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Topic of Research: The Interplay of Tradition and Modernity: An Ethnographic Study of Contemporary Tangkhul Naga Society

Findings

Tribal societies are in different phases of transition; some have undergone tremendous changes while others in a slower pace. Since the colonial experience, tribes in the northeast India, Tangkhul Nagas in particular, have been witnessing and experiencing social transformation in their own unique ways. Various aspects of society continue to be governed by the traditions with a number of customary rights, albeit these rights are progressively changing as they interact with the state, the market, and wider society. The interaction between traditional and modern institutions, ideas, and values has caused disquiet in society and influenced fundamental aspects of tribal and rural life, pushing them toward transformation. By considering the dimensions of 'tradition' and 'modernity', as an ideal type, the study examines the idea of modernity and the modernisation process of the Tangkhul Naga society as an interplay of local cultures and the outside cultures.

Ethnography-as-fieldwork, data were collected through participant observation, semi-structure interview, in-depth interview, and group discussion. Additionally, a survey technique is also used, particularly to identify and understand the diversification of livelihood in the villages.

The study focused on the four themes: Belief system and religion, village polity, land relations, economic relations and livelihoods of the Tangkhul Naga society. Tangkhul Naga society.

The study examined the influence of Christianity in relations to the numerous facets of traditional belief systems, practices, festivals, and various aspects of rituals in people's daily lives. The Tangkhul Naga society has become increasingly Christianized, yet many aspects of the traditional religious system still permeate daily life and social interactions. This is evidently manifested in traditional festival observations and everyday practices. Christian values and practices are incorporated in traditional rituals and rites, yet the manifest goals of festival and its latent functions remains largely unchanged. The implication entails that converting to Christianity doesn't necessarily diminish the underlying traditional belief system and the essence of traditional symbols and values.

Secondly, the study examined the nature of the traditional local governance system and the relevance of traditional authority in contemporary times. The legitimacy of traditional leaders is contested by democratic values and ideals. This has resulted to the democratization of traditional authority structures by expanding and reforming the institution of *Hanga-shim*. In connection to this, the village power and authority structure is divided into three separate bodies: Khashim, Village Council, and Kalangshim. The khashim is the legislative body of the village and all the adult male are the members. The village council members are duly elected through democratic process of adult franchise, and their functions is to oversee and execute the administration and development of the village. The Kalangshim functions as the judiciary of the village, and the position of this office are held by traditional leaders. Its function is to interprets the customary laws and adjudicate the dispute according to the customary laws and usages. Although the Tangkhul local governance is witnessing democratization of traditional political institution, the

democratic space still entails the elements of patriarchal dominance and clan power relations. The extension of political rights to women in the village political space remain a far-fetched idea.

Thirdly, the study examined the traditional concept of land and changing land relations. Traditionally, the village land and forest is divided into three categories: *Shim-lui kat* (Family/Individual land), *Shang Lam* (Clan Land), and *Yarui Lam* (Community/public Land). However, the interconnected elements of market and state has led to the growing tendency of commodification of commons. In response to the shifting conception of land, forest, and water, the common ownership of land and forest has shifted away from the community as privatization and commodification have started to gain ground. Such situations have created internal conflicts over competing ownership and claims that not only cause the community land to diminish over time but also within clans and groups.

Fourthly, the study examined economy and livelihood of the contemporary Tangkhul Naga society. The traditional economic relation i.e. moral economy based on 'reciprocity and redistribution' are waning with the penetration of market and monetary transactions. With the diversification of occupation and the rationalization of economic activities, socio-economic relations have become more calculative and individualistic. A significant proportion of the population remains dependent on agriculture. However, cropping choices and cultivation objectives are no longer confined to self-consumption alone; instead, there is a shift towards market-oriented farming aimed at generating income. Yet again, the force of production and the technique of production remains largely unchanged, crude and primitive. This dynamic reflects the nuanced relationship between market forces and tribal communities, highlighting the intricate aspects of traditional mode of production in market economy.

Tribal society is always evolving, renouncing some of its long-standing customs and embracing others. Contemporary Tangkhul Naga society is adjusting to different aspects of cultural conditions in order to accommodate traditions and modern elements as the basis of their emancipating process. With new ideas, values, occupations and increased social and spatial mobility, modernisation did bring some positive changes to society, but it also led to the decline of traditional institutions, authority, and the moral and ethical tenets of tribal life. There is no doubt that tribal society is changing, but in this transitioning period, as a social process, their future depends on the choices they make and adapting capabilities to modern forces.