

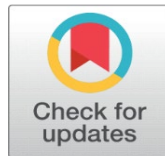


LIFE OF ANGAMI WOMEN IN THE TRADITIONAL SOCIETY

Sedevinuo Kire ¹, Dr. Khruvolu Keyho ²

¹ Assistant Professor, Tenyidie Department, Oriental College, Kohima, Nagaland, India

² Assistant Professor, Tenyidie Department, Kohima Campus, Meriema, Nagaland University, Nagaland, India



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Corresponding Author

Sedevinuo Kire, avinuo321@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

The Angami are a major tribe in Nagaland, a land made up of a conglomeration of many tribes, each tribe is distinct in its own character. Traditionally Angami society was centered on warfare, this war culture promotes a patriarchal society and male dominance was the norm, with a self-governing system. Women as a daughter, sister, wife, and mother were assigned enormous role. A girl child was segregated from male child and was prepared for her marriage from her childhood as the society required women of very high moral standard, for these teachings of girl or women were not neglected and also for self-sufficiency and independent life. The main objective of this paper is to study and explore the lives of women in the traditional Angami society. As a qualitative study, data were employed through primary and secondary sources. Today, the conservative view has slackened and her status and role is not only related to her family but education and career while continuing many of their traditional family obligations. She is responsible for the economy and sustainability of her home and community. This paper does a simple study from a women's perspective since the life, value worth importance of a woman in all walks of life are kept in the dark or is invisible while writing the history of certain people.

Keywords: Angami, Traditional Role, Women, Life, Society

1. INTRODUCTION

The distinctiveness and diversity of each tribe of Nagaland makes the land unique and rich in cultural heritage. The Angamis are divided into four groups based on their geographical location and administrative purposes as the Northern, Southern, Western, and Chakhro Angamis. Their language is called Tenyidie. Traditionally the occupation and general economic activity of the Angamis is subsistence agriculture with rice as the main crop. The Angamis have cluster of villages known as *rüna* or *pherüna*. Each village may be called a village-state as every village has a political unit, a self governing system of its own. They practice a religion called *pfutsana*, meaning faith rituals of the forefathers. Traditional Angami

society practice head hunting which bring prestige, honour and valour, this war culture promotes a patriarchal society. Women lives were confined to the household duties. All women have similar assigned roles completely different from her male counterparts. The division of responsibility, that men provided protection and the women cared for the domestic duties of looking after the house, rearing children and livestock, gathering food, clothing the family" (Chase (2004) 33). She is also an integral part of her community and family she strongly and steadfastly adhere the custom and traditions of her culture.

2. OBJECTIVES

- 1) 1.To study and explore the lives of Angami women in the traditional society.
- 2) 2.To understand the traditional situation of Angami women.

3. METHODOLOGY

Research approach is carried out qualitatively through primary sources of interview which were unstructured and secondary sources from books and scholarly articles were also referred.

4. LITERATURE REVIEW

An effort to review some of the important works in relevance to Women's life and Angami Naga in particular has been made.

- 1) **Hutton (1921):** The Angami Nagas: It is a monograph of the Angami Naga tribe presenting detailed account of the Angami way of life,
- 2) **Khrieü (2022):** Zhozho: Traditional customs and teachings culture particularly of women were written. Culture and traditions of Tenyimia were highlighted. Teachings and guidance of people cultures customs related to women were written.
- 3) **Chase (2004):** Women in transition: Angami Naga Women from 1878 to the present: It is a historical narrative of the impact of Christianity on the status of Angami women. It is a research on history of Angami women.

5. ANGAMI WOMEN IN TRADITIONAL SOCIETY

Life of women (*thenumia*) revolved around her village, family and agricultural work as their survival were dependent on it. A girl was taught and trained from her childhood days to make her eligible for good marriages and to become a good wife and a mother so she should learn the skills for the upbringing of her family. Mr. Zeliang has stated "To this end women were trained to be good housewives and mothers. They were taught in different areas of domestic work and were trained to look after their siblings which in a way prepared them for later life." (p 126) as good moral character and hard work were the criterion for a suitable wife.

A girl child is welcome in the family as "It meant a helper to mother and family" (Chase (2004) 51) but people would usually respond to her gender with such terms as 'ei vimu' or 'orü' meaning 'fine, or good only' which is a sign of incomplete happiness (Khrieü 36) the reason being that girls will one day get married and go to her husband's place also she cannot be involved in war or inherit ancestral property. There is a sense of preference for male child as in a warfare state men were assigned to go for war and hunting as it is their duty to protect women and children in their village. Having a male child provides a sense of protection and security. "Men are

naturally strong; they participated in war and served social security. This is one main reason why boys are preferred during birth” (Rutsa 75). The male child is regarded as a successor of ancestral properties as in a patriarchical society. Wives were expected to produce sons to the family. Metha also stated that “In the past when the people were in constant warfare state, men served as the protector of the family as well as the village community while women on the other hand served as a caregiver for the family. (p 61). “But this does not mean that a girl child is unwanted as said by Khrieü that if both male and female are born in a family there is abundant joy and those are *ruokuothomia* meaning the luckiest. (p 36). As soon as a girl child is born her father who is beside her mother touch the forehead of his child with his saliva saying ‘*a rie ho*’ meaning ‘I am the first’ this is a sign that the father claim the child before the spirit also it is a mark of the first ritual of the birth of a child. The mother and the child is kept separated in *kinutshe* from the other members they observe a genna called *nuobo* depending on the gender the days differ. After this there comes ritual as *phere khrü* and *tsu khrü* first outing of the child followed by *geida* this is a ritual done by the priest (*zievo*) to ward off sickness and bad words (Whuorie (2022) 11). Birth ceremonies are strictly followed and adhered to for the well being of the child. “If a woman dies in childbirth or before the completion of the five days genna, she is taken out, not by the door but through a hole made in the side of the house, and buried with all her property” (Hutton (1969) 216). A Respondent has further said that she is buried unceremoniously and her body is pushed backward in to the grave though the Angamis bury a dead body with honor, dignity and respect.

As a daughter she stays close to home alongside her mother and sisters and learns household chores and prepares to become good perfect women by performing their appropriate roles for their men in the community. They learn through observation and imitation the arts and crafts, work ethics and moral, social characters. “Women were expected to maintain “pure” moral and ethical behavior...” (Roy 38). Girls and boys were segregated at a very early age and taught and brought up in different manners in a separate boys and girls dormitory called *kichüki*. One of the respondents had narrated that for a woman her mother is her first teacher. Women are caregivers and she is responsible for her family’s clothing, fooding, agricultural, economic and religious activities. Tendering to her siblings and family is her duty. The day of a woman starts from dawn she wakes up before the men to fetch water, make fire and carry firewood, cook the morning meal and food to carry to the fields. She has wake up as early as two or three a.m. during festivals like Sekrenyi and when they have peer work group ‘*pele*’. Waking up late was a shame *thenga* for women. She is the first to wake up and last to sleep. She also learns weaving at an early age growing closely beside her mother, sisters, aunties and grandmother and more thoroughly from the ladies Dormitory *kichüki* a place of socialization where she also learns folklores. It is the responsibility of women to weave clothes for the whole family. “Indeed in good old days every Angami woman was supposed to weave enough clothes for the whole household (Zeliang 130). There isn’t a single woman who doesn’t know weaving. It is a shame *thenga* for women if her husband or brothers wear old torn or unclean clothes in public. Besides household chores she starts to learn the agricultural work with her peer group called *pele* as early as eleven and twelve of age. The *pele* group comprising of both boys and girl worked in the field of all the members in rotation without wages. *Pele* group is not only a working group but also a strong bond of friendship group. From this *pele* group they learn to socialize with the other gender in a healthy way.

For marriage, the proposal is sent from the boy’s side that sends *liethomia* as *thenu lie kechümia* probably an elderly person who is close to his family to fix the

marriage. Angami society follows a monogamous system of marriage and exogamous as well (Hutton (1969) 219). Neichüriezo has said that once a boy and a girl joined a peer group *peli* their parents begin to think about her/his marriage too (p 9). Most of the times from this *peli* group male and female choose their suitable partners for marriage but it is the boy who shares it with his parents and if his parents agree they send the proposal called *thenu rüsa*. Women were chosen for marriage mainly for her strength of character. As for a women a marriage is by her parents' consent as said in the novel by Vilhouzhalie when his admire from his *peli* bought the topic of marriage and that he had her in his mind she says "*He-i we thenumia sü kedipuo pulieta? Mhapete rei u krünuo medo ze ru..*" meaning she can't say anything as it depends on her parents' wishes (p 7). After some rites which don't take much time marriages takes place as soon as it is completed in forms as *thevü nhyü* or *thevo nhyü* (Neichüriezo 9). Marriages are mainly arranged. Women were also expected to marry at the marriageable age but it is not binding and divorces are also not restricted. After marriage women can grow their hair because it is tradition that unmarried women shaved their heads. Shaved heads of a girl is a sign of chastity, purity, virginity and truthful life (Personal Interview). Girl longs for long hair so before growing their hair, as a game in her play time and to protect her head from the scorching sun while herding cows some plants like pine tree leaves, wild plantains, corn leaves and some other plants were used as hair. It's a taboo *kenyü* for unmarried women to grow hair and if one does grow her hair it is called *kemethuo tha* i.e., meaningless hair. It is *kenyü* too if a women doesn't grow her hair long in her lifetime but one can't force her to marry so she is to marry the village gate which is called *kharu kharu ki nyi*, after that she is regarded as married and is permitted to grow her hair. (Personal Interview)

After her marriage as in her family before she diligently perform all her domestic chores like looking after her house, nurturing children, livestock, and agricultural works. Kelhou has rightly said "The occupation of a woman in the past was first a house wife and a mother and secondly, a farmeres." (Kelhou 55). Besides household works and performing rites as *kizie* sanctification of a house she perform the rites for the whole community as *liedepfü* the first reaper which is done to invoke God's blessings for a bountiful harvest and long lasting of grains. (Personal interview). "Women also played the role of *Demi* or *thetuo* (mediator) between two warring villages. She delivered the victims head (*rütsüu*) to the bereaved family she mediated and negotiated peace between the warring villages. And it is taboo *kenyü* to kill her. (Kire 54) "While their men conspired to go for warfare women were the contributory agents, the virtual linchpins, in sustaining the village life" (Nienu 69). It can be asserted that women play an indispensable role in the community.

6. CONCLUSION

She shoulders her parents and husband her whole lives. Women with utmost pride and prestige followed the customs and culturally sanction obligations and norms, which they don't feel as binding but are somehow viewed as protection and beneficial, without any grudges she adhered to the customs even though she is not allowed to partake in decision making, meetings and administration nor she can inherit ancestral properties. The families' success and progress depends on her hard work and rigid following of rituals with an inner drive not to lack behind others even in her personal bearing. She is expected to live a doubly pure life as compared to a man and taboos concerning women are more than men and teachings and disciplining of women are more or higher than men, which is why elders use to say "*Thenumia zho ca 30 nunu kho 100 tso iya shie*" meaning rules and teachings of

women are many. With the coming of Christianity and education, Women's status was uplifted and her role has widened from household to the outside world of education, job and opportunities. At present there is a need to refurbish and recoup the past good practices, skills, moral characters, independent and self sufficient life of women and blend them with modernity.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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