

Westernisation threat to Naga culture

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Zeliangrong Heraka Association believes that 'Loss of religion is loss of culture and loss of culture is loss of identity'. Genuine cultural identity of any society is comprised of indigenous religion, native culture, language, glorious history of forefathers, art and crafts, rites and rituals, traditional village institutions and customary laws. We work to enhance every component of Naga identity. Today, it has become a fashion in Naga society to talk about Naga identity while cutting the roots of every component that constitute genuine Naga identity. Wearing costly dresses, singing pop-songs, drinking foreign whisky and rum, disco-dance, beauty pageants, violation of civic rules and disobedience in the name of civil liberty, indecent dress and heinous deeds, etc. are not the symbol of Naga identity. It is in fact the state of confusion and perversion. Unfortunately, the disrespect to law of the land, violation of customary laws, dereliction of government duties, neglect of social responsibilities, embezzlement of public money, behaving as a mafia don, disrespect of Naga religion and traditional festivals and gasconadors and impostors posing as the spiritual awakener and savior of the soul are being considered as symbol of progressiveness and advancement. High rate of consumption of intoxicants by Naga youths, boys and girls have led to many maladies including the spread of killer HIV/AIDS.

The root cause of all these problems lie in the adoption of western way of life hedonic consumerism and disrespect of Naga religion and culture. If we wish to save Naga society from doom and downfall we have to return to our forefathers' root. Westernisation in the name of modernisation is dangerous. Modernisation and economic development should be brought over in tune with Naga indigenous religion, culture, heritage, arts and crafts, customs and customary laws, etc. A lasting peace must return to Nagaland for perfect and permanent prosperity.

Under the influence of western culture, it has become the fashion to discard, dishonour and disown our own forefathers and condemn them as head-hunter, naked, wild, pagan and heathen. But whose forefathers were not so in pre-Vedic periods? Pre-historic people were nomads, naked, raw-meat eaters and raw food eaters and very often people were killed in feudal clashes. This type of human - history is common throughout the globe. Our forefathers were no exception to this fact. The same early men evolved Greek Civilisation, Indus Valley Civilisation and several other civilisations on the earth. Today's people are proud of these forefathers because they were also followers of their own native religion and they were not Christian. Head-hunting practice in Naga forefathers was not a savagery. It signifies valour and bravery of our forefathers. In any war, people were killed. The victorious warrior is honoured for his courage and valour. He is not condemned as murderer and savage. Bu!

In case of Naga forefathers, some of our misguided people do not identify the virtues of our forefathers and these misguided people condemn them as head-hunters. It is a conspiracy hatched by foreign missionaries and British Government in connivance with white writers to malign and undermine glorious Naga history. Is it not true that at the time of birth of a boy it is a custom in Naga society that elders of the family and clan visit to newly born baby and bless him to become brave like a warrior? Zeliangrong Heraka Association upholds the valour and virtues of Naga forefathers and works to popularise it among the young and old from Naga society. This was the clear and obvious perception of Zeliangrong Heraka Movement, which angered British rulers and foreign Christian missionaries. This was the reason that they killed Haipou Jadonang on fake murder charge. They also attempted to eliminate Rani Maa. But with the grace of Lord Tingwang she could escape unharmed. But hostile elements worked tirelessly to finish her and neutralise

her influence on Naga people by doing her character assassination.

Rani Maa and myself met former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi along with a Zeliangrong team and submitted a memorandum demanding integration of Zeliangrong people in one administrative unit. On the advice of Rajiv Gandhi, Buta Singh, the then Home Minister, assured us to fulfill our demand of integration and the file in Union Home Ministry started moving in our favour. But the game was spoiled by the Church leaders of our own community. Because of opposition by the Church leaders, the decision was kept in abeyance in Delhi. The Church was in habit of opposing Rani Ma. This time also they did the same. The only reason for opposing this achievement was that Rani Ma, N.C. Zeliang and members of the team were not Christian. They were Heraka. In fact, Hindu leaders had also supported our demand at that time. Thus, we lost the golden opportunity due to lack of foresight.

In the changed scenario at national and international level the premier underground organisation is negotiating with Delhi for integration of Naga inhabited areas with Nagaland. On behalf of Zeliangrong Heraka Association Assam, Nagaland and Manipur and on my own behalf, I send my goodwill and good wishes for the success of on-going dialogue. I appeal to Government to assess and understand the ground realities in Naga society and do the needful for lasting peace and prosperity in Naga area.

Because of our association with some national leaders and organisations and because of our rejection of foreign religion and culture, a malicious propaganda was made against us. We were accused of being Hinduised under the influence of Hindu leaders. The accusers stated that Naga identity would be harmed immensely under Hindu influence. But now this fear from Hindu influence is cleared because of the advent of mass media and interaction of Nagas with Hindu society in rest part of the country. Educated and enlightened Nagas are aware of world history. They are also aware how several civilisations, their religions and cultures in countries like Greece, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Morocco, Thailand and

Indonesia, etc are finished by the followers of Islam. It is also known to them how the religions and cultures of people of South Africa, native people of USA like Cherokee, Inca, Maya and Aztec tribes collectively known as Red-Indians and s!

Several other indigenous people of American and European sub-continent including UK were uprooted, their religious and history books were burnt and their worship places were demolished by Church.

On the contrary, Nagas have been living with Hindu society from centuries and they are not converted to Hindu Dharma. Rather, Hindus encourage us to preserve, protect and progress our own indigenous religion, culture and traditional festivals. Hindus believe in co-existence, not in survival of the fittest. Today the world is changed. In 1997, a team of 22 Japanese scholars visited several places in Nagaland and did video-recording of Naga customs and traditions. It was a part of their research to revive their ancient faith and culture. Americans, Britishers and other European Countries are researching and working hard to revive their forefathers' religions and cultures. They have identified that lack of spirituality and destruction of joint family system, have given rise to major problems at national and international level. The recent failures of USA in domestic and international conflict management and attack of Al-Qaeda on World Trade Centre on 11 September 2001 have strengthened the fear of holocaust in the mind of Americans. They are, therefore, organising Pagan Conferences to revive ancient faith and culture. The number of Church-goers in western countries are sizeably diminishing. The Protestant Church and Catholic Church are looking towards southeast Asian countries particularly India for nuns and missionaries. Several of Naga missionaries and nuns are working in America, Britain and other American and European sub-continent. Catholic Church is mostly dependent on India for Catholic priests and nuns. This is the reason that all the denominations of Catholic and Protestant Churches are pouring money to increase their numbers in India particularly in Northeast region. The first missionary- St. Thomas, landed in India almost 2000 years ago but the Christian population in India is only 2.5 percent. We must protect our religion and culture from being extinct. Zeliangrong

Heraka Association stands for till's purpose. The Heraka Youth leaders should know the sacrifices made by lieutenants of Rani's army such as Ramjo, Dekei, Gumhei of Mbaupungwa, Areliu of Ntuma, Italakpe of Lalong and Igwangtuing of Peren. This is not the exhaustive collection. The list goes on and on.

It is good that Nagas have today realised the grave dangers to genuine Naga identity posed by alien forces. The traditional Naga festivals, which were once condemned by Church, are now being observed even by Christians with gait. It is a happy development. Naga scholars should come forward to collect and compile the customs, traditions, festivals and customary laws and publish it in book forms for the use of posterity. While doing so, the collection, compilation, explanation and narration of different aspects of festivals, traditions, traditional worships, rites and rituals, etc. should be original and exactly as per our forefathers' belief and practice. The

explanations and narrations should be free from foreign influence. Zeliangrong Heraka Association calls upon all enlightened Naga people to revive Naga religion and culture to protect genuine Naga Identity. The Heraka youths should serve the society selflessly in this respect with more commitment.

I also call upon the Christian community particularly Church leaders from Naga society to adopt tolerant perception and attitude towards indigenous faith and culture. The Church leaders from Nagaland may think of introducing Naga customs, traditions and way of worship in Church service. In Kerala Catholic Church and Marthoma Church have adopted Malayali customs and way of worship in their Church services. It can also happen in Churches of Nagaland too so that Naga identity is not eroded.

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