songs echoing through the hills like bees disturbing the silent atmosphere of village life. They busy themselves in small groups getting ready for the night, and gather at the outskirts of the village, wearing

neh-thso which is wrapped around their waist coming down to their knee, with bracelets fitted from the delicate lower arms till the upper arms, they wrap their bodies with *neh-hung* which cross under both the arms and are fastened on the opposite sides above the shoulders which is covered by the colourful Khamniungan traditional necklace displaying a vibrant play of colours ranging from blue, yellow, red and orange which is contrasted by wearing red and white earrings.



Alei-tsieTsouhang (Moonlit dance)

Women from different clans come together to lead the girls into singing and dancing different traditional songs. They are later joined up by the village folks into singing and dancing in the moonlight, a place of learning traditional dance in preparation for the *Khaozasie-Hok-Ah* festival, the main festival of the tribe where feasting is accompanied by the colourful traditional dance. The place also served as a training centre for the young girls,

they would bring their bamboo knitting sticks and *Ae-cha moa* (small basket). After singing and dancing some few hours they would sit around the fire in the open air for spinning cotton into thread, knitting and stitching with the light of the burning fire. Women had the opportunity to equip young girls with knowledge, skills and wisdom. It eventually prepared them to live life committed to the family, village and community to foster peace and unity in the land.



(Ae-lem lay) Spinning cotton

Wui village was one of the most prosperous Khamniungan villages. Women of Wui village lived an exemplary life, many of the girls and women were potters in this particular village. Only the women folks could make a pot, no men could become a potter. In the traditional society, pottery was confined to some few families, only few families had the authority to make a pot, for the whole village and was sold out to all the neighbouring villages of Khamniungan and the other tribes as well, it was sold in exchange of goods as barter system was the only means of exchange.



Photo Credit : Chentei Lam

Young girls were taught by the elderly women the art of pottery, they would collect three different types of clayey soil on the outskirts of the village, which is thoroughly grinded until it turns into powder and was soaked with the bark of a tree (Lano Sen) and is grinded again before it is finally shaped into a pot. Wui village was marked with respect and honour by all the other villages as the women folks contributed immensely to the economy of the village. All the other Khamniungan villages suffered from poverty due to poor harvest but Wui village was the only self sufficient village. The contribution of women to the village economy helped the Wui people to survive throughout the dark days.

Creativity shared among Wui women is one of the most influential cultural skill, that supported the families and their finished products are sold all over the state, blessed by the unique location they safeguarded the village from poverty.

The Spinsters' Dormitory was both highly relevant and utilitarian as women shared practical knowledge and experiences according to the needs of the village folks. Young girls were taught and instructed community ethics, cooperative labour, responsibilities to oneself and to the society and were trained to become worthy citizens, knowledgeable and practical in all aspects of life.

Tsüki was a rural traditional institution in Ao Naga society. Young Ao girls were taught in *Tsüki*, a female institution. Tsüki was another learning institute for girls as old as Arijü. Tsüki was looked after by a widow or an unmarried woman of the same clan. The members of this institution are called *Tsükir*, which refers to the members of a small garden of beautiful flowers. In Ao dialect, *tsüki* or *atsüki* means "garden." The young girls became members of the institute based on age, clan and location. When a girl reached the age of ten or eleven she would join her peer groups to sleep at the widow's house, which was usually occupied by four to five girls of her own clan.

The permission to sleep at the widow's house was considered with much restriction. The girls were permitted only with the consent of the girl's parents and the widow. The girls' dormitory functioned like a modern educational institution, which serve the purpose of teaching and learning at night, since the main occupation of the traditional Naga society was farming. Every members of the village went to their paddy fields during the day.

The girls learned the ethics of life in their respective Tsüki. A place where a girl moulds her personality and practiced the art of weaving, making thread, embroidery, design works, folk songs, folk dances, stories about bravery and heroism of their fore-fathers. Which eventually shaped the young minds to submit to patriarchy, as Nagas believed in 'might is right.' Though women had fewer affairs in political and administrative affairs of the village, her position in the society was far from inferior. Women remained back home without taking part in the actual battle but they supported the men folks in becoming warriors and defenders of the clan and village. Women were not allowed to enter the morung. Julian Jacobs notes:

The morung which was typically huge, was usually constructed in the conspicuous place "resplendent with carvings representing hornbills, tigers, human heads and sometimes with projecting barge-boards resembling wings and horns" (Jacobs 27).

The young girls were taught discipline, social behaviour, obedience and to serve and respect the elders. The girls also helped the hostess in carrying water, firewood, and in times of sickness they helped the widow in her agricultural works. During *Moatsü* and *Tsüngremmong* festivals the young girls usually had a custom of presenting their male friends, specially prepared rice brew, newly woven clothes, etc. Because festival is the time when *Ariju* men visits the girls' dormitory and they spent their time of merry-making by singing love songs.

Honourable songs were also composed and dedicated to the good administrators and warriors of the village. It was a place where young girls enjoy liberty with the opposite sex, to choose the right life partner. Here they shared ideas, learnt about each other's strength and flaws, way of life and their approach to family, village and society, which shaped their relationship in becoming competent partners for life. The girls dormitory moulded the young girls in building their character, prepared them to shoulder the motherly responsibilities in becoming responsible citizens of the society.

The history of the girls' dormitory confirms the fact that, it was the most important educational institution in Naga society. Its functions were closely interlocked with the cultural, political, social, moral, economic and religious life of the Nagas. The overall activity of the dormitory was directly or indirectly related to the welfare of the Naga community. Sujata Miri commented on "*Why Tradition?*" in *Modernization in Naga Society* that, "from time to time the elders arranged handicrafts session and the youngsters were taught how to make Naga handicrafts" (Miri 29). The training offered in the dormitory aimed at producing responsible citizens.

The strength of the village largely depended on the members of the boys and girls' dormitory. It served as the cradle of the social and cultural life of the Nagas. The girls' dormitory was the leading traditional institution of learning which laid the foundation of Naga culture. Toshimenla Jamir in "*Women and Politics in Nagaland: Challenges and Imperatives*" commented on the dormitory system of the Nagas, "The cultural life of the Nagas presents a window into the reality of women in Naga society. Clearly, the institution of morung and Tsuki socialized boys and girls into gender specific roles" (Jamir, 23).

R.R. Shimray in his account "*Origin and Culture of Nagas*." Wrote about the Naga School:

The coming of the new religion (Christianity) adversely effected this institution in some areas. It was, wrongly interpreted that the dormitory institution was not in keeping with the spirit and principles of Christianity. In some areas, however, the new religion brought still bigger re-enforcement for its continuance with greater vigour. This institution was found to be a very important agency through which the Bible could be taught and group singing practices were arranged easily. Perhaps this institution reached its climax when Christianity was at its best in Naga areas. For about half a century, the dormitory institution was humming with varied life (Shimray 200).

Ideas about women, particularly those of educated men, are in many ways the easiest thing to investigate when analyzing the experience of women in any society. Educated men have been thinking and writing about women since the beginning of recorded history, trying to determine what makes them different from men and creating ideals for female behaviour and appearance. Their ideas emerge in works of all types – religious literature, fiction, and poems, philosophical discussions, which have been preserved and read by subsequent generations.

The works which contain them, especially religious and philosophical writings came to be considered authoritative and unquestionable, so that the ideas of educated men spread to the vast majority of women and men who could not record their own ideas, and served as the basis for law codes which attempted to regulate behaviour which were later regarded as religious truth and scientific fact. And the laws that resulted from them led women to act in ways which conformed to male notions. Many revered authorities agreed about ‘women’s nature and life’ indicated to most people that they must be right. And only a few individuals recognized that the largely negative view of women resulted from the fact that almost all

written records came from the male authors and that a very different picture might have emerged had women also left records of their thoughts.

The colonial administrators and anthropologists who shared their insights about Naga women appeared to have a positive view on the status of women. Haimendrof remarked thus on Naga women:

“Many women in more civilized parts of India may well envy the women of the Naga Hills, their high status and their free happy life; and if you measure the cultural level of a people by the social position and personal freedom of its women, you will think twice before looking on the Nagas as ‘Savages’ (Haimendrof 101).

Similarly, Charles Chasie noted, “One advantage of conducting regular sessions in the *morung* was that it provided opportunities for the young people to learn the art of public speaking under the guidance of the senior members” (Chasie 115).

In Naga society, with the increase of native female writers’ authorities of all types is questioned. Dissident voices, both female and male, expressing a more positive view of women began to be a bit louder but still many changes actually restricted, rather than increased, the ability of women to act independently.

The Nagas have lately realised the importance of restoring cultural elements, awareness of the need to restore our tradition by discovering the relevant meanings instead of merely labelling and dismissing them as heathen practices. The need to restore the rich culture was also expressed by J.P.Mills thus:

It is difficult to see why the native taste for colour and brilliant effects which the Naga possesses should not be turned to the glory of God instead of being regarded as an offence before Him. If the bright colours worn as a reward for the giving of the feasts

of merit by the ancients, were retained by the Christians for their own acts of social service, if the insignia of renown in war were made badges of rank in the congregation, and deacon and pastors encouraged to wear feathers and cowrie aprons to denote their office, while those assembling for divine worship were encouraged to do honour to the occasion by dressing in their best, if they were encouraged to adorn their church buildings with carvings as they had done their morungs, their artistic sense would be encouraged and possibly imbued with fresh vigour and the villages would not be deprived of the brilliant festivities which at present do so much where Christianity has not yet destroyed them, to brighten the dull monotony of village life (Mills 421).

The cultural life in the traditional society presents a window into the reality of Naga women. They were not allowed to enter the morung and take part in the major decision-making for the welfare of the village. Thus, women concerns were not addressed even in the traditional society. Toshimenla Jamir argues:

Traditionally, it was considered to be a 'bad omen' if a woman comes nearby the *Ariju* because that was where crucial decisions pertaining to the entire village were made. The *raison d'être* being that, women were considered as profane. Moreover, it is said, often the men folk doubted the ability of the women to maintain the confidentiality of the matters being discussed in the *Ariju* (Jamir 25).

The exclusion of women from all the major policy-making is found similar in almost every Naga tribe. Thus, the Naga customary law does not allow women to be a part of the decision making institutions. Sardeshpande in "*The Patkoi Nagas*" wrote about the Khamniungan women thus:

Women cannot aspire to be a leader. In fact she is excluded fully from the leadership and decision-making spheres of Khamniungan society (even the entire Naga society) on the plea that she being light on her ear and of mouth cannot be trusted with confidential matters. The closest she can come to concerns of social moment is the outskirts of the Morung (Kamnoi) to take Madhu for her man congregating there with others for decision-making (Sardeshpande 21-22).

The Spinsters' Dormitory was the most important informal educational institution for women in Naga society. These were the practical schools, set up by every clan where the students were taught with practical methods. Young minds were shaped; the social, religious, educational and cultural activities revolve around the dormitory. When men folks were taught war tactics, knowledge and skill to rule over the people at the morung, women were taught practical skills of embroidery, farming, pottery, to remain submissive to the male members of the society, to sacrifice their health and time for the welfare of the men folks at the girls' dormitory. Thus, women were taught to play the role of a subordinate being and not to dominate the males. Their movement was confined to the hearth of the kitchen. With the introduction of Western education in Nagaland women have seen visible changes in all walks of life but in many towns and villages women are still facing a hard blow of social discrimination, voices of women goes unheard everyday, and the male dominant Naga society is still living under the customary law of the land which is biased on women and many educated females are denied leadership roles. Thus, women and girls are still fighting for more gender inclusive communities all over Nagaland.

Today Nagas have the highest number of unemployed youths, especially women. One possible reason is the decline of dormitory system in Naga society. The modern education system had transformed the youths in Nagaland to depend solely on the knowledge acquired in the concrete institution.

Skill development, character building and dignity of labour taught in the traditional institution had vanished from the society with the decline of the dormitory system. With the introduction of schools and colleges, the traditional school lost its relevance since children were sent to schools instead of the dormitories. Thus, we need to look closely into the picture to see the unseen, modify and rejuvenate the lost heritage of our ancestors to become contributing members of the society. The Christian- religion should not be blamed for the lost of our identity, as history reminds us that the dormitory system helped preach the gospel of Christ which gave rise to the people's movement all over the state in a very limited span of time. The vacuum has to be filled by the creativity of the young Nagas.

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CHAPTER: 3

GENDER ROLES IN PERFORMING RELIGIOUS RITES AND RITUALS

Khiamniungans believe that there is a very big god, the highest one, above everything, even above the sky, who is all powerful, who controls everything including those gods residing below him, on the ground and even under it. *Kovathso* oversees everybody and everything. Although a benign father-figure, *Kovathso* appears to wield little influence, if any, on the minds and hearts of Khiamniungans, except that he remains a distant ray of hope amidst the dark depredations of spirits (Sardeshpande 42).

The Khiamniungan Nagas believed in spirits. *Goa thso* (good spirit) and *paiya goa* (bad spirit). The evil spirits were blamed when misfortunes and calamities happened to people. The spirits had their abodes in trees, stones, rivers and mountains. Worships and prayers were made in the form of oblation; offerings were made to evoke blessings and good luck and to appease them. The tribal religion is also associated with the observance of lots of sacrifices, rituals and taboos. Khiamniungans' believed that death is not the end of life. There is a place called *Sükekhan*, located on the outskirts of Noklak town, a place for death's spirit to go to next life. Sardeshpande wrote about *Sükekhan*:

Even now every Khiamniungan spirit is believed to follow the same route and destination. The dead body was kept a little above the ground and fire lit beneath it. As liquid oozed out of the corpse it was collected in split bamboo and channelled into a big dug close-by. That was believed to strengthen the earth. It took nearly a week to so drain the corpse, whereafter it was buried in the house or at the edge of the village. Till the burial was over people could not go to the fields. To escape this they started keeping the corpse on the Machan (raised bamboo platform) in front of the house or at the edge of the village till it disintegrated. The Skull was separated after a year during

the Ooah festival (usually in November), put in an earthen pot and the pot buried under a stone or deep in the earth. Presently corpses- Christian or non-Christian- are buried immediately (Sardeshpande 44-45).

Khiamniungans' believed that misfortune always comes to the bad people and rewards the good people in every village. It is the fear of God that makes them honest. The fear of the punishment of God served as the panacea for all the evils that lives in the hearts of men in every society. The fear of a supreme being made the Khiamniungans' extremely meticulous in religious rites. *Eh-Nyiu* (*Eh* meaning 'Necromancer' and *Nyiu* meaning 'Mother') Necromancers predicted the future by supposedly communicating with death people. They enjoyed a higher position in the society, which was believed to be hereditary. A common feature in Khiamniungan animistic society was lycanthropy- a psychic and spiritual transformation of souls, living men and women into tigers. The man and the woman die as their counterpart animal dies or are killed.

Khiamniungan women were considered the backbone of village economy. The traditional society depended on the agricultural produce for their survival. Since, men folks were engaged in feuds and wars. They were considered warriors and defenders of the village. Thus, the agricultural production was completely the woman's responsibility. This enabled the women folks to perform all the rituals and rites for the rich produce of the land. Though women were not allowed to enter the morung and take part in the head hunting ritual they played a significant role in performing rituals for the family and agriculture.

Like the Orthodox Slavs in Eastern Europe and the Jewish communities, in Khiamniungan society women were considered impure and were forbidden to attend many rituals performed by men because the actual biological function of menstruation had not yet been discovered, menstruation was viewed impure as compared to other types of bleeding in

people's mind. The woman remained impure for few days each month and menstrual blood was generally viewed as somehow dangerous and different. This is why women were called *Menyiu-theniu*. The word '*Menyiu*' meaning '*female*' and '*theniu*' denotes '*impure*.' Since rituals should be performed with all sincerity, attention and purity. Women were not allowed even to enter the house, while performing rituals related to head-hunting. As human head was the greatest form of sacrifice to their gods for the fertility of the land.

Bi-am festival is celebrated in the last month of the year according to the Khamniungan traditional *Alei-ling* (calendar) known as *Bi-am Lei*. It falls in the month of August. *Bi-am* marks the dedication of granary, celebrated during the millet crop harvest season. Before the celebration of *Bi-am*, women perform a ritual called *Jih-Khio-Thsei*. The mother of the family go to the field- *Pae* (Khamniungans' practice shifting agriculture, where a plot of land is cultivated after a gap of more than ten years, and after cutting and burning the forest, food grains is cultivated on the first year but on the second year millet-crops is cultivated compulsory which is called *Pae*) and brings home the flowering millet plant. On the following day, she collects three branches of *jeyahnyiu-tsao* (thorny plant) and a small portion of *tsou-tsou* (the stem of a pine tree, which was traditionally used as light). And moves around the house and granary reciting prayers;

Jihyen-nyiu yah she tiah

(New millet crop is coming)

Makuku nyiu nia lekhu

(Spider go away)

(Spider here denotes evil spirits and poverty). After reciting the prayers, she places the *jeyahnyiu-tsao*, *tsou-tsou*, and *jih-khio* near the left and right side of the kitchen door. The

rite continues with stuffing a small rice pot with millet-seeds, where the whole family tastes *bün-tup* the newly harvested millet-crop and spat it out saying *khou-meshak jenaë, jenaë* (the crop is bitter, and it cannot be finished). This ceremony marks the bountiful, overflowing blessings of the millet harvest in traditional homes.

Bi-am is celebrated after the millet harvest. In the traditional society women were solely responsible for taking care of the granary, even among women, the mother of the family was the only person who could enter the granary, it was forbidden for the other members of the family to enter the granary because it was believed that the blessings of god was bestowed upon the mother, and a good mother is one who keeps her family self-sufficient throughout the year. And if the mother becomes too old to go to the granary she would bestow her blessings to her niece- wife of her son, who shoulders the responsibility of her aunt. This is why every family needed a mother to take care of the granary.

Bi-am is significant because granaries are dedicated. Sacrifices are made for good crops and good harvest, thanksgiving to their god in the form of worship. A chicken is killed on the first day and its blood is mixed with brew and is poured into a *chamtou koun* (a wild banana leaf in conical shape).

The mother carefully prepares for the ritual by putting a dried fish, ginger, millet, rice, chicken liver and koun inside a bamboo basket. And head towards the granary to perform rituals and offer prayers at the Am-tsang (a container made of bamboo used for storing grains. All the rituals performed by women at the granary centres around the Am-tsang, which is kept in the middle. The grains stored in this particular Am-tsang, was left untouched even in times of poverty). The society was structured in such a way that only the mother can manage and enter the granary, which helped the family to sustain till the next harvest. Mithun, buffalo, and cattles are slaughtered on this feast by every household.

Changlau is the New Year's festival celebrated in the first week of October. *Tsokum* is celebrated on the eve of harvest and serves as thanks giving to the deities, invoking blessings from God in the New Year marks this festival. Community feast of the first rice from the season's harvest is a traditional feature of the celebrations. *Jang-loat* (killing of mithun) is one of the major rituals performed by women. The husband and the wife at first decide to hold a feast. Their close relatives from the two clans are invited at first to eat, and drink. After which they go to the fields in search of Mithun, in some cases the search continues for more than three days, but if they succeed in bringing home on the first day it indicated good luck for the family.

During the festival, women were given a special privilege to participate in the *khiamtsa* (pouring of water). For women to take part in the ritual the husband and the wife should fulfil certain criteria; they should have killed ten mithuns called as *ping-shing*, where a bamboo was prepared artistically and the husband would hold it in one hand while killing the ten mithuns in each festival. On completion, when they decide to feast over the eleventh mithun together, the wife is given the opportunity to perform the most sacred ritual *khiamtsa*.

On this particular feast, an (X) mark was made on the forehead of the mithun with an axe. After slaughtering the mithun, the wife comes out of the kitchen carrying two bamboo water containers in a basket, dressed in ceremonial attire with *khaoneh*(a piece of cloth wrapped around the body), *lak*(necklace), *khiap-thso*(a pair of bangles), *nou-tao*(earring) and *huk- ngeang*(a rectangular piece of cloth used for covering the leg till the knee).

The wife offer prayers of blessing upon the family and pours water on the mithun, the third bamboo water container is passed over to the wife, which is also poured upon the mithun, after which the chaff was sprinkled all over the body. The ceremony continues as cooking of the meat was usually done by women. And she prepares for the common feast in celebrating

the *Tsokum* festival. In the Khamniungan society, every household would hang the head of a mithun on the kitchen walls. It indicated richness, prosperity and higher status in the society.

Khamthsa was a special ceremony performed by the wife of a rich man. Jang- Loat was usually performed during Hok-Ah festival and *Changlau* feasts. It was the highest honour conferred upon a woman. And only a handful of women had the opportunity to take part in this ritual. Thus, it was usually celebrated by a warrior family.

Pae-Miu-Lei-Nyiu (March) is a sacred month where women performed a ritual known as *Oung- Phan*. In this particular ritual, women would make a small conical shaped banana leaf, where a little amount of grain is grinded till it turns into powder, mixed with brew is poured inside and a dried fish is also added to it. The banana leaf is tied on both ends and is hanged on the horns of the mithun killed during the festival. This ritual is performed right after sowing millet seeds. It implores God for a fruitful and bountiful harvest.

Marriage is an institution that sanctions the relationship of a man and a woman and binds them to the functioning of a family life. The union of a man and a woman becomes a marital bond only when the society or family gives its approval. Marriage gets into social recognition through some ceremony. Marriage ceremony has certain rites, ritual, custom and formalities. It imposes certain rights and duties on both the husband and the wife. Kewepfuzu Lohe wrote about the Chakhesang Nagas:

If a person did not get married, he was considered to be abnormal in the society. It is taboo for a woman to keep long hair until she gets married. Before marriage she was to keep her head shaved (Lohe 42).

Marriage is one of the basic social institutions in every society. It is one of the oldest socially recognized institutions and essential for the procreation of children. Marriage is the

union of a man and a woman approved by society through ceremony of uniting marital partners. This ceremony has its own rites, ritual, custom and formalities. Selecting a son-in-law and daughter-in-law lasted for months in Khamniungan society. The lineage of the man and the woman was considered very important for marriage. The social position, physical appearance, and the family background mattered less for marriage in Khamniungan society. The courtship usually starts during the seed- sowing season. The man engages his would-be wife in many agricultural activities and makes her carry his umbrella and personal belongings on their way to the field and does the same while coming back home. It allows them to test their compatibility for a life-long companionship.

They invest time in their relationship throughout the year; it helps them get to know each other personally. If the girl agree to be marry the man. He would send his mother or his aunt, to the girl's family asking for her hand in marriage. The man would invite two of his best friends to accompany them on their wedding, after which a chicken is killed.

The girl after coming to the house of her would-be-husband, collect a small amount of dried grain in a winnowing fan, puts inside a grinding table and grind thrice. And leaving aside, she gets inside the kitchen to dip her right index finger in the *koun* (a conical shaped banana leaf filled with the blood of a chicken). This was followed by the ceremonial marriage feast that requires them to finish the whole meal prepared for the marriage ceremony. And they make their departure without the notice of the other members present at home, and the lady goes back to her paternal house. The following day, the groom goes to the bride's house with his friends, after making an entry to her house, the groom picks up the *ae-cha mao* (a small basket containing cotton thread, used for weaving and knitting) which is the only property of women. His friends would insist the bride by pulling her hand to come over to the groom's house, she follows them reluctantly. And they are finally declared married. The marriage takes place in the month of October (*Pai-shekham-tha-Alei*).

Marriage was the most sacred institution; people lived an honourable life by respecting the ritual performed in marriage. The couple constructs a new house and would begin to live separately as a family. Divorce was highly discouraged, once a couple gets married they remained loyal and loving till they are separated by death which is inevitable. Divorce would invite hatred among the clans because the wife would not allow young girls to marry the clan that despised or treated her with cruel hands. Thus, marriage strengthened the family ties between two clans. Shimray notes:

The sanctity and holiness of marriage was inherent in the marriage system and thus divorce was rare and considered as serious matter. However it did occur. A girl could be divorced on grounds of barrenness, personal incompatibility and differences and infidelity (Shimray 177).

Among the Khamniungans of Wui village, there was a practise similar to the purdah system of some Muslim and Hindu societies in South Asia. After the death of a spouse the wife or the husband of the deceased would cover their head with white or red cloth to honour the death spouse for a period of three years. Within the three years of mourning, the deceased spouse is forbidden to remarry another man or woman. Only after the public acknowledgement of their period of grief, on the completion of the third year, the wife or the husband can remarry. This throws light that the institution of marriage was held in high esteem.

The most important ritual performed by women takes place when the mother gives birth to a child. The mother and the child cannot leave the house for three consecutive days called *Ah-nou*. And the mother cannot eat the food cooked in the same pot along with the other members of the family. Thus it requires the husband to cook for his wife in a separate pot.

After the completion of the tenth day the mother and the child goes to the maternal uncle's house for *Ahjon-shu*. A ritual performed after the birth of a child. A chicken is killed and prepared in a special pot. The maternal uncle feeds his niece or nephew with the chicken soup, by his own hands. And invoke blessings of God upon the life of the child. The uncle offers a piece of *Nian-lak* (necklace) to his nephew /niece that remain a souvenir for the child.

This ritual strengthens the family ties between clans which continue for generations. This ritual is practiced even now, that requires the maternal uncle to feed his niece/nephew with his own hands, and ends with prayers of blessing for the child to God, the Father. Thus, tradition and culture changes but it lives.

Eh- Nyiu (Necromancer) hold a very important position in the society. If the evil spirit inflicts sickness and pain over anyone in the village, the afflicted person fall sick- bed ridden and may even die. To propitiate the evil spirit *Eh-Nyiu* is given a machete, spade, shawl, rice, brew, dried fish, and chicken. She is sent away to the field, the place where the sick person encountered the bad- spirit to perform the ritual.

After performing the ritual, the *Eh- Nyiu* goes home, with the belief to encounter the bad- spirit at night. In the dream, she offers all the items to the bad- spirit and requests the evil- spirit to partake of the offering and release the spirit of the sick person. The *Eh- Nyiu* could find the evil- spirit in the field, forest, river, or elsewhere. The next morning she returns to the sick family and tells the sick of their propitiation. This brought healing to the sick person.

In some other cases, *Eh- Nyiu* is given some amount of grains in a basket; she takes the grain and put it in the hands of a sick person and goes out to the place where the traditional grinding table is placed. She takes a handful of grains and throws out three times on the

outside of the house. If it does not heal the sick person, the ritual is continued for the next three days.

And the soul of the sick person is brought back by the *Eh- Nyiu*. She makes promises to the evil- spirit to wait till the next *Tangtiah* (*burning of husks*) to offer sacrifices for healing the sick person. Thus, the sick person sacrifices a big or cattle having four legs during *Tangtiah*. It was believed that the evil spirit was responsible for the poor harvest, accidents and all other human miseries. Thus, *Eh- Nyiu* had to propitiate the evil spirits for a peaceful existence the year through. Sardeshpande in his book “*The Patkoi Nagas*” mentioned the death ritual of the Khamniungans before Christianity came to our land:

When a person dies his relatives sacrifice a pig, Mithun, cow or buffalo and feed the visitors, along with Madhu, after setting apart a portion for the Ein. Next day all members of the clan get together, bringing a little cooked rice in a small earthen pot to the deceased’s house. The Ein partakes of his/ her portion of sacrificial meat and Madhu and goes home to undertake divination in dream. In the dream the Ein converses with Paiyakova to find out the cause of death and why the person had to die. Usually the cause of death is some infringement of custom, a bad act, or evil design of others. All the clansmen of the diseased adjourn to the Ein’s house to hear the conversation – in – dream. There is no idea of rebirth of the dead, or its spirit haunting or visiting (Sardeshpande 45).

In the traditional society, the dead body was not buried in the ground. The corpse of the women was wrapped in a bamboo woven mat with five bindings. Milanda Ganguli wrote:

Dead bodies wrapped in mats used to be brought to that grove and exposed on platforms a few metres above the ground. After a lapse of one year the sacrificer removed the head, cleaned it and deposited the skull in the hollow of an old tree...

Through the gaps between the stones, with which the hollows had been filled I could see bleached white skulls of the dead inhabitants of the village (Ganguli 249).

Women were considered as an inferior in the traditional Khamniungan society. They were given the opportunity to perform rituals in the field only in the absence of men. They lived the life of a marginalised and powerless female without being aware of it which impacted the growth of Khamniungan society. It may seem somewhat odd to think of Animism as a traditional religion which empowered women. For it contains strong streaks of misogyny and were in the early society totally controlled by male hierarchies, with the highest position of a warrior reserved for men. Men were considered the defenders of women, as women are weaker than the male counterparts physically. During war and feud women were gathered in a house and they were defended by strong men in the village against the enemies. Julian Jacobs notes that, “men are separated off from woman, before, during and after a raid” (Jacobs 138).

In the traditional society, though women were assigned a lower position in the society they were called “*Jumpao*” meaning ‘owner of the house.’ Because they were the owner of the granary and men had no right over the granary, as women were given the full authority to manage and sustain families the year through.

Women could practice medicine on par with men to treat various physical ailments by using natural products mostly derived from plants, stem, fruits, leaves and roots. Many religious rituals and rites could be performed in the absence of women. Because most of the rituals required cooking that engages women because they are careful even to the minutest detail. All the rituals were performed only by married men who had children. So, to be accepted as a man in the society one has to be married. In every religious ceremony, it required the partnership of men and women. The companionship of women gave men the

authority to establish a family. Thus, women played a significant role in performing religious rites and rituals.

The most important ritual a woman performs for her husband is in times of war. The wife of a warrior was highly honoured and respected in the society. The village belle usually becomes the wife of the warrior. In times of feud and war, the wife of a warrior would always fill the wooden plate with rice and curry and leave her husband's share at every meal. This was performed to show respect and honour to the warrior.

The mother of the family was considered as priestesses as they perform religious and sacred duties. This conferred motherhood, the most respected position in the family in Khamniungan traditional society. The highest position a person can enjoy as a mother of the family. As priestesses, they performed rituals for the prosperity of their families, rich harvest of crops and seek blessings for rearing cattle which was a pre-requisite for performing rituals.

As necromancers they were able to reveal hidden things or secrets of the past, present and future of the clients. They are consulted on both private and public matters. Necromancers are able to link people to their dead relatives to either know the cause of their death or give their advice to the families they left behind, and most importantly to heal sicknesses. Thus, through these religious functions, women are able to warn the individuals or community as a whole of the dangers ahead and right rituals to be performed to either avert them completely or to mitigate their effects when they occur.

Another area through which a Khamniungan woman participates in the ritual of worship is their role as dispensers of medicine in the traditional society. Medicine is usually part of the prescribed programme that a traditional priest goes through because religion and medicine go hand in hand in the traditional society. This explains why prayer, sacrifice and other rituals feature predominantly in the practice of medicine. Even though traditional

healing is a profession of both men and women it is more often the woman practitioners who handle children and other woman's needs.

Women are noted for giving education to children. Since children are mostly with their mothers at home, they learn most of the ritual prohibitions and prayers from their mothers. This is done through the myths, which are mostly about the Supreme Being, gods, ancestors, spirit beings and other sacred stories of the community. Shishak noted:

In the past there was no tribal or inter-tribal organization to deal with the needs of the tribe as a whole, so each village became solely responsible for its own economic, social, spiritual and political ends (Shishak 27).

Women were considered partners with men in performing religious rites and rituals in Khamniungan society. There are evidences of discrimination against women, in performing ritual relating to pre-raid, women involvement was completely discouraged. When a warrior prepared to go for head hunting, everything was prepared by man. It was believed that the mere presence of women spoils the omen of head hunting, resulting to injuries, death or may fail to get a trophy- human head. Thus, the ritual was performed with closed doors to avoid the entry of women in the process of the ritual. The traditional belief that women are weaker than men, passed down through the generations without ever questioning or reasoning became the root cause for female subjugation. Woman might have performed much better even during wars had they been given the opportunity by the community. In all the Naga tribes, women were not allowed to participate in the rites and rituals performed before and after going to war for head-hunting. R.R Shimray worded about the ritual in *Origin and Culture of Nagas* :

That night they would be dancing, singing and drumming, every man touching the head at intervals or staining their daos and spears with blood only to be washed the next morning at the stream away from the village. The warrior if poor, offered pigs or

chicken, to his clan's men and in some cases to the eldest of the clan. Usually, the rich men used to perform the ceremony for the winner of the trophy and the head was kept affixed at the house of the eldest of the clan... women-folk could not touch the war meat nor could they participate in the war rites and ceremonies. In case of some tribes, like Sangtams the warrior should remain in-doors for 30 days. During this period, contact with women was strictly forbidden (Shimray 78).

The role of women in performing religious rites and rituals has brought to the fore the fact that there is an ambivalent attitude towards women's participation in religious expression in traditional Khamniungan society. The menstrual blood connected with womanhood which tradition had considered as impure and dangerous should totally be removed and woman must participate actively without any restrictions. It is realised that the role of women in performing religious rites and rituals are indispensable, for certain rituals are the preserve of women.

The status of women occupying a subservient position in traditional society is no longer deniable. And all forms of discrimination against women based on their natural biological build –up should not be used to prevent them from fully participating in worship for them to realise the ultimate goal of worship- salvation.

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CHAPTER: IV

WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN FOLK DANCES AND TRADITIONAL PEACE PROCESSES

Jam-hüing is one the most important traditional dance which reflects the social status of women in Khamniungan traditional society. They were considered weaker than the males who needed constant help and protection from the unseen dangers, evil spirits and sudden attack from enemy clans. The hair of a woman was the most precious ornament of a warrior. The long hair of a woman is tied to a *thsa-lak* (small basket), worn on the waist by men folk dancers that add glamour to the warrior. Women are considered the jewels of the society because through them the family lineage continues to the next generation.

Jam-hüing is a folk dance, practiced by the people of Pathso Range. *Jam* meaning 'house' and *hüing* stands for 'dance.' Thus, it takes place inside the house. The preparation for the *Jam-hüing* begins with the beginning of the year. The richest man in the village decides with his wife to celebrate *Jam- hüing* after the harvest.

He would call upon his close relatives for a meeting, and reveal his intention to host the *Jam-hüing*. If his nearest kin agrees, he will spread the news to the whole village to assist him in his agricultural works throughout the year. The rich man would own a number of large paddy fields for that particular year. All the girls and women folks of the rich man's clan would volunteer to come together to help them out, and the village folks would lend a helping hand in completing all the agricultural works for an overflowing harvest throughout the year, from cutting and burning of the fields, clearing and sowing of seeds, weeding and harvesting. Every village folk must work and participate in the community work the year through.

After the harvest, women would gather at his house to dry the grains and on the following days they grind the grains and get ready for the festival. While in the meantime men folks of the village would gather to build a huge house at the place where the *Jam-hüing* folk-dance would be hosted. The house is specially designed, only the lower side of the wall will be covered by the bamboo, and the upper part of the wall is left open for the audience to watch the folk dance from the outside, half of the roof is covered with *trachycarpus fortunei* leaves and a big timber is tied on the roof to be used as a seat for the audience. Thus, audience can also climb up the roof to watch the dance from the roof.

The ceremony begins with the selection of the three girls from the whole village. The girls should be from the family of *Po-Kam Nyiu-Kam Thso* (a child whose parents are alive), they should not have been bitten by snakes, attacked by wild animals, they should not be an offspring of consanguineous marriage. Thus, the three girls selected are invited to the house of the rich man. And they are made to soak grains in water which is later tried and grinded into powder.

The first brew is prepared by them, after which six powerful men of pure lineage are invited to taste the first brew of the festival and a pig is killed to mark the day. On the following day, two pigs and three mithuns are killed for the *Jam-hüing* festival. The warriors gather for the folkdance displaying vibrant and colourful artistry. From human hairs and animal hairs to long hornbill feathers, wearing war shawls, criss-crossed on the chest and back, they walk majestically yelling and shouting, producing terrific howls filling the atmosphere of the house with war like whoops.

The men folks dance over different songs on the first day, only at the midnight hour, the three girls who were called to prepare the first brew are called to join the men folks into singing and dancing. The first girl is made to hold a small flesh of a mithun- meat containing

four bones cut out of the short ribs, the second girl is asked to hold spare ribs of a pig with four bones and the third girl is made to hold a small bamboo container filled with salt. Their mother or their aunt makes them stand with *Pou-Kam Nyiu-Kam Thso* and they make three rounds, after which the girls of the village join the group and the dancing continues without stopping till the next morning.



Photo credit : Chillia Chiu

Ah-hüng (Folk dance)

Jam nyiu long mei mei?

How beautiful is this big house?

Jam nyiu long yah yah!

This house is absolutely beautiful!

Ao-vem kong kong thso nia mo sai?

Midnight owl, are you still awake?

Bao she shao lum thso sai an khem.

Every insect had slept away, except me).

Menyiu leng tu ounpung koi nou,

(The ornaments of a woman are like the wool of a sheep,

Menyiu leng tu ngep sangnia nou.

The green tattoo is the ornament of a woman.

Seau nyiu along-thong ta aseau tae?

Beautiful woman, can you keep sounding the bell on your necklace?

Long-thong jeha tei ta je-seau tae.

There is no bell to keep on sounding.

Seau nyiu lakhe thi ko yah so sei?

Beautiful woman, shall we go back wearing your beautiful shell?

Shon tsao, lang tsao tse ko yah ko sei.

Through the thorny push, let the beautiful shell light the way.

Lah thso ting-ting mongchu ko yah,

The brass disc produces a melancholic sound.

Long thong ting-ting mongchu ko yah.

The bells produce a melancholic sound.

Nok jeha, menyiu nok jeha,

No village, women have no village,

Nok jeha ta hang-an lu she sei. ,

Women have no village, we can only sing about it in our songs.

Menyiu nok ta tsoi-thso ki moya?

Do women have a hill that can be called their village?

Menyiu nok ta tsoi-thso je khi mo!

There is no hill, woman can call their village!

The celebration continues with women visiting the rich man's house carrying fermented rice mixed with a white paste which is extracted from the rice beer. They smear the rice in the faces of men, uttering words of praise, which attracts the attention of the men folks and in return they smear the faces of women praising their beauty and character. They would utter only words of praises, digging out only the positive attributes of women and men. This is also a part of the ritual, where people learn to focus on the positive side of life by ignoring all the flaws hidden in a person. Even though the man looks older, the woman praises him for his youthful appearance, and the man in reply praises her, for being the most beautiful girl he ever encountered. The celebration strengthens the relationship of man and woman. Which help the tribes to build a strong society firmly rooted on love.

Khiamniungans addressed the women as *Menyiu*. The word '*me*' stands for 'others' and '*nyiu*' meaning 'mother.' Thus, the word 'Menyiu' conveys the meaning 'others mother.' Women were considered an outsider at her own home. They were brought up to be married off to some other clan because women find their completion in marriage. In order to fit into the tradition and belief held by men, the ultimate goal of a girl was to marry and give birth to a son which is the beginning of bringing together two clans as a family and building peace.

Peacemaking in the family has always fallen on women's shoulders. They appeal for peace as mothers, wives and sisters. Women have managed to engage themselves effectively within their traditional space and have significantly impacted the society. The cultural and traditional role of women as peacemakers legitimizes the modern day peace activism in the society. For women, peacemaking is a part of our traditional role. Khamniungan saws passed on over the years, by our ancestors' conveys the truth about women "Menyiu hai üh mae yachou eiu she" (women establish others' home). Every society masters the art of socialization from woman.

Women lose their birth identity to establish someone else's home. By denying herself she accepts a new identity that enables a woman to belong to two different families. Thus, women build peace between families as she maintains a cordial relationship between two different clans, villages, tribes and countries. A girl does not belong to the same family or village throughout her life. Thus, women become a bridge, being married to another clan, women actively pursues unity among clans with the aim to bridge the gap. Milanda Ganguli commented:

All Nagas welcome male descendents to this world with more enthusiasm than daughters, who later gets married to men of different clans and become their members (Ganguli 226).

In the traditional Khamniungan society, women played a vital role by becoming a shield for the men folks in the most violent of times. Head hunting was a man's game, it was considered a noble act, by killing an enemy they believed the men folks have fulfilled their duty by defending the village from the attack of the enemies and bringing war trophy was an act of sacrifice. Khashim Ruivah stated "for it was a manly act to sacrifice one's life for the cause of righteousness" (Ruivah 180). Men folks lived in the morung because it was

considered lowly to spend a lot of time with the family in the company of his wife, and performing household chores would invite criticisms from the society.

Men are supposed to be with his peer group, on guard for the safety of the village. Women were considered home keepers, who remained at home. During war and feud, women participated by carrying water and Vondem (an indigenous energizing drink, prepared with rice, quinoa and millet by fermentation). In a bamboo mug to satiate the thirst and hunger of the men folks engaged in war. It was the women folks who looked after injured persons from both the parties, even their enemy clan or village. Women shouldered the responsibility of carrying the dead persons away from the battlefield. Thus, women played an active role in building peace in the traditional Khamniungan society.

The difference in the role of men and women should be recognised and acknowledged. Xavier Mao mentioned about the role of women in building peace:

During the head hunting warfare, women have great roles to play. Even in the pitched battle between two warring parties, if women come in between with leafs or clothes and wave, the war has to stop immediately, the same applies even in ordinary fighting between two men. In the head hunting days, the peace treaty is negotiated by women between the two enemies. Even the heads of killed men in the battle are carried to the respective village by nulo (women ambassadors) (Mao 39-40).

Among the Changs, women were considered ambassadors of peace. In the traditional society, women were allowed to enter their enemy clans, Morung and village, prior to the conflict, during and after the conflict. Women played the commendable role of a mediator. From the village, some outstanding powerful women were chosen as mediators to mediate and call for peace between two warring villages. Their contribution in peace building was much honoured and respected by the village folks that it was tabooed to slain or kill a

mediator. And women were responsible for initiating peace talks between two warring villages, as they were considered ambassadors of peace.

Lucy Zehol in “Women in Naga Society” commented about the role of women in Konyak society:

One of the most important roles played by women was the role of a messenger or mediator during the inter-village war. In case of any dispute, women conveyed to the other village, the existing terms of agreement or the terms which were acceptable to her village and the other village to act accordingly, failing which war could be declared between the two villages. During the head hunting days, women carried the head of the slain ones to the bereaved families. They could not move freely between the warring villages. Not all women, but only the exceptionally talented women could play such role. It was tabooed to kill such women (Zehol 80).

Men tend to dominate the formal roles in the current peace-building process. Power is unequally distributed between men and women and such inequalities cause formal peace building activities and policies to suffer from insufficient understanding of the diverse communities in which they are representing. Not including women in decision making processes towards peace often means that female concerns are not addressed. Experiences and insights of both men and women during conflict and peace need to be represented in order to encapsulate all dimensions for holistic solutions.

Shimray wrote about the role of women during general war in Tangkhul Naga society:

When a party was pressed back very far killing a warrior or two, and the verdict was known, a neutral force came in. The neutral force belonged either to the neighbouring villages or the neutral ladies (PHUKHAREILA in Tangkhul) who were married to the

warriors of the enemy clan. The PHUKHAREILA holding long 'Y' shaped stick would enter the field and try to prevent the winner side from chasing the defeated party. At the intervention of the neighbouring villages or the PHUKHAREILA the pursuers would generally stop chasing, for to violate intervention would mean another war of the villages combined against the breaker of the inter-state law. The PHUKHAREILA could not be harmed as a rule. She was highly respected for her neutrality, for she was related to both the village. They are called the Ambassadors of peace who were related to both the village states by blood and by law (Shimray 80-81).

Women of Wui village played a significant role in building peace in the traditional Khamniungan society. Wui village was considerably small in size, but it had the most excellent smiths and potters. Thus, in the traditional society, with the establishment of every new village Wui villagers were invited to the newly inaugurated village for metal works to produce pots, daos, spear, spade and other agricultural tools. Thus, women took the advantage of selling pots in return of peace.



Wui-Lük (Wui pots)

They felt the need of a peaceful- community living since they were not confined to Wui village alone. They spread out across Khamniungan villages being invited by people because of their profession. They build peace between villages inhabited by their fellow villagers. In spite of the repeated attack of enemies Wui Village remained self- sufficient as a village because they were artistic potters and skilful smiths. Their products were known all over the region. Thus, Wui women were the fearless ambassadors of peace in their own capacity. They united clans and villages in exchange of earthen pots.

The recent land dispute at Tuensang District, the commercial hub of Eastern Nagaland divided the two Eastern tribes, Chang and Yimchunger in the year 2015. The whole population of Yimchunger Tribe was forced to leave the town within short span of days. Women became the victims of poverty, resulting from the loss of many families, property, primary income; forced separation from their ancestral land worsened the condition of women and children. This resulted in hardship for women, since it reduces their ability to gain access to the necessities required to maintain a household.

It lead to social expulsion and poverty for women and their children. Forced displacement of women leads to a change in roles and relations, which became both empowering and challenging. The numerous new roles shouldered by women in conflict situations, entailing reproductive, productive and social responsibility, were a heavy burden and delegated to daughters who are therefore not able to continue at school. This naturally increased the imbalance between the genders, even after the end of the conflict. As the conflict continued, the significance of women grew; women played a major role at all levels.

The Eastern Naga Women's Organisation contributed immensely to bring peace in the land. Sustaining community cohesion and promoting peace at the local level, beginning at their families by strengthening their matrimonial ties between the two communities, women

became the educators at home, civil society leaders sowing seeds of peace and mediator at the governing sector. Thus, women should be provided space to actively participate in the inevitable peace agreement and subsequent transitional justice process. Women's participation, especially in areas of prolonged conflict, will improve the likelihood of sustainable peace, and advocate peace in their communities.

Gender mainstreaming requires gender aware norms, standards mechanism for implementation and resources, the selection of appropriate leadership and decision-making structures; the recruitment of gender balanced peacekeeping team; gender awareness training and capacity building for all peace-keepers and the regular monitoring and evaluation of gender mainstreaming at all phases of peace operations.

The absence of women from the peace tables cause insufficient attention and reflection of the concerns of women in peace agreements. The number of women who participate in formal peace processes remains very small. Even when women participate or are included in formal peace negotiations, their role can be limited to a formal presence without having the capacity, or mandate to contribute to setting or shaping the agenda of such negotiations.

Male negotiators may also simply be unwilling to consider gender issues and women's concerns due to customs and traditions, as well as stereotypes that limit or narrowly define the role of women in public life and decision-making. Even when peace agreements contain issues of concern to women or gender-related aspects or provisions, these are sometimes phrased in such general terms so as to provide insufficient opportunity and basis for action in the implementation phase.

Lack of a common voice or agenda with regard to peace negotiations due to the lack of time or resources, the particular geographical constraints of a country, language constraints

which make communications among women and women's group difficult, women's diversity, with regard to ethnic, racial or religious affiliations, or their particular experiences during conflict, can also be an obstacle in developing a common agenda. Lack of gender awareness in peace negotiations further marginalises women's needs and contributions to peace. No peace-keeping operation could be sustainable and successful without the full respect of women and girls' rights.

If tradition has taught men to wage wars, create conflict and defend a clan, village and the community, surely tradition has also taught women to build peace in the family, to love an enemy clan and build the society firmly rooted on peace. In the traditional society it was women who sacrificed selflessly with a spirit of total surrender, spreading the spirit of serenity and peace where men left an enemy in turmoil, bleeding profusely without a head, a family deprived of its children and parents only to live as a slave in the cruel hands of male supremacy, who victoriously celebrate the battle won with rhyming songs of victory.

The society would have been lifeless and dull without women's participation in the social life. Even in the midst of feuds, climaxing in head hunting between villages, women would volunteer to act as a mediator. Women had always been the peacemaker, a person who selflessly gives much more than she thought would be possible, and women had stood for peace to keep two enemies as brothers, in pain and victory.

Women have the power to shape society with kindness and peace. Women's love transcends all barriers. Even though women were known to the community either by her father's name or husband's name, a society which places motherhood above womanhood, and were denied the right to enter a morung where all the major decisions were taken for the welfare of the village or clan, the voice of women remained unheard but behind the curtain of patriarchy women reciprocated peace.

Women succeeded in peace keeping because they mastered patience. Girls were taught by their mothers and grandmothers to live under male domination. Women cannot assert her rights even in her place of birth. Women were taught by tradition to endure patiently. But woman managed to positively contribute to peace building in a society that lives under male supremacy.

Women's peace initiatives are marked by a number of distinct characteristics. Women's peace activism encompasses concerns for food security, access to their land, forest, water and other resources. As women negotiate survival strategies the issue of livelihood, health care and education is given utmost priority grounded in the notion of justice and human security. Because of their lack of status within society women are systematically excluded from decision making opportunities, they are often stereotyped as victims and their experiences and contributions are virtually ignored in conflict zones.

Women should be given an opportunity to promote reconstruction efforts with a gender perspective and enable women to participate actively in this process. The presence of women and the incorporation of a gender perspective in these efforts have a favourable effect on the peace process. This is vital, particularly in the light of the fact that women increasingly make up the majority of the local population and able to function as role models for both women and men in the society.

When the women around the world is celebrating the remarkable contribution of women across all spheres of life, who have broken all barriers and reached the pinnacle of success by actively participating in politics, education, social work, corporate, sports, IT, research and development, innovative and diverse fields and have left their footprints; women still face the challenge to completely liberate herself from the cultural perception of gender because many educated still live in the past and not progressing past.

Women have courageously played various roles in defusing the density of the situation by directly intervening or through negotiation and democratic means which is still continuing actively till date. Women braving through the modern, sophisticated weapons of the armed forces are ceaselessly volunteering for peace and justice acting as human shields, negotiating with the security forces and the militants for the safety of their community, mediating inter-factional violence and emerging as the front line against human rights violations.

In today's era of conflict, distractions and diversions, women still believe in humanism and humanity and the religion of love and peace. The role of Khiamniungan women is continuing in tandem with the changing situation and scenario at the region that has become a conflict zone of border issue. Where women suffer the most, all these years of bloodshed and tears right from the formation of Naga National Council, women have actively participated and contributed in building peace within the tribe and much more among the Eastern Nagas.

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CHAPTER: V

GENDERED IMPACT OF SLAVERY

The Khamniungan Nagas are the head hunters, like any other tribe in Nagaland. They chopped off human heads and carried them as trophies of war. Despite its calamitous effect, has its own logic. Not that they want neither more land, nor a village but they did value human heads. They believed that heads of those belonging to villages other than their own would add fertility to their soil and was the highest form of sacrifice to god. The most important factor for waging war was, however the tradition that the man could not be counted as a warrior if they could not bring the head of the enemy.

Head hunting was a test of bravery among men. A warrior enjoyed the highest position in the society. He had the advantage of winning the hand of the village belle in marriage. Another compelling cause of war was justice. It was believed that the whole human personality is in the human head. That is why human hair was so priced in Khamniungan society for decorating *Thsa-lak*. If a head could not be brought, women hair was cut off and brought home as a substitute. Thus, the hair of a woman was a treasure. The village that took the maximum number of heads was considered the most powerful village widely, known as *lengnuk* (warrior's village).

A warrior who brought war slaves was much honoured than a person who brought human heads during the war. A number of women slaves were brought as trophies in the traditional society. As the hair of a woman was one of the most precious ornaments a man can ever own. *Shoutenpo* (a warrior who bring slaves) was much esteemed and honoured than an ordinary warrior, who brings human heads because slaves were brought alive which requires much courage, strength and war tactics. At the end of the battle, capturing slaves was the last resort, thus even among the warriors the most powerful and the courageous captured war

slaves. J.P Mills observed, “slaves were also kept as a sign of status of rich people. It was [a] custom for a rich men to be surrounded by a body guard of slaves when in contact with enemy (Mills 210).

In Khamniungan society slavery was not practiced within the tribe. War slave was brought to a village, from a different tribe. When a slave was brought to a village, they were treated cruelly with iron hands. A mark on the forehead was made with a machete, the blood that runs down from the forehead was collected in a bamboo mug mixed with water and slaves were forced to drink their own blood, after drinking the blood, the master would hit the slave on its forehead with the bamboo mug until it breaks. They were forcefully pushed inside a *Phen* (log drum) along with the other human heads that were chopped off in the battle field; a ritual of beating the log drum was performed. The warrior would recite *Ong Pho* (the slave was captured by me) while the other witnesses would reply *Oh-e Laa* (Yes, he captured the slave).

The slave was taken to the Dheo-düng. Unlike the other Naga tribes, Khamniungans kept the heads of the enemies by hanging them on a tree (Khelah pai -a thorny tree) at a particular spot in the village. The warrior would cut their hair to be used as ornaments to perform rituals. A thread was tied round his neck, with a long bamboo stick attached to it which kept him captive from running away. They were bound to serve their masters all of their life, without proper food, little clothes but with utmost sincerity and respect. Living a selfless life devoted wholeheartedly in serving and pleasing the master. Even to the extent of sacrificing one's life. Slaves had no right over their masters; they were bound to serve their masters even at the cost of their life. Bringing slaves during head hunting was usually done for material gain, and the person who owned the highest number of slaves was the richest person in the village because when a slave was ransomed, the enslaved relatives usually paid a huge amount of price like mithun, property and *lak-keng*(brass discs).

All slaves lived with their masters. They lived at the mercy of their master. They had no right to decide anything on their own. A slave could not even cut her hair. They had no right to own a property or a house that enslaved them to serve their masters whole of their life. A woman slave could marry and settle down, but she remained an absolute property of her master. A slave lost all her clan rights and became a member of her master's clan. But she had no right to exercise her will and freedom in her new found identity, which is actually forced upon. Haimendorf wrote painful lines on the life of slaves:

I have never seen more miserable creatures than these five 'slaves'; a young woman, a youth of about twenty, two small boys, and a small girl. After the massacre of their relatives they had been dragged off to hostile villages, conscious always of the terrible death awaiting them.... The tribes on the Patkoi mountains beheaded slaves at their Feasts of Merit. The only human trait in these cruel ceremonies was perhaps the custom of making the victim so drunk before slaughter that he went to his death only half conscious...the trussed slave was thrown into the hole, and was crushed as the main post came smashing down. But the worst fate awaited those slaves who were sacrificed on the newly cleared field, for the victim was bound to a stake, from where he watched the flames creeping up the dry felled jungle, roaring as the wind fanned them. The spirit which left the poor charred body was believed to have a fertilizing influence on the field (Haimendorf 137).

Slavery was prevalent since ancient times in many society but the forms of slavery were not as stringent as it was in other parts of the mainland and beyond. In some cases, the masters treated his slaves as members of his own family as they lived in the same house at the same food and the slaves also behaved as members of the same family. But, if the slaves are not treated well, they ran off to their villages and wage wars to have their revenge, thus if the master cannot trust the slave, he would invite the enslaved relatives to come and win over

with a huge amount of money or precious things. Christoph Von Fürer Haimendorf commented:

The Kalyo- Kengyus were apparently not bound by any such scruples. I never discovered what their gods thought of the matter but they themselves certainly considered the capture and selling of slaves as an extremely profitable business, and one that they would not easily renounce (Haimendorf 120).

Keeping of slaves in one's house was considered as a status symbol and rich men used to keep a number of slaves in their houses. As the social status of a rich man was indicated by the number of slaves he own. In most cases, children born of slaves were usually put to death. Going to war, was not by compulsion, a warrior needed to decide by himself to wage war because if he is defeated, he would be taken by his enemies as a captive, a war slave that would invite heavy fines to be ransomed. The master takes complete dominion over the slave. If a slave comes to dominate any property, it would go back to the master after the death of a slave.

During the pre- British period, children were captured from the hills and sold as slaves. Young girls became slaves at a very young age. They lived under the control of male supremacy. A slave had no right over her health and time. They faced discrimination in the society the war made them captives. Noksa Chiu explains what slavery does to its victims:

Slaves were totally at the disposal of their masters, even upto the extent of killing if the master desired so, and would add to his trophies. Slaves were bound to work for their masters in any circumstances, and had no right to express their wishes. It continued in the condition till they were ransomed by their relatives (Chiu 15).

Khiamniungan Naga society has seen little changes in all walks of life. But women and gender equality still remain a far cry. Because of the fact that majority of the Khiamniungans are still cultivators. Social reform in the rural areas is a major challenge of the tribe. People who claim to be leaders still face the major challenge of clanism. A blurred vision of the future with little history of the past, it is difficult to present a crystal clear picture of the present. Slavery was terrible for men but it was far more terrible for women. Many of the men slaves were ransomed by their kinsmen with the cost of many precious ornaments, property and mithun but a women slave was never ransomed, they remained a tool in the hands of their masters.

In many societies around the world, history repeats. Slavery still exists in Khiamniungan society under the curtains of patriarchy. Many educated people are of the opinion that men and women enjoy equal rights in every sphere of life but women and girls live under male dictates. Women and girls are still dominated by the males in the society. They had little or no time to invest in their career. All the major decision of a girl child is taken by the male members of the family even to this day. Like a slave, they are deemed to suffer at the hands of male supremacy.

Many of the Khiamniungan girls and women both from Myanmar and India live as domestic workers in towns and cities that contribute to the increasing number of child trafficking, rape and violence against women. In the villages, young girls are made to work tirelessly from morning till dusk without nutritious food, proper hygiene and a proper place to sleep. They still live the life of a slave without any knowledge of rights and privileges.

Case study

In one of the case study the mother recounted the death of her beautiful girl. Poverty is to be blamed, “I lost her smile” she whispered. A regretful mother with tears swelling up her sorrowful eyes and flowing down the sunburned cheeks, her wrinkled face revealed that her hard work made her look older than her age. The room was a small square with poor furniture, two thin worn out blankets. There was a small frame hung on the dark room. It was the picture of her little girl lying still at the coffin. The only picture the mother kept for herself, in memory of her lost daughter was clicked on her death bed. Her mother continued... “We parted ways on the first month of the year, “I cannot deprive you of your Right to Education” I told her truthfully. Since, your friends are moving to towns and cities, and you so desire to live as a domestic helper for the sake of your studies, I have no right to stop you, to deprive you of your dreams. She replied “Mother, I will come back during the winter break, with good marks.” From that day on, I lost her smile. I did not even have a phone to contact her but I could only meet her in my dreams. Every Sunday, I enquired about her, to people passing by the town she lived. But no body from my village ever met her. After few years, I got the news that her house owner treated her cruelly, that she was repeatedly beaten up, forced to carry a filled LPG gas cylinder at a tender age of twelve. I could not bear more, that I rushed back home and requested one of the fathers at my neighbourhood to bring back my child at my house. After a week, she appeared before me but she could not even look straight into my eyes. After all these years of happy dreams and longing to be united to an educated daughter, I was left battling with my tears. She was scared of her own mother and could not even walk straight she lost her true self in exchange of education. After few months of her silence, she was diagnosed with a dreadful disease AIDS. And I took her to a hospital, where I got a negative comment from her doctor “you are too late.” She passed away at the secluded ward of the hospital. The mother revealed the dark side of modern education and how it enslaves

the poor families. Many educated people in the society have neither an ear nor an eye for the poor underprivileged children of border areas. The innocence and loyalty of poor girls is used as a tool to exploit them and many a times it cost their life.

Women have no right over their bodies, in many cases they are forced to abort an unborn child. For men, social prestige is much important than the life of a woman, of whom they assign the position of a slave. Women still live at the receiving end of men's cruelty, hatred and social discrimination. Education has not completely wiped out the hatred in men, because modern education is reduced to a commodity-something that is bought at a very high price, for people living at the remotest boundaries but it has little impact on the character of a person and the community as a whole.

Khamniungan women living in Myanmar suffered immensely during the Military Dictatorship from 1962 to 2011. Women were treated like slaves. Common types of human rights violation including executions, physical tortures, rape, forced labour to build roads, railways and to serve as polders were committed in the ethnic minority Khamniungan areas. Women leaving their breast-feeding child travelled to distant villages carrying food and arms for the armed forces. They could not deny the duty assigned to them because they were physically tortured and beaten up harshly by the armies. Bearing the wounds of conflict and war, a woman is supposed to be a faithful, selfless, loving and gentle wife. Women suffered the most in any military rule around the world. The remote location of the Khamniungan tribe both in India and Myanmar is one of the main reasons for the marginalization of women. Women throughout Khamniungan history had gone through untold suffering and cruelty. Women still live speechless and are struggling hard to secure their rights.

During the head-hunting days, the society was positioned in a way that the fear of the enemy compelled the men folks to spent most of their time at the watch tower-morung and

women were left at home, tied to the family responsibilities the only place where they can exercise their power. They were prohibited to enter the morung. They were made to believe that their physical weakness would never qualify them to join the men folks in the battle fields. Even though some women could even kill wild animals they were seen by the society as a women who constantly need the help of men. They were confined to their homes and their suppression gave men the right to rule over them bringing them down to the lowest position in the society. Women will remain slaves of the society until they venture out of the familial framework to discover her potential as an individual and give expression to her inner space and self. The woman who occupies some special space being identified as wife, mother, daughter, and sister is not free; she is held in captivity. The true self of the oppressed person is moulded, subverted and distorted in such a way that it is ultimately driven to a state of powerlessness, facelessness and dependency. Jeanne Nobles writes:

Even when told, some were reluctant to be free. Slavery had, as it was, lulled many of the victims into a false sense of security. They either feared freedom or adopted the negative attitude of their masters (Nobles 56).

Slavery still exists in the society with little visible change. Women have no right to express their opinion and take major decisions in the presence of men. If they are given the freedom to make choices, it is usually in the absence of men. Women are trained to play a submissive role in the family, with a number of decisions taken by males suppressing their freedom, happiness and career. The woman who choose to break traditional barriers and yearns to achieve individuality and self- identity are alienated from the society because they rise above tradition. Thus, women are unwillingly trapped in the male- oriented society.

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CHAPTER: 6

TRACKING EQUITY AND EQUALITY

“... That all men and women are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, that to secure these rights governments are instituted, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. Whenever any form of government becomes destructive to these ends, it is the right of those who suffer from it to refuse allegiance to it, and to insist upon the institution of a new government, laying its foundation on such principles, and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to affect their safety and happiness.”

An excerpt from the opening paragraphs of *The Declaration of Sentiments*, also known as the *Declaration of Rights and Sentiments*, a document signed in 1848 at the first women's rights convention in Seneca Falls, New York, now known as the Seneca Falls Convention.

Owing to the fact that, the whole population of Khamniungans are Christians. Christianity is the most important source of ideas about women. Thus, it is important to reflect upon the range of women's experience as Christians. The early modern Europeans history reveals that Christianity had inherited many of its ideas from Judaism. The Jewish Scripture and the Christian Bible gives conflicting accounts of creation. In Genesis at first, God creates women and men at the same time, and in the second, a woman, Eve is created out of the rib of the first man, Adam, after God decides that Adam needs a mate. The second one is the one that comes to be retold and portrayed in the form of art widely, it became the root. Merry E. Weisner argues:

It is also the one that goes on to describe the first human sin, in which Eve is tempted by a serpent to disobey God in order to gain knowledge, and then tempts Adam; their disobedience gets them expelled from the Garden of Eden and comes to be described in Christian doctrine as the “fall of man” or “the original sin.” Most later Jewish and Christian commentators thus chose to view Eve, and by extension all women, as the source of evil and sin in the world, though there are a few who held Adam equally responsible, and a very few who viewed him as *more* responsible because he was a man and should have been better able to withstand the temptation (Wiesner 11).

The favourite metaphor for the virtuous wife was either the snail or the tortoise; both animals never leave their houses and are totally silent. Once the Reformation was established, most women expressed their religious convictions in a domestic, rather than a public setting. They prayed and recited the catechism with children and servants, attended sermons, read the Bible or other devotional literature if they were literate, served meals that no longer followed Catholic fast prescriptions and provided religious instructions for their children. Women’s domestic religion often took them beyond their household, however, for they give charitable donations to the needy and often assisted in caring for the ill and indigent. There are also examples from protestant areas of women who established and supported almshouses, schools, orphanages, fund for poor widows, and dowry funds for poor girls. The secularization of public welfare which accompanied the Reformation did give some women the opportunity to create permanent instructions to deal with social problems; evidence from wills indicates that women were, perhaps not surprisingly, more likely than men to make bequests which specifically benefitted other women.

Many of these female religious thinkers drew large numbers of followers. Anna Hoyer shared her religious insights after being widowed with children to care for, and in suffering persecution for them, but she confronted the established state church leaders much more

directly. She published sharp religious-political satire, blaming the Thirty Years War on the “devil pastors,” and attacking the Lutheran clergy for laxness, pride, greed, and trust in worldly learning. She often used literary forms normally supportive of traditional piety, such as the conversation between parent and child, but turned them into bitter polemical pieces. In her *Spiritual Conversation Between a Mother and Child About True Christianity* the mother first asks what did you learn about salvation and the bible in church today?’ ‘Nothing.’ ‘About the prophets and Revelation?’ ‘Nothing.’” The mother then launches into a harsh critique of the clergy’s monopoly of religious discourse despite their lack of spiritual understanding;

No one is allowed to contradict him

Even if he says that crooked is straight

And black is white. He must be right (Arnold 106).

In her other writings as well, Hoyer recommends that women act independently to make sure their children and others gain true religious knowledge, and not put too much trust in male institutions or authorities. She followed her own recommendation, gathering a group of like-minded associates as well as publishing, for which she was forced out of her Native Schleswig-Holstein and eventually found refuge in Sweden.

Ideas about women changed somewhat with the intellectual changes of the Renaissance. When authorities of all types began to be questioned, both female and male voices, expressing a more positive view of women began to be a bit louder. In the New Testament, Jesus himself spoke frequently to women and included them among his followers, sometimes even to the embarrassment of his male associates. He preached that men and women were equally capable of achieving life after death, and that women as well as men

should not let their domestic responsibilities come before their spiritual wellbeing. Many of his parables use women as positive examples, or relate things which would have more meaning for women. Jesus taught his followers that women thus instructed will be beneficial to the nation. Weisner holds:

The untraditional nature of Jesus' idea was quickly downplayed by many of his followers shortly after his death. The role of the twelve disciples, all of whom were male, was stressed in the books which became the Christians New Testament, and the role of his female followers, such as Mary Magdalene, was downplayed. Paul, whose letters form about half of the books of the New Testament and who in many ways transformed Jesus' teachings into a systematic set of beliefs, had a more ambivalent view about women's place; at one point he notes that there should be no distinction on account of gender in the Christian community, but says elsewhere that women should be silent in the Churches (Weisner 12).

The pastors claimed biblical authority for their position, and at the heart of the issue are the control of female sexuality and the maintenance of a moral order in which women are subservient. These factors emerged in nearly all the religious conflicts involving women.

Chaucer's fictional character, the wife of Bath, states this clearly in the *Canterbury Tales*:

My God, had women written histories

Like cloistered scholars in oratories

They'd have set down more of men's wickedness

Than all the sons of Adam could redress (Chaucer 236).

The key question for women is often the conflict between the authorities and opinions of men and authority of God. Woman had to choose between what male political and religious authorities, and sometimes even their fathers and husbands, told them to do, and what they perceived as God's plan for their lives.

In the villages many women are illiterate and they face severe discrimination based on gender, they are not given any important position in the church, because the church ministry is much focused on the rich and the powerful church goers, where majority of them are males. Women find it hard to get over the idea that "eating dog meat is a sin." The principles taught during the head- hunting days still govern the Christian church in many villages. Mary Wollstonecraft in "A Vindication of the Rights of Woman" holds that;

A mistaken education, a narrow, uncultivated mind, and many sexual prejudices, tend to make women more constant than men; but, for the present, I shall not touch on this branch of the subject. I will go still further, and advance, without dreaming of paradox, that an unhappy marriage is often very advantageous to a family, and that the neglected wife is, in general, the best mother (Wollstonecroft 42).

Nobody had ever questioned why females cannot become the pastor. The ability of a woman to act out her religious convictions is largely dependent on the social position of her family. Traditional patriarchal structures resembling that of the larger society can be reflected in the structure of church ministry, in which women are consigned to primary assisting roles.

It may seem somewhat odd to think of Christianity as a religion which empowered women for it contains strong streaks of misogyny and it is still controlled by male hierarchies with the highest levels of the clergy reserved for men. God is thought of as male, the account of creation appears to ascribe or ordain a secondary status for women, and the women are instructed to be subservient and obedient; the religious traditions is used by men as buttresses

for male authority in all realms of life, not simply religion. The ideal holy woman is a devout mother who lives quietly at home, and did her miracles and good deeds in private. In the villages, women who felt a spiritual calling remained with their families, devoting themselves to helping others.

Though tradition has it that, there has been social equality, women have not been treated equally. The women folks enjoyed less of a democratic status and social equality. There is this element of primitive ideas in the churches which frowns upon the women assuming leadership roles. But the New Testament makes it clear that women are called to exercise their gifts in the church ministry, and social discrimination should not hinder them from their right of leadership in the church.

In the past, women were painted in harrowing picture and presented a bleak vision, framed within a decidedly conservative version but the Gospel of Christ alone has liberated them from that old bondage. Culture or tradition of men cannot hinder women from their capable services in Church ministry. Christ has set them free from the primitive bindings. Christ honoured the women in the New Testament era so must the church today.

Woman should come out from the traditional homes, give up the role of a marginalized female, and start exploring the glories and miseries of a new identity in Christ, living for Jesus. Empower women with the word of God. Women were created by God and could be saved through faith, spiritually women and men were equal. In light of the physical and social restrictions placed on women, it is difficult to build gender equality under conditions of patrilocality that characterize the Naga society. Thus, religion should play a major role in social transformation.

Anna Maria van Schurman worded it beautifully in “The Learned Maid or Whether a Maid May be Called A Scholar?

My deep regard for learning, my conviction that equal justice is the right of all, impel me to protest against the theory which would allow only a minority of my sex to attain to what is, in the opinion of all men, most worth having. For since wisdom is admitted to be the crown of human achievement, and is within every man's right to aim at in proportion to his opportunities, I cannot see why a young girl in whom we admit a desire for self-improvement should not be encouraged to acquire the best that life affords (Schurman 55).

In the words of Joan Scott, "gender is a primary way of signifying relationships of power" and that people's notion of gender shaped not only the way they thought about men and women. These ideas in turn affected the way they acted, but explicit and symbolic ideas of gender could also conflict with the way women and men chose or were forced to operate in the world, thus the status of men and women were at once shaped by their gender. Women were widely recognised as having less physical, economic and political power than men, so that they need more magical assistance to gain what they wanted. When men could use their physical and social status to win over women, she could only scold, curse or cast spells. Because women often married at a younger age, they spent much of their later years as widows.

If they ever re-married it was often with widowers so that they become step-mothers. Resentments about preferential treatment were very common in families with step-siblings, and the evil step-mother became a stock figure in the folk tales. If a women's second husband died, she might have to spent her last years in the house of her step-son or step-daughter, who resented her demands but was bound by a legal contract to provide for her; old age become a standard figure of the popular stereotype of the necromancy. The ideas of female sinfulness, irrationality, and weakness drawn from tradition and religion regarded women as inferior and incapable of defending their honour completely without male assistance. But, underlying all

their ideas about women, and the laws that resulted from those ideas, were concepts about their own nature as men.

Khiamniungan women emerged out of a place called “Khiamniungan” as history unfolds by way of oral tradition. Men and women lived together at all places in different villages. At no point of time had men lived in isolation without the woman. It is written in the Holy Bible in Genesis 1:27 *“So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them”* (NKJV 1). The holy statement implies that, in the eyes of God, figuratively speaking man and woman are created equal. To be companions for a lifetime and not to dominate the other. However, in reality, there exists inequality in women’s access to the opportunities in the religious, cultural, economic, social and political arena.

Men and women are equal in the eyes of God. Churches can play a significant role in empowering women to discover their true self and contribute to the society. Few women leaders are working tirelessly to uplift the weaker sections in the society like the orphans, victims of domestic violence, drug abuse, differently able and much more service is rendered to empower people surviving with HIV and AIDS. The churches have changed their focus from the rich and the powerful to the weakest section of human society through different missions which is the first step towards women empowerment.

The church should give leadership opportunities to more women that can be the only solution to witness change even to the minutest detail. As children of God men and women are graciously bestowed with the knowledge and wisdom of God.

Conclusion

Women in the traditional society lived the life of a household drudge. Like many societies around the world, Khamniungan women lived with the ideology that they are inferior to their male counterparts. Owing to the fact that women appear physically weaker than most men, they confined themselves in performing domestic works in the family like taking care of the children, rearing cattle and engaging in agricultural works, they were deemed weaker to join their men in head chopping. Thus, it eventually assigned them a lower position than men. In retrospect, the society was characterized by strict norms and attitudes of patriarchy which had a significant bearing on the status of women.

The customary law of inheritance permits only males to inherit property. A woman cannot inherit landed property. A daughter could only inherit movable property. The property that women held or handed down to the next generation was solely in the form of movable goods. They were also restricted to own other major forms of wealth like mithun and *lak-jam* (necklace). Even the necklace was returned back, to her paternal family after her death. Women lived a life completely dependent on her husband; men were given absolute authority to rule over women, in the traditional society.

The introduction of western education and the coming of Christianity in our land improved the status of women. The most important economic changes took place, women moved out of their comfort zone and started working outside of their homes, and this enabled them to contribute to the family's income. But women faced discrimination even in the job market; they were paid much lower than the males for the same work assigned to them. And the little property they acquired through their hard work was handed down to the males in the family. Even to this day, majority of the educated people are of the opinion that women

cannot own any property. Women themselves hold the ideology that any landed property they own, should be passed on to the males in the family.

In the villages, few educated fathers have started sharing their property to their daughters but a girl child and a boy child do not enjoy equal share of their father's property. People are still rooted into the traditions and customs that were followed by our ancestors. At present, Khamniungan women cannot fully emerge as successful entrepreneurs because most of the families do not support major business investments made by women. Men are freer to make business investment with the family's wealth. The socio-economic status of women in social order is based on rigid patriarchal kinship system. The ownership of the family property serves as base of power for men. Economic dependence on men deprive women the right to take part in all the major decision making bodies. Women still live with a hope to be liberated through the increasing number of educated people in the families. In Khamniungan society tradition is deeply rooted in the family.

The dormitory system in the traditional society played a significant role in dictating gender roles in the village. Women were taught by the traditional institutions that they were flawed as compared to the males. Men are all powerful and magnificent; they were the strong defenders of the village. The notion that women being weaker physically should remain at home, they were not capable of joining their men in war. It gave women a secondary status in the society. Women were forbidden to enter the morung where all the important decisions were taken. The morung system is replaced by political system in contemporary times. Women are not given an opportunity to rule over the people. Naga women are still struggling to witness a woman political figure even after fifty years of statehood in Nagaland. In Khamniungan villages women are not represented in the Village Development Board. Their problems are not addressed. Khamniungan society exemplifies patriarchy in its highest form. Top leadership positions are always reserved for men. Women's absence is felt at home, not

in the political arena. In all the social organizations people blindly induct male leaders not based on their capabilities and visions. This can be one of the major reasons the society is still progressing backward.

Rites and rituals were performed mostly by women in the traditional society. Women were made to perform rituals related to agriculture and health. Women played a major role in performing rituals when Khamniungans were believers of Animism. To please the gods, our ancestors believed that one must be married, thus marriage became a must and only married men and women could perform rites and rituals. But with the coming of Christianity in our land, the religious life of women was restricted to certain limits.

The highest position a woman can hold in the church is a Woman Leader, a position which cannot be assigned to men. In the whole community there is neither a single woman pastor nor a reverend. This reveals the fact that women are still faced with harsh discrimination even in the church. But the gospel of Christ empowered women to become contributing members in the Church ministry.

In many of the Church sermons the ideal woman appears frequently, the opinions of men are communicated to the congregation because people required to attend church in many villages, there was no way they could escape hearing from them. Women are continually advised to be cheerful rather than grudging in their obedience, sitting with her children, listening to a sermon and dress soberly. In Christian marriage, women's self subsuming role is vital to marital security. Female invisibility is a necessary part in marriage. Home is a sanctified hearth that must be preserved with women's purity, chastity and depersonalized existence. Individual urges identity and selfhood are automatically invalidated. Men use religion as a form of control to subdue women. Patriarchal structures in the form of church ministry should not hinder them from their right of leadership in the Church. However,

women's view of the ideal wife is one in which competence and companionship is as important as submissiveness. Women should cultivate the spirit of courage and confidence and actively participate in the Church ministry. In many churches, women outnumber men in church services and women made more and larger donations for religious purposes than did the men of their families. To be called human, man and woman should break down the traditional barriers of social inequality.

A folk dance in the traditional society was the unifying factor between men and women, clans and villages. Women actively participated in the peace processes. They shouldered the responsibility of building peace in the family because human society cannot fully develop unless the people live in peace. We must confront a very ugly truth, if men and women cannot live in unity with equal share of powers and functions, no society can live in peace. Peace is the ultimate solution for all the conflicts and war that exist around the world. The developmental changes in the society have changed the role of women in building peace in the society. The new religion as opposed to Animism has changed the role of women in building peace. Women as prayer warriors sacrifice their time by organizing prayer and fasting for peace in our land. The border tension, conflict and land disputes between tribes have become the order of the day. Leaders at all levels work for the development of villages and towns. Since, majority of the population in the villages are illiterate, developmental works in the rural areas results in conflict which become the major cause of disunity among the people. Women being the weaker section in the villages, they stand at the receiving end of major conflicts which results in the subjugation of females in the society. But, women's contribution in peace-making cannot be undermined. They reach out to different conflict zones bearing the banner of the cross. They continue to support peace processes by participating in prayer chains for peace in the land. Women have effectively contributed to the peaceful co-existence of different tribes and nationalities through their prayers and faith.

Slavery was practiced in the traditional society. Slaves were captured during wars. They were treated cruelly by the masters. The slaves became the absolute property, allowing the master to own, buy and sell other individuals. They were treated like animals. In the present scenario, girls and women become slaves for the sake of education. Because of the remote location and illiterate parents many young girls come to live in towns in search of menial jobs, for skill development and education where they live as domestic helpers. Many girls leave their parents before ten years of age. They live as domestic helpers and become subject to serious abuses; it increased the number of human rights violation in the state. Women and girls become the victims of many social evils because of illiteracy and ignorance. There are many cases of rape, violence and suicide where many cases remained a mystery. The rights of women and girls are violated in many towns and cities which remains the major social issue faced by Khamniungan Menyu Hoikam and Eastern Nagaland Women Organisation.

The word equality is used many times and often times it begins to lose its meaning. Many men in the community has the opinion that the condition of women had improved after westernization but women are not given the right to take major decisions in the family, they can only take major decisions in the absence of men. Experienced and qualified women were able to ascend up in the church hierarchy only up to the post of Women Leader because the post cannot be assigned to men. In most of the villages women cannot become a member of the Deacon Board where all the important decisions affecting the church members are taken by the Deacons.

Women are constraint from taking on leadership roles in the NGOs. The highest position in every organization belongs to men. Illiteracy is the most visible barrier that hinders women from political participation, in many villages the male members of the family decides who to vote during elections.

Women are responsible for their own victimization. Women are taught by the society to hate each other, instead of loving and accepting each other on grounds of sisterhood. Planners and policy makers must be mindful of the major aspects of socially ascribed gender functions and the specific needs of men and women. If development policies are to be sustainable, they must consider existing gender parities in employment, poverty, family life health, education, the environment, public life and decision making bodies.

Working women experienced pressure to maintain gender roles while assuming professional roles, including the assumption of submissive roles toward male colleagues and allowing family interest to trump over career concerns. Educated women who can earn and are independent in every way remain slaves of the society, customs, parents, husband and children.

Historians of women have demonstrated that there is really no historical change that does not affect the lives of women in some way, though often very differently than it affects the lives of men of the same class or social group. Women have made a major contribution in every society, tribe and individual, but they are reduced to just a mere 'subordinate female' who derives her identity in relation to her father or husband and if she failed to fit herself into a family by way of marriage, she definitely loses her identity in the society. But much more ridicule and criticisms waits, if she failed to give birth to a male child.

The fact that the age of a woman is much younger than her partner in marriage paves a way for the exploitation and deterioration of the status of women in every society across the globe. Throughout history women have been observed by socially constructed code and convention formulated by the social belief systems and the political structures that have fashioned social order.

Empowering women will be beneficial to the community. Look into all history, those nations ever were, now are, and always shall be, the worst of all communities, where women are most undervalued. Thus it is important to confirm, refute, modify or nuance the effect of general historical developments on women in every society. Like in any other patriarchal society, Khamniungan women stand at the receiving end of every political, economic and even military historical change.

Women are assigned a lower position in many countries around the world. Customary laws are biased on women in most traditions. In Naga society even a well-educated progressive female feels the intense tugs of traditions, the patriarchal structure of the society assign women a secondary position in the society.

Women become the victim of social and emotional upheaval being placed at the lowest position in every society. Thus, the governments were instituted to empower the weaker sections in the society. Women should be legal rights literate because women's legal dependence will empower and increase their participation in social, economic and political arena. Everyone is equal before the law.

The old age belief that "women cannot rule the village" still rings in the ears of many educated men. Education is the most important means of empowering women and of giving them the knowledge and skill, self confidence and awareness of rights to be full partners in the various spheres of life. Women thus instructed will be beneficial for the community.

So long as women are depressed in the fields of literacy, legal rights, economic independence and due share in state power, there cannot be social justice. Women have to rise to their full stature in their own right and benefit by what belongs to them. A society has no claim to be called a civilised society if it is unable to protect the weak within itself. Despite the fact that

they constitute half of the entire population the society has given women vis-à-vis men an inferior status in almost all matters.

Women do not yet envisage drastic change in the family, society and the church. But we are certainly progressively moving towards a perspective in which remedies for gender injustices are conceivable. Albeit with time, along with the girls and women of the world, Khamniungan women are fighting for a sense of unified selfhood, a rational, coherent and effective identity in the society that promotes male chauvinism. New voices and new ideology seem to be emerging gradually. There is at least a ferment which may slowly swell into subversion. Women are still struggling to find a voice in the self. Women and men are created to be a team, not to dominate women. Men and women are created to be a companion in glorifying God.

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MAP OF KHIAMNIUNGAN (INDIA)

