

Globethics Repository

The logo for Globethics, featuring the word "Globethics" in white sans-serif font on a blue rectangular background.

Side by side : Naga women doing theology in search of justice and partnership

This page was generated automatically upon download from the Globethics Repository.
More information on Globethics see <https://www.globethics.net>. Data and content policy
of Globethics Repository see <https://repository.globethics.net/pages/policy>.

Item Type	Book
Authors	Longkumer, Limatula;Longkumer, Talijungla
Publisher	CCA-EGY Unit & Naga Women Theological Forum
Rights	2004 CCA-EGY & NWTF
Download date	2026-06-29 16:22:58
Link to Item	http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12424/220613



Published jointly by
CCA - EGY UNIT
AND
NAGA WOMEN THEOLOGICAL FORUM

SIDE BY SIDE

Naga Women Doing Theology in Search of Justice and Partnership



Side by Side

Naga Women Doing Theology in Search of Justice and Partnership
Edited by **Limatula Longkumer & Talijungla Longkumer**

SIDE BY SIDE

*Naga Women Doing Theology in Search of
Justice and Partnership*

SIDE BY SIDE

*Naga Women Doing Theology in Search of
Justice and Partnership*

Edited by

Limatula Longkumer
Talijungla Longkumer

SIDE BY SIDE

*Naga Women Doing Theology in Search of
Justice and Partnership*

Published Jointly by
CCA-EGY Unit &
Naga Women Theological Forum

Published
CCA-EGY & NWTF
Copyright @ 2004
Reprint @ 2012
Reprint @ 2013

Price
Rs. 250 (India)
US \$ 10 (Outside)

Edited by
Limatula Longkumer
Talijungla Longkumer

*Composed &
Printed by*

: ESPACE
74B AJC Bose Rd., Kolkata - 700016
Ph. : +91 33 65351127
email : espace_design@ymail.com
website : www.espaceindia.in

CONTENTS

<i>Foreword</i>	- Corazon Tabing-Reyes	vii-viii
<i>Introduction</i>	- Limatula Longkumer	ix-x
1. Gospel and Culture: Women's Empowerment	- Aphuno Chase-Roy	1- 7
2. Doing Theology from Naga Women Perspective	- Eyingbeni	8- 18
3. Naga Women in Theological Education	- Limatula Longkumer	19-35
4. Issues of Partnership in Ministry	- Phutoli Chingmak	36-45
5. A Liberative Theology of Inheritance: A Critique of the Ao Naga Customary Law of Inheritance	- Imsopangla	46-65
6. No Justice without Mother Earth: Ecofeminism In Naga Context	- S. Temsulemla	66-76
7. Women and Globalization: Lessons for Naga Women	- Talijungla Longkumer	77-100
8. Reading the Bible from Naga Women's Context	- Asangla Lemtur	101-113

9. Transgressing the Boundaries: Rereading the Story of Vashti in the Context of Quest for Women's Identity - Atula Tzudir	114-138
10. Women in the Wisdom Tradition of the Old Testament - Jekheli Kibami	139-152
11. Protest with a Cause: A Study of the Temple Act of Jesus for Empowering Naga Women in their Struggles - Zakali Shohe	153-168
Bible Studies	
12. Women: The Agents of God - Akhrole Kenye	169-174
13. Re-Reading the Bible through New Eyes to Build Up an Inclusive Community - Narola Imchen	175 - 179
14. A Challenge for Courage - Abeni Lotha	180 - 183
15. Concluding Statement	184 - 186
List of Contributors	187
List of Participants	188

FOREWORD

That which was common among all women in the world yesterdays and that which rhymes among them today is the fact that they have been and still are subordinated, marginalized, domesticated, suppressed and dominated. That which resounds again and again among the women today all over the world is the search for justice and peace against the various discriminations and violence inflicted on them throughout the centuries. The marks that a Filipino, an Indonesian, a Chinese, a Malaysian, an Indian, a Burmese or a Thai woman bears is the same although the cause of it may vary. Their sufferings and aspirations are now visible to the world as they break the silence causing solidarity among women today.

Unknown and far, unheard and unidentified there are other sisters who are trying to make their voices heard. Unmarked yet sentient to the miseries that envelopes them, are these Naga women from the north eastern hills of India, creating awareness among themselves; identifying their causes of subjection and searching for ways of emancipation by working **Side By Side**. The first step that a child tries to take is always the greatest achievement to walk however wobbly or unsteady it may be. Establishing the **Naga Women Theological Forum** is in fact, a very significant achievement for the theologically trained Naga women in particular and for the Naga women in general. This is where we all stand and will stand in solidarity to voice out our cause till it is heard and till our aspirations are realized.

Side by Side, being the first book to be published by the **Naga Women Theological Forum**, gives us an introduction to the awareness and realization of their situations among the Naga women as they relate and co-relate with each other. The book carries a comprehensive overview of the state in which the theologically trained Naga women are actually in. It touches all the important areas within the present scenario.

The implication of the title **Side By Side** is clearly evident

throughout the book. It is in striving side by side with each other, male and female counterparts, that we can achieve partnership at all levels. I congratulate the **Naga Women Theological Forum** for bringing out this book. This book will surely shape the perspective and position of the Naga women in particular and to the sisters around the world who are still struggling to make their voices heard.

Corazon Tabing-Reyes

Joint Executive Secretary,
Ecumenical Formation
Gender Justice, Youth Empowerment
Christian Conference of Asia

Introduction

Nagas are an indigenous community living in North Eastern part of India, and majority of them are Christians. Nagas are a patriarchal male dominated culture and so, like in other patriarchal societies, women are treated as inferior and subordinate to men. Women are being discriminated, oppressed and humiliated in every sphere of their daily lives. Hence, women bear untold miseries and sufferings in silence and subjected to the subordinate roles both in the church and society. Though 90 percent of the Nagas are Christians, the churches in Nagaland are still conservative, and patriarchal in nature that pastoral ministry and higher leadership roles in the churches are not given to women. Women are given only the secondary roles in the church ministry.

Modern education system, development, democracy, information technology have brought tremendous changes upon Naga women. Today, women have opportunity to get education like men and eventually many Naga women are undergoing theological studies and are becoming aware of the injustices and discriminations done to women due to patriarchal Naga culture as well as through dominant Christian theology. Though women know that they have every right to speak out against injustices, they could not organize themselves to come together and raise their voices against the oppressions due to many reasons. It was in May 28-30, 2003, the first consultation of **All Nagaland Theologically Trained Women** with the theme DOING FEMINIST THEOLOGY FROM NAGA WOMEN PERSPECTIVE was organized by Ecumenical Formation of Gender and Youth (EGY) of Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) for Naga women. The Ao Theological Association (ATA) and Nagaland Baptist Churches Council Women Department (NBCCW) coordinated the consultation. We express our deep appreciation to the CCA-EGY for initiating this important

consultation, bringing together the indigenous women of Nagaland to share their stories of struggles, identity crisis, solidarity and critical reflection in our theological journey for emancipation. Indeed, this consultation was a very significant moment which gave birth to the **Naga Women Theological Forum**.

The purpose of establishing the **Forum** is to bring together Naga women to share and work together for the emancipation of Naga women from various forms of discrimination. It aims to find a “space” to articulate our voices and aspirations as women, search for a new language of speech that would empower us to bring transformation for both women and men in the church and society. It is a search for solidarity and partnership in our theological journey. It calls for a paradigm shift in formulating relevant theologies from Naga socio-cultural and political context and’ re interpretation of the Bible from indigenous women’s perspective. It also aims to reclaim/rediscover women’s hidden stories and potentialities from our indigenous traditions and histories and use them as resources to empower women today.

One of the objectives of the Forum is to collect various reflections and articles from women’s perspectives and publish it for wider theological reflection, because of the fact that a book is a good medium to share and communicate our feelings and assertions to the people around us. Hence, this book is the outcome of the **All Nagaland Theologically Trained Women** consultation which took place in May this year. Unless women speak out and pen down their assertions their sufferings will go on unnoticed in the society and church. Thus, this book is the collection of several articles and essays from Naga women theologians. We express our appreciations to all the women who have contributed article and Bible study in this book. In fact, many of the contributors were involved in the consultation. We regret that due to shortage of fund we could not include many of the articles which we have collected. Only a selected

articles are included in this book. However, we are planning to publish more books if funds are available in the near future. Therefore, those papers which have not appeared in this book will be included in the next project.

This book deals with various issues and themes relevant to Naga women today. The concern is in developing a feminist theology from Naga women’s perspective and so all the articles are centered on this area, though looking at from different angles. This book highlights that the patriarchal cultures and customary laws of the Nagas has kept women in bondage. There is a need to explore decisively the encounter between the gospel and culture in order to develop appropriate counter-cultural elements for empowering Naga women. Using women eye glasses for interpreting the Bible is one of the concerns in this book because Bible has been interpreted from males’ perspective and so the present interpretation of the Bible suppresses women. Therefore, this book calls to re-read and reinterpret the Bible from Naga women perspective. Nagas are also not spared from the forces of globalization and environmental issues which affected and touched upon in all the areas of life. Women are badly victimized by all these forces in our society. Hence, there is a need to critique and educate the people in these areas which impinge our lives. Women in full time Christian ministry is another serious issue that Naga women are facing today. This brings attention to the whole theological education process, its nature and purpose of education. The present issue of partnership in ministry is conditioned by the gender biased theology and theological education. Healing can be brought only by developing gender biased free or inclusive theology and theological education process.

The editing has been a collective work of the editorial committee of **Naga Women Theological Forum**. We especially thank Imsopangla, one of the editorial committee members for helping in collecting materials and typing the manuscript in the initial stage of this book. Without her valuable

work this book would have not been successful.

As mentioned above, this book is published jointly by CCA-EGY cluster and Naga Women Theological Forum. We hope that this small humble work of Naga women theologians and sharing of their struggles, assertions and longings can contribute towards a fuller understanding of women's issues and empowerment for transformation in the larger contexts of our society.

Limatula Longkumer

GOSPEL AND CULTURE : WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

Aphuno Chase-Roy

I. Introduction

In this paper, I wish to draw our attention to a general discussion of 'Gospel' and 'Culture' and elucidate how in the process of enculturation, the Gospel and what it has come to represent—the church seems to have been dictated by culture and cultural norms of the people, and how a proper appreciation of the situation can become Empowering for Naga Women.

The terms 'Gospel' and 'Culture' are over-used terms. They are broad and can be discussed from various angles. In this paper I am using them in relation to women in the church. I am raising the fundamental question as to why in the church the cultural norms are used in arguing for the continuance of male dominance and denying women equal status and participation? If the enculturation of the Naga Culture with the Gospel has been partial and has only encouraged male dominance in the church, the Naga churches need to take a hard look at themselves and be willing to be corrected on the basis of the Gospel.

The term 'Gospel' is defined as "The Christian doctrine of the redemption of human through Jesus as Christ". The implicit

understanding of Gospel as well as the spirit of Christianity is freedom from sin, salvation from eternal death and condemnation and liberation from fear and any other form of oppressive and discriminatory human structure that prevent full development of the individual.

There is no one definition of culture. The Dictionary defines “Culture” as “the ideas, customs, skills, arts, etc. of a given people in given period”. So generally speaking ‘culture’ can be understood as the way or norms of life of a people. Culture is all that defines the group, the society, the family, the individual. Culture provides the identity and safe-guards society with cultural moorings.

A relationship is established when the Christian message or the Gospel is taken to a given group who live in and with a culture. This begins the process of enculturation. “Enculturation is defined as ‘the process that permits change in belief system at the level of conscious thought... consists in replacement of one belief system by another’”.¹

II. Christianity and its Impact on Naga Women

Culture changes and there is no static culture. The Naga culture(s) had witnessed tremendous changes within the last one and half century of its known history. The hallmark of the changing culture has been the improved status of Naga women. There has been big stride made in their role and status. The improved status of women has largely depended on Christianity. To the Naga mind, Christianity equates education and education has opened up hitherto unknown avenues for women to adapt to new roles - thus the upward mobility in society.

To go back to history, the Christianity brought to the Nagas by the American Baptist was the late nineteenth century evangelical Christianity. It meant that much emphasis was

placed on education, so that the converts should be able to read the Bible and use the hymnal. It coincided with the British policy of civilizing the savageous Nagas. Subsequently modern Western education, popular then in British India also got introduced in the government schools in Nagaland. The British officials in Assam (of which Naga hills were then part) left the entire educational activities to the missionaries in Nagaland. Educational institutions became centers and primary vehicle of evangelization.

Women, who became Christians, became the first women to be counted literate and they actively participated in the drive for adult literacy as well as taught in primary schools. They gathered women in the church at least one day during the week for learning. With the rudimentary knowledge they acquired they were pressed in to serving in neighbouring villages.

This is to illustrate that the impact of Christianity upon women was unprecedented. Christianity educated them to take up new roles. Their enlightenment prompted them to adapt to better life style, better health and hygiene. In the church, women found a sense of liberty, a new identity and individuality, a sense of worth. They developed skills in speaking and leading mixed congregation of men and women. They read from the Bible, sang in choirs with musical parts, some of them served as deaconesses and became members of decision-making bodies. While some made valuable contribution by helping with Bible translation, some translated hymns, choir pieces and composed devotional songs and even dramatized Bible stories.

Another unique contribution by women was organizing their own society, which eventually became the main financial resource for the church. It supported evangelists, theological studies, maintained hostels and work of Bible translation.

However, the improved status and playing new roles was within the purview of a male dominated church and a patriarchal society. So in the process of enculturation the socialized mentality about the subordinate status of women did not receive any special attention. Moreover the missionaries themselves were steeped in patriarchal male dominance. Though they made concerted effort to educate women, they

¹ S.C. Daniel, “Christianity and Culture” in *Society and Culture in North East India: A Christian Response*, edited by Saral K. Chatterji (Delhi: ISPCK for CISRS, 1996), 154.

were no feminists. The issue of ordination, let alone of women, even of men apparently was not high on their agenda.

Furthermore, as alluded to, what education women received was rudimentary. Neither High School nor College, including professional training for women was taken at a larger scale prior to 1960s. It was post missionary era when the number of Naga High school and college going student began to swell, and the educational system and the syllabi became increasingly secular. This began to have its toll on the life of the church. The church under girded by the Evangelical theology² became suspicious of any secular understanding of the Gospel, Christianity or the church. Other factors such as internal splits and misgivings in the church made the church inward looking; particularly true of the Angami Baptist church, which after the major split in 1950s no longer has any communion with the Christian Revivals.

The church/Christianity of 1970s and 1980s inherited such a tradition. The church since then has not been able to transcend the cultural trappings and barriers that relegate women the secondary status. So it can be concluded that the impact of Christianity on the status of Naga women is two-tiered. Women in the secular sphere have attained greater freedom and equality at work places with men in society, in terms of power, authority, and decision-making. Women in the church are, however, still denied this freedom and equality.

One may argue that women share equal opportunity, participate equally and even perform more visible role in the church. Or others may argue that among some Naga groups, women have received equal recognition as men as having been ordained as pastors. Our primary concern should be to voice that as long as women are denied equal participation including ordination, Christianity has only partially impacted women's

² Renthly Keitzer, "Developing a Contextual Theology for North East India" in *Culture, Religion and Society* edited by S. K. Chatterji and Hunter Mabry (Delhi: ISPCK for CISRS, 1996), 131- 153.

status, and that the core of the gospel message of liberation, of equality has been supplanted by patriarchal culture; culture is upheld rather than the Gospel in the church. For women our concern is expressed in the principle "until every woman is free, no woman is free".

This has direct relation to the issue of gender justice, violence against women and fundamental human rights violation. These hurdles need to be addressed and overcome. If and when women are denied equality with men due to culture, that culture must be countered with the Gospel. The cultural practice of relegating women secondary status in the church amounts to denying them justice and denying them justice is violence against them, it means silencing them and denying them their fundamental rights, as humans created equal and in God's image, to live and develop as God intend them to live.

III. The Gospel for Empowerment of Naga Women

If Christianity has impacted the status of Naga Women only partially, it is because Naga Christianity is culture bound. The impact of secular education, thus secular ideology, has succeeded far more in raising the status of Naga women to be equal with their man in the society.

There is the tendency to see culture as all sufficient and Gospel as supplementary for the on going life of the church. There is a danger in the ideology that Gospel has come to 'enrich, fulfill and glorify the belief systems of different cultures, especially that of indigenous cultures'³. This upholds that culture is all valuable and Gospel is the ornamental accessory. This sees only the good in culture and closes the eye to cultural traditions that dehumanize and degrade.

There is no denying that women have received the Gospel message, the life enhancing message and they have not been barred from performing complementary roles in the church with the exception of the ordained ministry. "This exception", women

³ S.C. Daniel, *Op.cit.* 54.

say, “is discriminatory” and therefore is against the spirit of the Gospel.

The Naga culture(s) has been resilient, but it has learned to adapt to the changing context and to accept the many changes in our society in homes and in churches. Our concern as theologically trained women should rather be going back to the Gospel and rereading the scripture; first educate ourselves to be able to apply our learning to useful social uplift movement, learning to articulate and raise voice against social evils and create awareness. The task ahead should be to conscientize the Naga community. We should also learn to overcome our own fear, transcend our tribal affiliations, ethnocentric feelings. Armed with our knowledge of the Bible and our theological insights, we should look to break down discriminatory and hierarchical structures and replace them with circular structure, where there will be no headship rather participatory leadership. This will necessitate as well as enable us to advocate the cause of Naga women. So this calls us to network with other women organizations, NGOs, both locally and globally.

Our Naga culture upholds the culture of silence for women. We have remained passive and only listened. Mary Grey, a Roman Catholic Scholar and feminist calls this passivity a sin. She writes:

The important point made by the analysis of female sin as passivity is that when it is linked with the Christian ethic of self sacrifice, of losing a self in order to find it women are locked hopelessly to a spiral of self giving, in which no authentic self development is possible. Christianity encourages them to identify with Jesus’ suffering on the cross. Society offers them nurturing, caring and serving roles in which to do this.⁴

Grey also quotes Elizabeth Cady Stanton, a giant in American Feminist Movement, who more than a hundred years ago cried,

⁴ Mary Grey, *Redeeming the Dream: Feminism, Redemption and Christian Tradition* (Anand: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 1999), 18.

“Self-development is better than self-sacrifice.”⁵

Conclusion

What I have attempted here is to highlight that Christianity/Gospel has been solely contributory to the improved status of Naga women. The resilient Naga cultures have been able to adapt to the demands of the changing contexts. Christianity in Nagaland is no exception. It has seen many changes and has come to accommodate these new changes, including counter cultural elements in the Church.

The improved status of women has been possible because of new found roles in the Church. Christianity has provided them with incentive for upward mobility. But it is this same Christianity/Church that is still reluctant to admit women to equal status and partnership with men in ordained ministry. The one block is culture and in our theologizing as theologically trained women, we need to go back to the Gospel of Christ for empowerment and to develop appropriate counter-cultural elements for empowering Naga women.

References:

- Amaladoss, Michael. “The Religions and Mission.” *Vidyajyoti*. 57:12 (December 1993).
- Chase-Roy, Aphuno. “Can Naga Women Birth Fire?” *In God’s Image*. 19:4 (December 2000).
- “The Impact of Christianity on the Status of Angami Naga Women From 1887 to the Present” (D. Th Thesis, Senate of Serampore, 2000).
- Chatterji, S. K. (Ed). *Society and Culture in Northeast India: A Christian Perspective*. Delhi: ISPCK for CISRS, 1996. Chatterji, S. K. and Hunfer Mabry. (eds.) *Culture, Religion and Society* (Essays in honour of Richard W. Taylor) Delhi: ISPCK for CISRS, 1996. Grey, Mary. *Redeeming the Dream: Feminism, Redemption and Christian Tradition*. Anand: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 1999.
- Lobo, Mary “Culture and Evangelization: the Women’s Agenda” in *Kavunkal*, Jacob and F. Hrangkhuma. (eds). *Christ and Cultures*. Bandra, Mumbai: St. Paul’s, 1994, pp. 91-113.

⁵ *Ibid.*

DOING THEOLOGY FROM NAGA WOMEN'S PERSPECTIVE

Eyingbeni

Introduction

The option to explore plausible meaning for life is ever open. The horizon for human quest for surmounting situation is also expanding. The experience of 'faith' poses hard questions to an inquiring mind. **Of** all these, women are equally challenged to tackle with issues and find ways to have a meaningful pilgrimage with the Lord (God/Creator). But why specifically a Naga Woman Theology? In this paper, we attempt to state the necessity of theologizing from our own perspective; honestly point out how our own culture subjugates us; make suggestions for our empowerment from our own resources; and make exploration to discover the liberating aspect of our faith foundation.

1. Doing Theology from Naga Women Perspective: It's Necessity

'Experiential'¹ theologies are born, not with an intention to invent

¹ 'Experiential' is preferred to the popular term 'contextual' in references to the theologies that have arisen from 'lived-situation' theologies like Dalit,

a concept as it was never there. To say that a 'new' theology has been propounded is to exaggerate an attempt to accommodate questions raised and answers sought. Agreeing with Alister who writes, "It is virtually impossible to do theology as if it had never been done before".² We do theology only to make explicit our thought patterns, grounded in our own psyche, so as to find a meaningful expression of the liberating motif of the Gospel. Naga women have their own stories to tell, minds to speak out, pains and sufferings to express feelings³ about God to share, and accumulate joy to pour forth. Aruna expresses, 'Feminist theologies methodology is rooted in the pains and sufferings, joys, and creativity of women's experience in the dailiness of their lives'.⁴ Besides, the world in which we find ourselves in today, is more complex and theology framed and handed down to us- women, does neither sufficiently recognize our presence nor adequately address our concerns.

Despite skepticism with which any feminist (liberation) endeavor is looked at, Naga women must "make their voices heard and leave its impact for the transformation of the society".⁵ Concern of Naga women doing

Tribal, Feminist, have not simply evolved from the larger context. A much deeper influence and a more personal reason is their 'own' experience of being despised, hated, ridiculed, rejected, denied, and subjugated. It is something from 'within' themselves.

² Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology, An Introduction*, 2nd ed. (MA: Blackwell, 1997), 3.

³ For the majority of Naga women who do not have the opportunity to learn to conceptualize their beliefs, 'feelings' or 'sense' of the Supreme Being is all they have, and yet it brings satisfaction to their quest for God who openly accepts any sincere devotion rendered by the creatures.

⁴ Aruna Gnanadason, "Feminist Methodology; Indian Women's Experience" *Confronting Life: Theology out of the Context*, ed., M.P. Joseph (Delhi: ISPCK, 1995), 173.

⁵ Eyingbeni Humtsoe, *Naga Women and Culture*, Unpublished M. Th Thesis (Jorhat: ETC, 2002), 43.

theology⁶ is no different, in the strict sense, from other feminist themes. Our common hurts and yearnings, felt in the deepest level of our being, shape our languages. The difference is that, we do it in our own dialect as others do it in theirs. We quote Kwok who writes. “Just as translation involves expressing meaning in one’s own categories and thought forms, Asian feminist theologians must claim the power to speak their own theological dialects in order to be a theological subject”.⁷ Thus Naga feminism is both necessary and significant.

2. Naga Culture and Women

Needless to elaborate, and without doubt, culture⁸ plays an influential role on the Nagas. While life-enhancing ones are upheld, life-degrading ones need to be either recast or done with. We may highlight some of the unjust practices from which women seek a release.

i) Child naming

Female subordination begins from the womb. UNICEF statistics revealed millions gone ‘missing’ in India since 1909. They were killed in the foetus or murdered in the first few hours after being born.⁹ Although among the Nagas, abortion is condemnable, the birth of a girl, especially in succession is not a joyous moment.¹⁰ Even after birth, she is not free from the

⁶ Given the fact that for the Nagas, there is no strict dichotomy between the secular and the religious, the terms-Naga women doing theology, feminist theology, feminism, doing theology from women’s perspective, shall be used interchangeably to embrace all aspects of life.

⁷ Kwok Pui Lan, *Introducing Asian Feminist Theology* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic press, 2000), 36.

⁸ Culture is used to denote all dimension of life social and religious; habits and behaviors: laws and attitudes: concrete and abstract.

⁹ *The Telegraph*, (Kolkata, 25th Sep 2000), 5.

¹⁰ The birth of a boy, no matter the number in succession may not invite so much pity to the father and blame to the mother.

further reminder that she is a ‘girl’. This is clear in the number of days reserved for the actual naming ceremony. Some tribes christen the baby after six days in case of a boy and three days after for a girl. Nevertheless, almost all tribes have the common rule to name the girl child earlier than the boy child.¹¹ This is a form of gender separation, which, though viewed as trivial, is the cause of larger issues of gender-inequality in later years. The logic behind the eagerness to finish off ritual (s) concerning females earlier than those concerning males, is not grasped, and also unexplained by elders.

ii) Inheritance Rights

It is the practice (and staunch stance) of every Naga tribe, not to pass inheritance, particularly land; to their daughters, wives, or even mothers-who are women. Christopher/observed the Konyaks and wrote, “Land never passed in the female line...man’s eldest son inherited his entire holding...if a man has no sons, his daughters could inherit his movable property such as ornaments and pigs, but land went to the father’s kinsman”.¹² J. P. Mills also wrote of the Rengma with the same rule of inheritance -”all property goes to the male heirs,’ with the important provision that a widow is entitled to maintain from her ‘husband’s’ (Writer’s stress) property till remarriage or death.”¹³ Even among the Tangkhuls, females have no right to inherit property.¹⁴ Among the Sumis, it is slightly liberal. Hutton writes, “although women can possess movable property

¹¹ This applies also to the fixed days of mourning for dead. Some tribes observed death mourning for six days for a man and five days for a woman. See. R.S Raypa, “Naga: Lotha”, *People of India: Nagaland*, ed., K.S. Singh (Calcutta: Naveen Kishore, 1994), 115.

¹² Christopher Von Furer Haimendorf, *The Konyak Nagas* (USA: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969), 89.

¹³ J. P. Mills, *The Rengma Nagas*, 2nd ed. (Kohima: Directorate of Art and Culture, 1982), 143.

¹⁴ M. Horam, *Social and Cultural Life of Nagas- The Tangkhul Nagas* (Delhi: B. R. Publishing Corporation, 1977), 83.

in absolute ownership, they cannot, however possess land unless they have bought it....”¹⁵ Unlike the tribes above, in the Angami tradition there is an instance where she can inherit certain land property. According to Das, “the status of an Angami woman compared to the status of a man is lower, but woman enjoyed the privilege of inheriting a particular category of land called *Pozoupu* in *Zounou-Keyhonuo* dialect which is transmitted in matrilineal line from a mother to a daughter only”.¹⁶ Such provision keeps the female related to her ancestral heritage and endorses her belongingness to her natal tribe.

For numerous reasons, many families are either selling or buying lands and housed, traditional law of only male heirs is unpalatable. It makes more sense, as modern people and as a Christian community, to share properties not on the basis of sex and both spouses having full authority over ‘their’ (not his) belongings. Excuses that “the daughter after marriage comes under the care of a different clan and family as such, is not entitled to any share in the father’s property,”¹⁷ is not to overlook her personality and deny her, her selfhood. Such mentality is irrelevant because women too are individuals. They have a right to own and make decisions as they deem fit and proper.

iii) Marital Demands

Under this section we shall discuss two issues.

a. *Bride Price*

In traditional marriages, material gifts like, spear, dao, brass plate, basket, rice, chicken, mithun were demanded by the bride’s family. In recent times, such gifts are not commonly used. But demand and payment is made in different manner.

¹⁵ J. H. Hutton, *The Sema Nagas*, 2nd ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), 186.

¹⁶ N. K. Das, “Naga: Angami”, *People of India: Nagaland* (Vol. XXXIV), 68.

¹⁷ N. Talitemjen, *Ao Naga Cultural Heritage* (Mokokchung: Author, 1997), 76.

It may not be as loud as the system of *dowry*, but is certainly practiced in a softer tone. Ghosh has the opinion that due to the influence of Christianity, the people do not like to ‘sell’ the daughter nor the father of the boy wants to ‘purchase’ a ‘daughter-in-law’. But the traditions are die-hard and so it is now sold and purchased in a modified form.¹⁸ The Lothas have the practice of giving apportioned size of pork to the nearest kin of the bride. Some tribes demand shawls and *mekhlas*. Whether one gives or takes, it amounts to the notion that women can be bought or sold, as culture requires. The people must be conscientise to the fact that no matter the amount spent for buying or selling, it cannot be equated or even compared to the value and worth of a human person-woman. Because of this practice, marriage can also have a disastrous end! Fidelity to an impertinent tradition as this is not becoming a Christian who is to honor all human beings, (cf. 1.Pet. 2:17a).

b. *Wifely duties*

Talitemjen candidly pointed out that the “Ao society being patrilineal, the father is the head of the family.”¹⁹ (Inconsistently, even in matrilineal societies of the Garos and Khasis the father is still the kingpin of the family). In most families, women are treated as vehicles to keep the patrilineal genealogy alive.²⁰ Nagas hold no better view that the Greeks who support that marriage should be regarded primarily as a means of producing healthy and efficient citizens.²¹ A marriage relationship, with hierarchical attitude maintains, “The wife becomes the

¹⁸ B.B. Ghosh, “Sema Marriage”, *The Tribes of North East India*, Ed., S. Karotemprel (Calcutta: Firma KLM Private Ltd., 1984), 130.

¹⁹ N. Talitemjen, *Ao Naga Cultural Heritage*, 75.

²⁰ This is one reason why divorce is common when a son is not born, because it is presumed to be the end of a man’s lineage.

²¹ G. Lowes Dickson, *The Greek View of Life*, 23rd Ed. (London: Methuen & Co., 1957), 115.

mistress of the new household and maintains with her husband under his guardianship and protection. She has to follow her husband in every respect...the children begotten by the married couple belong to the line of the father, completely ignoring that of the mother's."²² A change of woman's surname (Aos are an exception) to the husband's is an unnecessary compulsion, indicating the women's nothingness in the family and the robbing of her self-identity.

3. Revitalizing Our Resources

i) *Music and Dance*

Music and dance were integral parts of festivities and merry-makings. Most celebrations of our ancestors were accompanied by the beating of the drum and the sounds of locally made instruments and not forgetting the rhythmic lilt of their shoeless feet.²³ Many Nagas acknowledge the western influence on our lifestyles. Even our spirituality²⁴ appears to be imported. Doing theology must include the art that so much identifies us to our root and helps us to remember and cherish them. Unfortunately, there are some tribes where only men were dancers and beaters of drum. Today, we can claim our freedom in Christ, to dance in praise of God who is the giver of all things, and also assert ourselves as bonafide members of our community. In the Old

²² B. B. Ghosh, "Sema Marriage, *The Tribes of North East India*, 66.

²³ Among the Mizos, traditional drum is part of church music. In some occasion(s) children, young and elderly: women and men join in dancing while singing to their folk melody with Christian texts, during the worship hour.

²⁴ Spirituality refers to "what gives life and animation:" In the words of Alister, it is "about the life of faith -what drives and motivates it, what people find helpful in sustaining and developing it. Which animates the life of believer and urges them to deepen and perfect what has at present only been begun.... in which Christian individuals or groups aim to deepen their experience of God" Alister Mc Grath, *Christian Spirituality- An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), 2-3

Testament times, people did have women who embodied good news and danced to convey the message cf. Exodus 15:20(21)

Then Miriam, the prophet, the sister of Aaron, took a timbrel in her hand; and all women went out after her with timbrel and dancing (RSV).

Women, blessed with a natural affinity to something that is our 'own' can weave the emotion-filled music and spirit-pregnant dances, as an essential part of our evolution of being a conglomerate and journey together (with men as well) in a quest for an original spirituality.

ii) *Myths and Tales*

Nagas' Myths and folktales belong to the genre of oral tradition and are deprived of "scripture or creed that provides a systematic exposition about their worldview".²⁵ "As much as our Christian history is guided by Bible which is man made because it is written by men and is the expression of a patriarchal culture".²⁶ Our ancestral history too reveals the stamp of a male-biased reflection. As myths and tales are considered as indispensable resources, it naturally informs our theology. But if they represent only anthropocentric values then theology becomes improvised. For a theology to be born with holistic import, the 'female' must be resurrected. Their importance in making of the stories should inspire women and men alike to narrate, preserve, and write the truth about them.

In the story of *Lijaba*²⁷ narrators, so far exalt Lijaba as a kind deity who has concern over the villagers and so comes to visit them personally. But what about Yarla and Asatula who provided him food and shelter when all else failed him? These two sisters served as a springboard for the manifestation of

²⁵ A.Wati Longchar, *The Tribal Religious Tradition of Northeast India - An Introduction*, Revised ed. (Jorhat: Author, 2000), 22.

²⁶ Elizabeth Schusler Fojeniza, *In Memory of Her* (NY: Crossroad, 1995), 13.

²⁷ For detail story, please see, A.Wati Longchar, *The tribal Religious Tradition of NEI*, 12-14.

the power of *Lijaba*. Furthermore, by *Lijaba*'s generosity to fill their pot with rice and meat and good harvest, women are encouraged to think that contents of the divine image such as sharing, giving, deciding, love, and dominion are not devoid of women. By the same token the gifts of God are also without conditions and our service, loyalty, devotion, and commitment as responses of those who bear the image of the Giver are accepted in spite of our sexuality.

In another myth of Angamis analogous with the construction of the Tower of Babel (Gen. 11:1-9), we see how 'man' wanted to construct a tower up to heaven to meet their ancestor, *Ukepenopfu* (also spelt *kepenopfu*). But she made them speak different languages and the idea of construction of the tower was abandoned.²⁸ This myth, not only brings to our mind of the feminine aspect of Sophia but also of the feminine characteristic of the Supreme Being.

4. Exploring Our Faith Foundations

The Transcendent "I am who I am" (Ex. 3: 14) of the Bible is also the Supreme Being, called by us as *Potsow*, *Tsungrem*, *Alhou*, *Tingwang*- to mention few, who sent emissaries to be in touch with creatures. This "God is and remains a mystery beyond comprehension"²⁹ and therefore cannot be confined to the explanation and description of narrow, bottled up, limited, closed, one-sided, theologian of antiquity (also modernity). This I AM, beyond everything human, is open for us women, to feel, to know and to be understood; and be who, who is most meaningful to the believer. The Emmanuel "God with us" (cf. Mt 1:23) performs the duty entrusted (cf. Jn 4:34). Like the function of the demi-god/godlings, who enter the world

²⁸ B. B. Kumar, *An Introduction to Naga Tribes* (Meerut: K.K. Mittal, 1997), 83.

²⁹ Daniel L. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding* (Grant Rapids: William B. Erdmans, 1991), 2.

of ancient people to be either helpful or bothersome.³⁰ Jesus came to end pseudo-religiosity based oneself- righteousness, which resulted in the loss of power for some and the gain of hope for others. The saving presence of Christ strengthens us to challenge our weaknesses and give us victory, over the culture that appears 'unredeemed' and 'worldly'. The Counselor emboldens us, to pursue the truth (cf. Jn 16:13a) and patiently leads us to the fact that though "like the search of a woman for her lost coin" (Lk 15:8) the work of theology is strenuous but may great joy.³¹

Our trust in a big God, guarantees for us the freedom to search for new meanings. Our life in Jesus prompts us to "examine their (our) faith critically, to determine if their (our) attitudes and praxis were (are) in fidelity to the teachings of Jesus Christ".³² If we affirm our belief in a living God, then nothing about 'us' and God is an ended agenda. Daniel clearly writes,

Christian Faith invariably prompts questions, sets an inquiry in motion, fights the inclination to accept things as they are, continually calls unquestioned, unexamined assumptions about God, ourselves and our world.³³

Naga women, seeking to construct a relevant theology and consequently to build a true *ekklesia*- "the assembly of free citizens gathering to decide their spiritual and political affairs,"³⁴ is valid, because we believe in the justification of our faith, authenticity of our voices and in our responsibility to create a

³⁰ Lothas tell of such gods called Sukhingo, who desires the good of all as a destiny -keeper: the other is Tchupvou, who is a mischievous water-deity, who may give or refuse a good catch of aquatic creatures.

³¹ Daniel L. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding*, 1-2.

³² Geffery B. Kelly (ED), *Karl Rahner: Theologian of the Graced Search for Meaning* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), 31.

³³ Daniel L. Migloire, *Faith Seeking Understanding*, 2.

³⁴ Kwok Pui Lan, *Introducing Asian Feminist Theology*, 111.

just society. The suspicion of the mass to dispense with 'new' theologies as a "disturbing permeation",³⁵ unnecessary and harmful to the faith, which has nurtured them, can be called "arrested development, if not downright stupidity."³⁶ A maturing individual, a growing church and a moving world, indicates that we, as theologians along with our fellow believers, "will have to become seekers, pilgrims, pioneers with no permanent residence."³⁷

Conclusion

As Nagas and as Christian women, as we together venture to look for innovative possibilities and broader formulation of traditional teachings and biased cultural demands, we have to gather patience as Wilkinson suggests, "Empowerment is not a magic potion that will do wonders overnight: women have to strive and strive hard for rights ... unless women take a firm stand and assert themselves, no one will give them their right in a silver platter".³⁸ Like a woman in labor pain, we have our struggles today but, also like the immense bliss that floods the mother, we have a future sealed with the promise of God. The vistas that awaits to be discovered and claimed by us is rich, even as we make few steps (including this paper) towards attaining the wealth of being God's children, particularly as daughters of God.

³⁵ A. P. Nirmal by J. Jeyakiran Sebastain, "creative Exploration: A.P. NirmaFs ongoing Contribution to Christian theology", *Bangalore Theological Forum* (Vol. XXXI, No 2. Dec 1999), 51.

³⁶ Samuel M. Miller, *The life of the Soul* (NY: Harper and Bros., 1951), 15.

³⁷ Daniel L. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding*, 4.

³⁸ S. Wilkinson, "Betrayed by their Own", *NCCR* (Dec. 2002), 889-90.

NAGA WOMEN IN THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION: PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

Limatula Longkumer

Introduction

Numerically, at present Naga women may be the highest contingent undergoing theological studies in India. The enrolment of Naga women students may be higher in most of the leading theological colleges in India comparing to women from other States. Women enrolment may be about 40% in most of the theological colleges in Nagaland. Average wise, every year at least about 100-120 women graduate from different colleges but except a few, women are not to be seen in the ministry. Where do they (women) go? Why women cannot fully involve in the ministry? Is something wrong with the women? with the church ministry? or with the theological education process? These issues draw our attention to the process of theological education and the present church ministry in one hand as well as the impact of Naga socio-culture and political ideologies upon women on the other. This paper highlights some of the problems and prospects of Naga women in theological education in general.

1. Naga Women in Theological Trends

Naga women are late comers into the field of theological education. The reasons may be due to both sociological and theological factors (which will be dealt later in this paper). Roughly, Naga women came forward for theological education only from 60s; but in those days it was very few in number. Prior to that, theological education was regarded as something for men only. Some of the pioneers of leading Naga women in higher theological education: to name a few persons like Rev. Noksangchila the first L. Th. graduate in 1959, Mrs. Khrieleno Terhuja, the first B. D. graduate in 1961¹ and also Rev. Sennangshila, Mrs. Vitoli, Mrs. J. Savino, Mrs. Qhetoli, Mrs. Neikolou Mero, and few others² were the pioneer Naga women in theological education. These women pioneered in initiating women's issues and women organization/Association in the churches of Nagaland. Women going for higher theological studies in a big contingent is only a recent development. Only from late 80s women came forward for theological studies in a bigger group. According to statistical report of NBCC which was published in the book *From Darkness to Light*, there were altogether 872 theologically trained Naga women in 1997.³ I am sure the number must have already doubled by now. Today in B.D and Master's levels, Naga "women may be the highest number studying both in Nagaland and in other parts of India as well. This shows that Naga women are really advancing in theological studies. Currently, at least three women earned doctorates (Ph.D) - Akumla Longkumer, L. M. Narola Imchen and Aphuno Chase Roy; and one got D. Min. Right now there are several women undergoing doctoral studies in different colleges and universities both in India and abroad. At least about 80 women hold M.Th degree and numerous B.D. and B.Th degree holders in theological studies. At present a number

¹ Interviewed with Rev. Dr. Noksangchila on May 29, 2003 at Dimapur.

² *From Darkness to Light* (Kohima: NBCC, 1997), 128- 133.

³ *From Darkness to Light*, 96.

of well qualified theologically trained women are working in various organizations/ministries and also in teaching Faculty in theological colleges in North East India and in other parts of India. We are very proud to see three of our sisters being ordained by our churches, they are: Rev. Noksangchila, Rev. Sennangshila, and Rev. K. Kapfo. These are the incredible achievements that Naga women have made in our theological journey and in God's ministry.

However, having a big number of women going to theological studies and getting higher degrees do not solve the problem of women's issues. As the number of women theological graduates rapidly increases, the problem seems to be more acute and visible than before concerning their jobs. Women are not as easily placed as men in ministry. Placement of theologically trained women has become one of the greatest problems in Nagaland because women are not given equal opportunity in pastoral ministry. Churches do not give administrative roles and pastoral ministry to the women. As a result, except a few, most of the women cannot enter into church ministry due to hierarchical and exclusive structure of the church. So, the question before us is, for what purpose women undergo theological studies if the churches cannot give space for pastoral ministry and top leaderships? This challenges us to look critically at the whole theological education process from women's perspectives.

2. Problems of Women in Theological Education

Women's problem in theological education is contributed by three factors- the patriarchal socio-cultures of the Nagas, the traditional Christian theology and present church's teachings. Since it is not possible to discuss all these factors in detail, I will limit only to a few points in brief.

(a) Patriarchal Ideologies

Naga society is a male dominated patriarchal society where women are treated as inferior and dependent beings. Patriarchy means "the rule of the father." It refers to systems of legal, social, economic, and political relations that validate and enforce the

sovereignty of male heads of families over dependent persons in the household.⁴ In feminist theory and practice, the meaning of patriarchy is no longer restricted to the power of the father or male supremacy in the clan but patriarchy is a social system of control and domination of men over women. It restricts women's freedom of choice, behaviour, action and thought. It is a pyramidal system of domination, subordination and exploitation of women.⁵ Patriarchy articulates structural and institutional relations of dominations and power relations between women and men. Thus, it is important to see patriarchy both as an ideology of women's subordination and control, and, a concept of struggle against the same.

Due to patriarchal nature of Naga society, males dominate in the socio-economic, political, and religious affairs and women play only the subordinate role. Women's role is confined only at homes. Society places women in a position of subservience to and dependence on men. In village socio-political life, women have no privilege to participate in the affairs of the village administration. Under no circumstances can a woman become an administrator of the village council till today. Therefore, women are being denied participation in the decision making. According to Naga customary laws, women cannot inherit any family properties. Only sons inherit family properties. In the absence of sons, the daughters or mothers cannot inherit family properties but the nearest kinsman of the father becomes the recipient. Due to this patriarchal influence Naga women are tamed to be passive and submissive.

This patriarchal attitude was very apparent when the formal education process was established in Naga soil. It was

⁴ Rosemary R. Ruether, "Patriarchy", in *Dictionary of Feminist Theologies*, eds. Letty M. Russell & J. Shannon Clarkson (Westminster: John Knox Press, 1996), 205.

⁵ Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, *Wisdom Ways: Introducing Feminist Biblical Interpretation* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2001), p. 116.

missionaries who introduced modern system of formal education in Nagaland. When the missionaries opened a number of schools in Nagaland, parents strongly opposed the education of their daughters. Parents thought that the education of girls was a waste of time and domestic labour. Thus, they preferred educating only the boys. That is why, when the missionaries began their educational work, they had great difficulty persuading parents to send their daughters to school. Those who did come were restless, overgrown, shy girls, who were more interested in finding a husband than in studies.⁶ On the other hand, missionaries too had the patriarchal mindset and so did not really aim to promote women in higher education. Apparently, Mrs. Clark revealed this in the objective of Impur Mission School, "... school preparing young men for pastors, evangelists, and day-school teachers, and young women to be suitable wives for such men."⁷ This reflects the patriarchal attitude towards women and the traditional understanding of women's role in society as confined solely to domestic life. It also reflects the predisposition of parents and society at large to give preference to boys over girls. Therefore, parents thought that sitting in a classroom and learning was a waste of time for girls. It was simply not what women were supposed to do.

But in spite of this patriarchal ideology, gradually women were enrolled in schools and so education of women brought a significant change. It successfully counteracted the prevailing view prohibiting the education of women. This paved the way for Naga women to pursue higher theological education. Today,

⁶ F. S. Downs, *The Christian Impact on the Status of Women in North East India* (Shillong: NEHU, 1996), p. 18.

⁷ Mary Mead Clark, *A Corner in India* (Gauhati: CLC, 1978, reprint), p. 148. Impur Mission school was established in 1895, a school with nine pupils. This school was to be the pioneer institution for years in Nagaland producing teachers for schools, evangelists and pastors for churches and leaders of the people. See, Kiremwati, *Education and the Nagas* (Impur: ABAM, 1995), p.12.

in secular fields Naga women are well educated like men and have assumed positions of leadership roles in many organizations which they had been previously denied, being debarred from taking a leading role in public life. While this progress is commendable, it should also be noted that in the higher levels preference for boys is still greater in the attitudes of the parents.

This patriarchal domination is more rampant in the church ministry than secular organizations. Though, the church is a foremost community of believers, Naga churches developed its ministry along the hierarchical patterns of the traditional society. The patriarchal male-dominated structures of society are reflected in the structure of church ministry. Christianity appropriated the clan based male elder village administrative pattern in the church. Thus, the whole working pattern in the church is like a photocopy of the village administrative system.⁸ As a result, women are given only assisting roles, except in the women's department. Leading a church by a woman Pastor is unthinkable for the Nagas. In spite of the advancement in the Naga society through many forces, the patriarchal ideologies still dominate the church ministry and socio-cultural life of the Naga society. Therefore, even though women get the opportunity to pursue theological education, placement in the church is a serious issue.

(b) Long Histories of Submissive Roles

Naga women have been educated to be submissive and passive for many centuries. So the vestiges of the long history of women occupying subservient position in society cannot easily effaced over-night. The passive compliance with and resignation to the subordinate functions allotted to them are so deeply engraved on the minds of the women that any questioning or

⁸ Limatula Longkumer, "Christianity and Naga Women", in *Transforming Theology for Empowering Women: A Theological and Hermeneutical Reflection in the Context of North East India*, ed. R. L. Hnuni (ETC, Jorhat: TSC, 1999), 61.

rejection of the status quo is hardly entertained by most women. These passive roles are accepted as being derived from the order of nature and so ordained by God as part and parcel of the humanness of a woman. The expression of being a woman as "an ideal woman" is fully appreciated even among segments of the woman-folk of theologically trained women themselves. This traditional defined model of "an ideal woman" as weak, dependent, humble, passive, motherly, caring and feminine are so deeply rooted in the minds of the people that aggressive and outspoken women are regarded as not "womanly" by our society. In fact, smart and outspoken women are looked down by our society as "uncultured woman". Such aberration has its antecedents in the systematically developed portrait of a woman as independently unable to stand on her two feet, plan her life and achieve set goals. Physical frailty associated with women is conveniently linked with intellectual disability. Her major roles in society are seen as not requiring training in technical skills, logic and critical knowledge. Indeed she is credited with having little capacity and need for intellectual pursuits. Her centre of gravity is located in her heart signifying her emotional nature and ephemeral learnings while the brain signified serious thinking and calculated decisions is the centre of gravity for her male partner.⁹ Such ideologies have dominated the women for so long that even some of the women theologians are more comfortable to carry on the traditional stereotyped roles in the church than breaking down the oppressive structures in the church. Unless women realized their oppressive situation and come out from this cocoon of traditionally assigned status of ideal woman and affirm ourselves that we women are capable, smart and intelligent to perform like men, mere receiving theological education alone cannot bring any changes in the status and role of women in the church and society.

⁹ Mary Gerald Nwagwu, "Relevance of Theological Education for Women", in *Women, Culture and Theological Education*, eds. Protus O. Kemdirim & Mercy A. Oduyoye (Nigeria: WAATI, 19%), 90.

(c) Traditional Christian Theology

Feminist theologians are convinced that traditional theology is largely responsible for the subordination of women in theological education as well as in ministry. Since theological education is rooted in the traditional patriarchal theology, the present theological education is a male oriented education process. The theology which we have inherited from the missionaries was a missionary theology, a western model, predominantly conservative, anthropocentric, patriarchal and male biased theology that it negates women's roles and status in the church and society. This traditional Christian theology is androcentric and dualistic approach which makes males as normative.¹⁰ Throughout the history of the church, Christian theology has been done with the exclusion of women and their experiences. The masculine genderization of theology as a systemic feature has corrupted theological frameworks and theories of theology.¹¹ So, this theology has deleterious consequences for women. The traditional theology concedes in its own teaching the naturalness of women's subordinate condition and consecrates the unequal stereotypes of the masculine and the feminine as desired by God, thereby endorsing women's oppressive destiny. For example, male theologians like Augustine, Tertullian, Thomas Aquinas and other theologians in the history of the Christian church denigrate women and gives divine authority to the reinforcement of societal denigration of women.¹² This masculine theology fails to treat women as full and whole human beings. As a result, theological education remains a male dominated education process. This male biased and conservative theology does not encourage women to involve

¹⁰ Rosemary R. Reuther, *Sexism and God-Talk: Towards a Feminist Theology*, 10th Anniversary ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993), 95.

¹¹ Fiorenza, *Wisdom Ways*, 84.

¹² Pamela Dickey Young, *Feminist Theology/Christian Theology: In Search of Method* Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 15.

in theological education. Though women are enrolled in theological education they are made to think and do in the thought pattern of men. Hence, theological education too perpetuates oppression and discriminate women. Unless women's experiences are included in theological reflections and women are made subject, our theology will remain an incomplete theology.

(d) Gender Issues in Theological Education

The present theological education is a gender-biased education process. Despite the existence of feminist theology as a major theological movement challenging the gender issues in theological education, it is still exclusive and male oriented one. Women's voices and their assertions of rights have not been heard much in theological education. Gender discrimination is found in the theological curriculum, structure of the theological institutions, appointment of the faculty and enrolment of the students. The existing model of theological education is a Western model both in its method and content. Education which has developed in the Western patriarchal culture, shaped by Western social structures and ideologies is transported and transplanted in our context. Thus, the present structure is male-oriented and so only a little encouragement is given to women. The symbols, metaphors, concepts, and language are all male oriented. Mostly men occupy the leadership positions in theological colleges for centuries.¹³ There are about 32 theological colleges in Nagaland but none of the principal is a woman. The infrastructure in many of the theological institutions has very limited dorm facilities for women and so only a little number of women can be accommodated in theological colleges/ seminaries. The reason is that in the past only men used to come for theological studies and so the infrastructure was made according to those needs. Unless the whole structure is changed to inclusiveness,

¹³ *Directory of Theological Schools in South Asia* (Bangalore: BTESSC, 2002).

the discrimination of women will continue in theological education process.

The present curricula of theological education have developed within male dominated institutions, hence, curricula function to re-produce traditional patriarchal relationships of dominance-/submission of women through education. Women are being educated to think in the thought patterns of men because the designers and makers of theological education process have been male theologians for many centuries. Due to the influence of feminist theology, theological education under the Senate of Serampore colleges¹⁴ shows signs of 'gender awareness' by incorporating 'Women's Studies' as a separate branch in the theological curriculum at the graduate as well as Post-graduate levels. Yet, adding few new courses to curriculum does not change the core of the curriculum or perspectives of the people. Moreover, an addition of one subject or department alone is not enough to bring gender justice in the education process. Often those courses on women's concerns end up as a course exclusively for women. Hence, Women's studies/feminist theology subject remains like a "ladies compartment in the train run by males."¹⁵

The attitude of men towards women theological studies is also not positive. Churches are not supportive to train women theologically and provide leaderships to them. Comparing to male counterpart, till today in ratio wise the enrolment of women students is far fewer than the male students in most of the theological colleges. In Master's and in higher levels of theological education, women are still fewer. The reason is that the churches prefer male candidates than female and so

¹⁴ I assume that majority of the Nagas are graduates of Senate of Serampore University. Moreover, non Serampore colleges in Nagaland also directly or indirectly follow the Serampore Syllabi in their colleges. Therefore, I am using the example of Senate curricula here.

¹⁵ Gabriele Dietrich, *A New Thing on Earth: Hopes and Fears facing Feminist Theology* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2001), 8

the churches recommend more men than women for theological training. A wrong notion among the people is that only men can serve faithfully in the ministry. It is believed that women after marriage cannot be involved fully in ministry due to childbearing and family responsibilities. Therefore, a general understanding among the people is that investment in women's theological education is a waste of time and resources. In spite of this wrong assumption, many women pursue their theological studies on their own (self support). At least upto B.D. level women enrolment is quite high, but mostly these women are not church sponsored candidates but self-supported candidate.

(e) Mushrooming of Theological Colleges

Mushrooming of theological colleges in Nagaland creates a huge crisis in theological education. There are about 32 theological colleges in Nagaland, out of these, three colleges are affiliated to the Senate of Serampore College, few are accredited to Asia Theological Association (ATA), and majority are private colleges sponsored by their own tribe/ association/ churches and some are established by private individuals.¹⁶ Why so many colleges in such a small State of Nagaland? Why big contingents of people go for theological studies? There are many reasons: For some people, establishing theological schools/colleges is a lucrative business, that is, making money is the main reason behind establishing these institutions. Secondly, among the churches' Conventions/Associations establishing their own theological colleges has become a prestige in Nagaland. So, there is a competition of establishing its own church sponsored colleges. All these motives lead to division of sources, creates 'ism' among the people and finally

¹⁶ Zelhou Keyho, "Mushrooming of Theological Colleges in Nagaland: Its Problems and Challenges", in *Journal of Tribal Studies III/1* (January-June 1999); Siga Aries, "Theological Education Net-Works Other than the Senate and the Validity of their Degrees", in *Journal of Tribal Studies III/1* (January-June 1999).

produce a substandard theological education which creates acute problem in the theological issues and counter-challenging one another for the sake of survival of the institutions. Thirdly, mushrooming of theological colleges and going for theological education is a contribution made by the Revival Movements in 70's and 80's in which the church teachings were mainly on soul winning and on mission emphasis of sending 10,000 missionaries to other lands. Many young people committed their lives to study theology and go as missionaries abroad. So, the present trend in theological studies is mainly the product of revival movements in Nagaland. Fourthly, it is a general notion among the parents in Nagaland that one child among their children should go for theological studies. Thus, parents pressurized the children to study theology. Also, sending their children to theological studies becomes a prestige for many parents and so some are forced to study theology even though the person concerned is not interested. Fifthly, for some people theological education has become a springboard to go for higher studies and going abroad. As a result, going for theological studies among the young people has become a big enterprise just like going for secular studies. But some of those students have no proper spiritual commitment and conviction for Christian ministry. Hence, we have many theological institutions, theological students but very few committed and dedicated theologians to serve the church and society.

As far as the enrolment in the theological studies is concerned Naga women have no restriction. They get equal opportunity like male counterpart to study theology because Baptist churches in Nagaland keep the door so freely open for anybody who wishes to go for theological studies. Churches recommend generously whoever wishes to study theology with no obligation to take in back to their own church after their study. Hence, many women undertake theological study on their own or self support without any bond service from their churches. As a result, though we have number of women theological graduates, there is very little opportunity for them to involve in the ministry. Thus, mushrooming of theological

colleges and theological studies enhance more problem for women rather than solving their issues. In fact, many men think that large contingent of women in theological studies is a good gesture which shows that women issues in the-church is already solved. But, in reality this will never solve the problem of women in ministry unless the structure of ministry is changed and unless people's attitudes are totally transformed.

3. Some Suggestions for Gender Justice in Theological Education

Women search for an alternative theological education which will be inclusive and relevant for all. It is not seeking a theological education for women alone but for a theological education which can take every human being, man and woman, rich and poor, with all seriousness. It is a search for liberating theological education with a hope to transform the dehumanized situations. Hence, there is a need to reconstruct and reenvision an alternative theological education from feminist perspective because the present theological education is one sided, male biased and oppressive for women. Therefore, *Feminist practices of theological education* should be emphasized in theological education process. Feminist practices of theological education are moulded by feminist theology and the feminist movement in Christianity. Seeing the injustices and discrimination of women in theological enterprise and theological education, feminist perspective of theological education has emerged in order to bring justice and transformation in theological education process. It is a paradigm shift from male stream scholarship of academic institutions to an inclusive understanding of theological education. Such a paradigm shift would not only produce different emancipatory knowledge but also a different kind of theological education.

Feminist practice of theological education calls to redefine the concept of education and theological education. Feminist educators defined education as "process of forming, constructing, fashioning and refashioning or developing human

subjects.”¹⁷ Education is for humanization and liberation “of the people in community. Feminist calls for fresh understanding of theological education. The task of theological education is for transformation of the whole person of both men and women in the community. It aims at training and equipping men and women for the variety of Christian leadership roles and ministries. Theological education task is “to motivate, equip, and enable the people of God to develop their gifts and give their lives in meaningful service.”¹⁸ It is theological in the sense that it involves people in a commitment to mission and ministry, a commitment to the study of God in the sense of God’s revelation in the life of Jesus Christ and God’s continuous working through the Holy Spirit. Theological education supposes to prepare both men and women for the task of enabling and building up the communities as well as empowering the people to become living witnesses of the life-giving power of the Gospel. John Pobee describes,

Theological education... calling men and women to be prepared for a costly ministry which encourages and empowers the whole people of God to bring justice, peace and the compassion and mercy of God to the suffering, weary and divided world in which we live.¹⁹

This indicates two important aspects: (a) that theological education is a holistic education which equips men and women to render their life-long service for God’s ministry. It is not exclusively for men only or women alone but for all those who have a divine calling and has a strong conviction to serve God. (b) There is a strong relationship between theological education

¹⁷ Rebecca S. Chopp, *Saving Work: Feminist Perspectives in Theological Education* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster Press, 1995), 43.

¹⁸ Ofelia Ortega, “Theological Education”, in *Dictionary of Feminist Theologies*, eds. Letty M. Russell & J. Shannon Clarkson (Westminster: John Knox Press, 1996), 282.

¹⁹ John Pobee, *Towards Viable Theological Education: Ecumenical, Imperative, Catalyst of Renewal* (Geneva: WCC, 1997), 1.

and church ministry. The purpose of theological education is for God’s mission; that is, educating for Christian service. If both men and women are called by God, then gender disparity should not be raised in theological education. Theological institution should be a place of creating lives of freedom, mutuality and promote gender equality and justice. Theological education should promote teaching-learning as ‘a practice of freedom’ for all. Gender justice in theological education has to be promoted.

Feminist perspective in theological education is concern with subjectivity that means to recognize women as theological subject. Subjectivity constitutes a person’s sense of self, thoughts, emotions, modes of understanding the world, the sense of individuality and uniqueness. Thus, subjectivity embodies lived experiences and feeling.

Women’s experiences must be taken seriously as a critical and primary source for theological education. Women’s experiences- the sufferings and daily struggles of the women must be consciously integrated in the whole process of theological education. Otherwise, theological education will miss its primary focus and goal. A theological study that neglects one section of the human race, namely women, cannot be considered as authentic education. The integration of the perspectives of women in theological education will create awareness of discriminatory gender realities and help people to do something concrete to change this oppressive situation.

Women are critical about the whole process of theological education. They are concern with how students learn, how knowledge is produced and how subject position is constructed. Feminist practices of theological education try to activate those who are traditionally silenced, those who are denied an opportunity to participate fully in the making of culture. It tries to raise critical consciousness among the students and to empower students towards liberation. Women’s experiences should be incorporated in curriculum making, and content of theological education. Gender justice structure should be promoted in theological institutions in all aspects.

The present trend of theological education system in Nagaland should be seriously questioned. Theological education is preparing people for ministry but not for getting degrees. It should not be equated with secular degrees. Establishing many theological colleges should be discouraged because these business-minded colleges cannot provide quality education but sub-standard theological education which kills the future prospects of the students and also spoil the whole image of Christian ministry. At the same time, having many colleges divide the resources and as a result many colleges are going through a severe financial crunch in Nagaland.

The present patriarchal structures of church ministry in Nagaland need to be changed if the partnership of men and women is to be realized fully. The question of women's participation in ministry should be approached from the point of partnership and not from superiority and inferiority perspective. We should make conscious effort to give equal opportunity to women in the theological faculties, women students in theological colleges and other decision making bodies in the church and society. To achieve this goal of partnership both men and women should work together, visioning together with open mindedness.

Conclusion

Today the situation of Naga women is improving gradually due to education and many awareness programmes for women. We have many talented women theologians coming out every year from the theological colleges, however, it only contributes to the increase of unemployment problem for women theologians, which is a serious issue we need to tackle urgently. This calls for a demand in total change in the structure of church and society. On the other hand, though, women theologians are many, we are scattered in our own places and practically cannot come together. We do not have a forum where we can pour our ideas and share together our theological reflections. No doubt, as Naga women we face countless hardships and sufferings in our church and society but individually we bear all

these sufferings quietly. The sufferings, discrimination and injustices of our daily life should become a context in which we the Naga women must begin our theological reflections. We should come together and create together, "a space" where we can raise our voices for emancipation by critiquing 'the evils of our society and church teachings. Unless we unite together and cooperate ourselves for our common cause, our voices will not be heard by the people. For this, theologically trained women should first of all do away with tribalisms and prejudices and then come forward to develop networkings among ourselves. This is the urgent task for Naga women theologians today.

ISSUES OF PARTNERSHIP IN MINISTRY

Phutoli Chingmak

Introduction

Issues of women in ministry is determined by many factors like socio-political and cultural aspects of a given context; as well as conditioned by the dominant theological interpretation and its practices in the church. This is very much true in the churches in Nagaland. Naga women are denied privileges and leadership roles in the churches in Nagaland. Theologically trained women are debarred from pastoral ministry and decision making bodies in the church. Women are playing only the secondary roles which are mostly confine to women departments in the church. Thus, the issue of partnership in ministry is a crucial and burning issue today. Both women and men need to understand the essence of partnership in this present age and implement it in the ministry of the churches. This paper is a short reflection on the issues of partnership in ministry in the churches in Nagaland.

What is partnership?

Partnership means sharing and working together of both men and women for a common goal. It is concerned with mutuality, reciprocity and interdependence or partnership rather than

superiority or inferiority. It also means recognizing the unique differences of each individual, respecting each person- their various gifts and talents for the welfare of the community. The present ministry in Nagaland does not emphasis on partnership of both men “and women. Women who form half of the population in the church, who are the most active in the church attendance are still neglected when it comes to participation in ministry; they are always placed in the periphery of the ministerial ladder. Women are discriminated not because they are incapable but because they are women. If the church is to be the church, we must strive for healthy participation of women in all the ministries of the church. The question of women’s participation in the ministry should be approached not from the viewpoint of “superiority” or “inferiority” or “submission” or “obedience” of wife to husband, not “equality” of men and women, but from the point of view of PARTNERSHIP.¹ The image of God in creation implies equality, mutuality, co-existence and interdependence of both men and women. There is neither superiority nor inferiority but God created both women and men in the same Imago Dei. R. L. Hnuni says, “the emphasis on partnership in the church is not a new invention, its basis is found in the creation story itself.” She further says, “It is only when the nature of true partnership is lived out by men and women in all aspects of life that the true nature of the church as the Body of Christ will be realized.”² But this biblical teaching is not practice in the churches. Yet, in reality we have number of problems which hinder and deprive women to participate fully in the church’s ministry in Nagaland. Because of which partnership in ministry is still a distant dream for

¹ Solomon Rongpi, “Women Empowerment: A North East India Perspective”, in *Transforming Theology for Empowering Women*, ed. R. L. Hnuni (Jorhat: TSC, ETC, 1999), 127.

² R. L. Hnuni, “Issues of Women in Ministry”, in *Good News For North East India*, ed. Renthly Keitzar (Guwahati: CLC, 1995), 192-193.

Naga women. The problem of partnership is contributed by many factors.

Problems of partnership in ministry

Patriarchy

Patriarchal culture is a very oppressive culture for women. Problem of partnership in ministry is due to patriarchal socio-cultural system of the Nagas. Naga society is a patriarchal culture. Patriarchy is a social system where the male or the father controls all members of the family, properties, where male is the central reality, the reference point by which the human is measured and defined. It is a culture in which men exercise control over women, restrict women's freedom of choice, behaviour, action and even thought pattern. Hence, men are the controller and maker of history and culture and women play only the subordinate roles in the society. Males dominate in the socio-economic, political and religious affairs. As a result women suffer humiliation, oppression, dehumanization, and pain under the patriarchal system. The present understanding of women's ministry in the churches also reflects these patriarchal ideologies. Some of the injustices imposed upon women by patriarchal system are:

Gender roles

The patriarchal ideologies lay down clear cut distinctive roles and norms for both male and female in the society. The concept of 'gender' describes all the socially given attributes, roles, activities, and responsibilities connected to being a male or a female in a given society. For example, a woman must know cooking, house keeping, taking care of children, or a woman should not climb a tree, should not help in house constructions in the villages, because these are men's jobs. The traditional stereotypes roles define that a woman must be humble, feminine, motherly, caring, hardworking, etc. Likewise, roles and functions are defined according to the sex of a person. Our gender identity determines how we are perceived, and how we are expected to think and act as women and men, because of the way society

is organized."³ Gender also determines how power is distributed between the sexes. These gender defined stereotype roles make homes and family life as a woman's place and the public and political affairs are regarded as man's place, and so functions and responsibilities in the public affairs all belong to men. Women's roles are found in the private life, they are regarded as subordinate to men because men are superior and have ability to rule in the society. Therefore, the accepted norm of our society is that household work and nurturing children are exclusively women's activities. This gives a picture that father or male is the bread earner and mother or female is regarded as homemaker. In spite of the tremendous changes in Naga society this attitude still prevails and women do all the household chores even if they work the same length of time as their husbands outside the home. This gender defined roles and functions effect partnership model in ministry. Unless these stereotyped roles of women are changed, there will be no partnership in the church and society. In order to change women's position, we must address the way gender determines power, status and control over resources.

Socio-political life

Since Naga society has a patriarchal culture, men dominate in the socio-political life of the people where males take major leadership roles in all the political activities. The elected male elders only govern in the village polity. It is a gerontocratic form of polity where elders are nominated from different clans to form the government in the village. Although the pattern of administration can, be described as democratic, women are completely absent in this form of government. It is a taboo for women to participate in the village administrative decision making system. A woman is not allowed to become a village administrator under any circumstances.⁴ Only men are eligible

³ Candida March, Ines Smyth & Maitrayee Mukhopadhyay, *A Guide to Gender-Analysis Framework* (Oxfam GB), 19.

⁴ Limatula Longkumer, "Women in Ministry: A Reflection from Ao Naga Women", in *In God's Image* 19/4 (December 2000): 39.

to attend and take part in a public meeting. Deliberations and decision making, planning, administration, and policy framing belong to men. It is not a woman's business. Women's role is simply to follow and cooperate with the men's decision without any complaint.⁵ In spite of the advancement in education, modernization and globalization, the same village political system of village council is still followed in the Naga villages even today. This attitude of people where only men are regarded as rulers, administrators and policy makers in the society cannot accept women as administrators, pastors or top leaders in the churches. Unless this attitude is cast away from the minds of the people, there will be discriminations of women in the leadership roles of the churches.

Church's teaching

We cannot deny the fact that American Baptist Missionaries who came to Nagaland and preached the Gospel brought tremendous changes upon the lives of the Nagas. But as far as the problem of women in ministry is concern, Christianity also contributed a lot. The missionaries also came from patriarchal church traditions who brought along male biased theology and teaching. They were blind to the cultural exploitations towards women. Without realizing they established the churches in the same pattern of village administrative council set up. Therefore, the village administrative system is replicated in the church structure. Christianity appropriated the clan based male elder village administrative pattern in the church. For example, the pastor is like the Chief or the head of the village council and the deacon board like council of elected elders. The deacon board, which is the highest decision making body of a local church congregation is constituted by men. Women were never included on the deacon board. Now only the negotiations are going on to include women but the debate is still continuing.

⁵ Limatula Longkumer, "Christianity and Naga Women", in *Transforming Theology for Empowering Women*, ed. R. L. Hnuni (Jorhat: TSC, ETC, 1999), 56.

As a result the pastoral ministry and other administrative posts in the churches are occupied only by men. At present there is no woman pastor in Nagaland.

From the early period, Christianity did not encourage women's leadership except in the fields of schools education and health services. They have been given only the subordinate position of leadership in the church like Sunday School teachers, evangelists or women leaders.⁶ It is sad to say that Christianity did not encourage induction of women to the ordained ministry. Even today many churches uphold this tradition strongly. This is another serious mistake that the churches have made concerning women from the very inception of Christianity in Nagaland.

Christianity re-enforced a male biased theology. As mentioned elsewhere the missionaries also came from the patriarchal church traditions of the West and so they brought along with them a male-centered theology. Not only did the missionaries come from a very conservative evangelical background but their teaching was also conservative. The same conservative teaching prevails in the churches even today. Thus, the whole Christian tradition is interpreted from the perspective of male's experience. Christianity has given an ideology of male deity, inferior status of women and an exclusively male Christian ministry. As a result, talking about equal partnership in ministry has become a taboo and men think that women are demanding what they are not suppose to. Indeed, Naga churches are still dominated by the traditional theology which maintains and insists on the inferiority of women. This conservative and narrow minded theology is no longer valid when we talk of partnership in ministry today.

Steps for partnership in ministry

When we talk about a holistic ministry, one cannot neglect women's equal participation in the ministry of the church. Christian ministry is a ministry for all people irrespective of

⁶ *Ibid*, 61.

gender, class, caste or tribes. If one section of the people is neglected, then it is not a holistic ministry. Therefore, change of attitudes toward women and accepting them to participate in the church's ministry must be given greater emphasis. Some of the steps for partnership in ministry are:

1. To achieve full partnership in ministry women need to empower themselves first. Empowerment means strength, power and energy. It means giving power or authority to act. In general, power has negative connotations like force, authority upon, coercive, etc., but empowerment has to do with acquiring strength and energy to act. It should enable women to empower themselves to protect, assert their rights, and stand for justice. Thus, power is not to control others but to serve others, lift the fallen, forgive the guilty, and encourage growth and responsibility in the weak. Empowerment is a process, which allows women to make decisions, assert their opinions, create critical consciousness and reflection which will lead to develop self confidence and establish full justice for both men and women in the society. Women empowerment is a collective exercise where women realize their own resources and collectively take decisions to use it for women emancipation. The purpose of Jesus' incarnation is for empowering people. Jesus said, *I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full (Jn. 10:10)*. Empowerment of women is concern with equal partnership and relationship of both men and women. It is a search for equal partnership, mutuality and reciprocity. It is also to critique the political, ethical and moral hierarchical structures and relationships in the society. Empowerment of women is concern with liberation and emancipation of women. Emancipation from the bondage of gender discriminations, status and the role distinctions sanctions by society and religions. This has to do with the issue of justice. It means women need to be conscientized to fight against the injustices because many women are not aware of the evils which hinder them from full participation in the church.

2. Re-imagining women's status and role in the society can be one of the steps to bring changes in the church's ministry. Christian tradition and its theology are male biased and exclusive and so woman's images are distorted. Re-imagining means constructing a new and positive understanding of women's image as enabler, healer, important, capable, active and energetic people against women as dependent, subordinate, and inferior. Women searches for an inclusive imagery, language and models which can liberate them from bondages. Image and models of women such as ideal mother, wife, mistress, daughter, nurse, etc., which are conceived as roles of subordination need to be discarded today because these give a very negative image to women.
3. There is an urgent need to re-interpret the Bible from holistic perspective. The traditional interpretation of the Bible is exclusive, onesided and male-dominated interpretations which perpetuate discrimination and subordination of women. The literal interpretation of the Bible still dominates in the church. Thus, it is important to re-read and re-interpret the Bible from women's perspectives in order to recover fully the hidden roles and status of women.
4. Partnership in ministry calls for reconstruction of our Christian theology, an inclusive theology for both men and women. This calls for a paradigm shift in formulating relevant theologies from Naga perspective.
5. The present church ministry is structured in line with patriarchal structure of Naga society and so women's role in the church is very secondary. If the church is a community of faith, a community consisting of men and women where everyone participates freely and equally, then there should be equal sharing and equal partnership. Letty M. Russell describes the church by using the metaphor of a round table metaphor around which the community sits, and share together. Around the table no chair is higher than the others. Such atmosphere of equal sharing should be created in the church, where men and women can work

together if it is truly a faith community, a believing community of Jesus Christ. There should be no distinction on the basis of gender. The church should be an agent of change in relation to women partnership in the ministry. Solomon Rongpi points out how church can be an agent of change in this regard.

- a. A call to take the side of women, to denounce all the oppressive structures in our culture and traditions, and to announce freedom, equality and justice to women, this implies open protest against atrocities inflicted on women.
- b. A call to recognize and accept female members as equals in all spheres of the church's life and mission. Denial of permission to distribute communion elements or marginal representations is no longer adequate expressions of the full participation of women in the church's life.
- c. A call to change the non-liberating structures of the church. At present in most of the church in North east India only male Christian workers are ordained. Can't the qualified woman be ordained?
- d. A call to identify certain elements of patriarchy as sinful structures in the church and in society and to denounce them. Patriarchy - the rule of male members alone. Is this present in our families, churches today?
- e. A call to have indigenous and innovative forms of ministry. Women are unique persons, created in the image of God, professing the same faith, reading the same scripture. Since equality is part and parcel of Christian faith, an equal treatment of women must be a part of life in the church. Admission of women to baptism implies their full participation in all the areas of church activity and mission.⁷

⁷ Solomon Rongpi, "Partnership in the Ministry of the Church", Unpublished article.

The church has the responsibility of continuing the mission of Jesus. This mission urges the church to get herself immersed in a total struggle of women and to empower them to build a better and fuller human community where women and men experience total liberation and full humanhood by participating together.

A LIBERATIVE THEOLOGY OF INHERITANCE: A CRITIQUE OF THE AO NAGA CUSTOMARY LAW OF INHERITANCE¹

Imsopangla

The Naga society as a community with exclusive culture and tradition has various laws that govern their lives. Especially when we look into the customary law of inheritance we see that it has authority in people's lives. The problem thus arises is not with the practice of old culture and tradition, rather with the practice which discriminates Naga women. This paper focuses on the position of Ao Naga women in relation to the customary law then a study of the biblical understanding of inheritance is brought out in constructing a liberative theology of inheritance for gaining new perspective in understanding the customary law of inheritance.

The Ao Naga Customary Law of Inheritance

The Ao Naga set of customary laws and ethics are related to individual and societal behaviour. The different language groups

¹ A part of this article was taken and modified from an unpublished M. Th thesis submitted to the Senate of Serampore in March 2003 entitled "Inheriting Our Father's Garden: Towards A Liberative Theology Of Inheritance Within the Ao Naga Society."

of the Ao Naga's have slight differences in social, ethical and aesthetic cultures, but in general they follow common social customs.² The Ao Naga Customary Law of property includes rights over property and customary assessments.³

It is believed that the Naga customary law originated and followed from their place of origin. Nagas claimed that in the beginning their ancestors were living together with God who taught them the codes and norms, thus its violation was considered as violation against God. These laws were transmitted orally from one generation to another. With the passage of time, changes were made according to the needs of the community.

The customs and laws were considered to consist of truth, justice and public utility and were observed by people as the moral, religious and social codes. As such it still holds great relevance for the Naga community.⁴ Ao's believe in *sobaliba* (ethics, tradition, and customs) from Chungliyimti.⁵ The customary law is considered more than custom, it is perceived as a part of *sobaliba*.

The customary law of the Nagas has been legalised by the rules of Administration of Justice and Police Act. 1937, article 371 A of the Indian constitution and the Village Council Act 1978.⁶ The civil and criminal cases are handled by a customary court in villages and at dobashis⁷ court levels. Till the present day the customary law is obeyed. A Memorandum issued in

² P. Imchen, *Ancient Ao Naga Religion and Culture* (New Delhi: Har Chand publications, 1993), 106-107.

³ Tajen Ao, "Naga Customary Law and its Influence on Legislation," unpublished paper, no date, 3.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁵ Interview with N.Talitemjen on 21st May 2002 at Mokokchung, Nagaland.

⁶ Akang Ao, *Practicing Naga Customary Law* (Dimapur: Modern Press, 1999) 3.

⁷ These people come from different villages and are usually people with knowledge on the customs and traditions of the Ao.

1998 by The Land Revenue Department of the Government of Nagaland, under No. Lr/1-1/94 states its concern for the development of women in securing them justice and making them equal participants, yet it also mentions that the government will not interfere in the traditional customary law concerning land and its transfer.⁸ This clearly reflects that though people seem to be aware that women are in need for social upliftment the customary law remains unchallenged and unquestioned.

The Ao Naga Women's Share of Inheritance

In the tradition of the Ao Nagas, women have no inheritance.⁹ The heirs are the sons, the father's brothers and the male clan members, who inherit both property and the responsibility of debts of the deceased.¹⁰ The daughter is entitled to receive property through gift, *inter vivos* or will,¹¹ from the personal property of father.¹² It is assumed that the fore-parents did not divide the inheritance to discriminate women but because woman marry into six clans and bear their children. Thus mixing of the clan property would cause disruption resulting in fights for the inheritance.¹³

⁸ A Memorandum Issued by the Land Revenue Department Of the Government of Nagaland 20th March 1998. "The development of women forms an integral part ...it will intervene to secure gender justice and empower women so as to make women co-equal participants and partners.... The ownership and transfer of land in the traditional holdings are governed by the respective customary laws.... Government does not consider it prudent or expedient at this stage to intervene in the matter."

⁹ Correspondence on 9th June 2002 with N. Rongsen Ao.

¹⁰ W.C.Smith, *The Ao Naga Tribe of Assam: A Study in Ethnology & Sociology*, (London: Macmillan & Co Ltd, 1925), 59-60.

¹¹ Akang Ao, *Practicing Naga Customary Law*, 18-19.

¹² Correspondence with N. Rongsen Ao.

¹³ Interview with Imkongakum at Mokokchung, Nagaland 16th May 2002.

Inheritance in the Ao Naga society is understood as a son taking the place of the father in terms of responsibilities, functions, property, and replacing the father's position in the family.¹⁴ Many a times women's inheritance is called *temeim senmang* (inheritance out of love), since inheritance depends on the degree of love and concern of the father, or brothers or uncles and clan who decide what is to be given.

1. Inheritance of Movable Property

Women have no share of inheritance since what is given to them is discussed within the family, who then distribute according to their understanding. Some give all the household goods to a woman on the death of her husband, except materials made of metal.¹⁵ In other cases the mother's property went to her son¹⁶ but ornaments and dresses went to the daughter. In case there was no daughter it went to her mother's family because it was now a clan property.¹⁷ The daughter inherits all the costumes and ornaments, which the father buys for her. Upon her death it is to be given to the brother's family.¹⁸ Those ornaments which her husband buys for her is hers until her death after which it goes to her husband or his heirs. Those ornaments she buys are her private property and she can give it away to her daughters or to anyone, but if it remains undivided at the time of her death it goes to her father's heirs. The property she brings at her marriage is divided between her husband's heirs or husband and her father's heirs.¹⁹

¹⁴ Tajen Ao, "Status of Women in Ao Naga Society: Their Rights and Position," Paper presented on Awareness Camp for Women on 30th October 1991, 2.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁶ Interview with Imkongakum.

¹⁷ Interview with Tekayuba at Mokokchung, Nagaland 22nd May 2002.

¹⁸ Interview with Satemmeren(Ungma) 17th May 2002 Ungma, Nagaland.

¹⁹ J. P. Mills, *The Ao Nagas* (Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1973), 190.

In certain villages daughters could inherit cash, castles and domestic animals like hen, pig, dogs, but cows were given to the men as it had more value.²⁰ Women also inherited rice, which was the most precious wealth.²¹ In certain villages the share of women consisted of all the household goods, animals, and food, which included the rice and men's share, were all the lands.²² A widow has no right over her late husband's property, she remains a guardian and her eldest son is *de jure* head of the family.²³ Usually whatever was given to the wife and daughter in the lifetime of the husband and father was always unchallenged, but the undivided property was subjugated to the customary law.²⁴

2. Women's Inheritance in Immovable Property

The general understanding is that land has always belonged to the male since they swear by the land.²⁵ Giving land to women is considered contrary to tradition and custom.²⁶ But even in the rigid patriarchal society some men give land to their daughters, contrary to the customary law. In case a father was rich he may give a daughter a plot of agricultural land (*Alushi* or *Kimongshi*). This was just a love gift not a share of

²⁰ Interview with Satemmeren (Ungma).

²¹ Rice was usually of two kinds *mapuk* (sticky) and *logtitsuk* (plain). *Mapuk* was inherited by women and the *logti* was given to men. Cf. Interview with Tekayuba.

²² M. Akang, "Aladang Ao Yimli nung Tezurtem Jenjang," Shisa Lemsak Kakat, edited by Chubala, Ruth, Rongsenla Longkumtsur (Mokokchung: Watsurogo Mungdang Mokokchung, 1989), 7.

²³ Jeuti Barooah, "Property and Women's Inheritance Rights in the Tribal Areas of the North East" *Changing Womens Status in India: Focus on the Northeast*, edited by Walter Fernandes & Sanjay Barbora (Guwahati: North Eastern Social Research Centre, 2002), 105.

²⁴ Interview with Judisang 19th May 2002 at Ungma, Nagaland.

²⁵ Interview with Nokrenjungshi 19th May 2002 at Alichen, Nagaland.

²⁶ Interview with Judisang.

inheritance.²⁷ *Alushi* is the personal property of her father. This is passed to her sons or her uncles. Some *Alushi* were given permanently to the daughter, usually to the eldest daughter.²⁸ In the Ungma village a daughter is given only the trees and the land is taken back after her death by the heirs.²⁹ When a father gives land to his daughter, if it is not declared before the clansmen, it may be reverted to the male heir after the daughter dies.³⁰

At present there is the provision of will which has to be made by either the father or husband before his death. But there have been few cases when such wills have to be protested against, and even though such rights exist since culture and tradition is so much embedded in the mind of the people most would think twice of leaving landed property to daughter.

The Present Context of Ao Naga Women

Changes and developments are seen due to the impact of modernization mediated first by the British administration, English education and Christian religion and later by the modernized Nagas themselves.³¹ This results in the end of isolation of villages, since many are forced to leave their villages' to work in towns.³² There is also a growth of an elite urban wealthy class in the Naga society,³³ breaking the traditional

²⁷ Interview with Marmongba, 16* May 2002 at Mokokchung, Nagaland.

²⁸ Interview with Mapuchuba, 15th May 2002 at Mokokchung, Nagaland.

²⁹ Interview with Satemmeren (Ungma).

³⁰ P. Longchar, *Historical Development of the Ao Nagas in Nagaland* (Dimapur: P. Longchar, 2003), 318.

³¹ M.M. Thomas, *Nagas Towards A.D. 2000 and other Selected Addresses and Writings* (Madras: Center for Research on New International Economic Order, 1992), 147.

³² A. Wati Longchar, *The Traditional Tribal Worldview and Modernity* (Jorhat: ETC, 1995), 154.

³³ M.M. Thomas, *Nagas Towards A.D. 2000 And Other Selected Addresses and Writings*, 63.

understanding of communitarian life and sharing. At present each individual is independent and responsible for amassing wealth and also its enjoyment. The process of urbanization has increased the personal property, not representing ancestral lands and property. The new technology and money economy has created awareness of the rights of human personhood and equality between man and woman. The role and involvement of women is widened by their contribution to the wealth of the family and community.

But in spite of all these, the Naga women are controlled by the customary law of inheritance. They are denied access to land, which is the most productive of resources. Women can only own land by way of purchase or gift.³⁴ Women are kept under control because they are dependent financially upon the male and there are people who misuse the customary law. There is recognition that the ancient custom is too simple for the present day.³⁵ The limitation of the customary law in covering the entire economic system leads people to misuse it. Since there exist no general law which clearly states the custom, people interpret on their own, and women are mistreated on the basis of a general belief.³⁶

Among the Ao Nagas, the Watsu Mongdang³⁷ recognizing the discrimination against women by the Law of Inheritance nominated a Senmang (Inheritance) Committee in the year 1989.³⁸ They claimed women's share of only the personal property like the father and husband's properties. The Senmang committee

³⁴ Chozhule Kikhi, "Naga Women and Property Inheritance," *Nagaland Post* March 20, 2000, 5.

³⁵ Interview with Toshilemba 19th May 2002 at Mokokchung, Nagaland.

³⁶ Interview with L. Opangla 19th May 2002 at Mokokchung, Nagaland.

³⁷ A women's organization concerned with issues of women and their empowerment in the Ao Naga society.

³⁸ The committee consisted of Ruth Tajen as convener, and the executive members were Tekayuba, Marlemba, Meyila, and Bendangla. Cf.

was defunct and it has been more than ten years since it held its last meeting³⁹ Thus we see that though there is awareness for the need of change not much progress has been made.

The Old Testament Interpretation of Inheritance

In the Old Testament the word inheritance is translated as nahalah, meaning the holding of land and the rule of succession as belonging to the family or clan, and to the individual heir only as representing family or tribal rights. The concept of inheritance acquired religious association, since the inheritance of Canaan signified the secure position of land as God's gift to Israel.⁴⁰

1. Practice of Inheritance

The Israelite family was patriarchal;⁴¹ hence inheritance was given to the male line in the family. Although in the Old Testament we find two legal texts in reference to inheritance,⁴² these were probably of later origin, since in ancient Israel there was no written will or testament regarding inheritance.⁴³ But

Interview with Ruth Tajen, Tekayuba, Meyila and Bendangla. But Marlemba claims that he was not part of this, but rather he just advice some of the women on certain issue. Cf. Interview with Marlemba 23rd May 2002 at Mokokchung, Nagaland. According to correspondence received from Bendangla through Temsuwati Kichu, she gives a different list of names regarding the members.

³⁹ The committee met a couple of times but nothing concrete was achieved. Many did not support their cause, plus there was also the rumour that the women who were members of the committee were even threatened by their husbands. Cf. Interview with Tekayuba.

⁴⁰ J. C. Lambert & E. A. Eghill, "Inheritance," *Dictionary of the Bible*, Second Edition, edited by James Hastings (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1963), 417-418.

⁴¹ Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions*, Fifth edition, translated by John MacHugh. London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1980), 20. It is seen as beth ab, meaning father's house.

⁴² Deu. 21:15-17 & Num. 27:1-11.

⁴³ Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions*, 20.

before the father died he set his house in order by giving instructions about the distribution of property.⁴⁴ The son alone had the right of inheritance; even among the sons the eldest had a privileged position.⁴⁵ The law protected the rights of the eldest son against the son of the wife the father preferred.⁴⁶ In the nomadic life the eldest son inherited only the leadership of the tribe.⁴⁷ In the settled life patrimony consisted of material property.⁴⁸

Daughters did not have the right of inheritance in the earlier records. It was only after the exile that a law was created regarding the inheritance of daughters.⁴⁹ But even in these documents⁵⁰ the inheritance of daughters was with restriction, where marriage was to be endogamous for the property to remain within the clan. In the Book of Job,⁵¹ we see a notable exception, where along with the seven brothers, three daughters

⁴⁴ 2Sam. 17:23, 2Kgs. 20: 1, Isa. 38:1.

⁴⁵ This concept may be rooted in the Nomadic culture where the first born son entertained all clan or family guest in his tent and cost, and he was also responsible for performing religious function on behalf of the family. Cf. Julian Alorgenster, "Inheritance," *The Universal Jewish Encyclopedia Vol. 5*, edited by Issac Landman (New York: KTAV Publishing House, 1969), 565. For biblical reference check Deu. 21:17; 2Kgs. 2: 9.

⁴⁶ Deu. 21:15-17.

⁴⁷ Since the tribe was not broken up into independent house, they had a common interest in the resources of the tribe in terms of flock and lands. In the settled life the family was independent and the tribe became mutually interdependent (Gen. 27: 29).

⁴⁸ Earle Bennett, *The Hebrew Family: A Study in Historical Sociology* (Chicago, Illinois: The University of Chicago Press, 1927), 192-193. For biblical reference check Deu. 21: 17.

⁴⁹ It is not clear why earlier documents and laws were silent in this issue. The greatest possibility is that this document was an effort to meet the changing situations and to permit women to inherit property (Num. 27:1-11). Cf. Earle Bennett, *The Hebrew Family: A Study in Historical Sociology*, 188

⁵⁰ Num. 27: 1-11 & Jos. 17: 36.

⁵¹ Job 42:13-15.

get a share of inheritance.⁵² Usually women were allowed to inherit property only as gifts.⁵³

The members of the family had an obligation to help and protect the family inheritance.⁵⁴ Property was bound up with the house.⁵⁵ The Levitical law prescribed the widow to marry her brother-in-law in order that property remained within the family. However, in the book of Ruth a widow is seen as the owner.⁵⁶ In the case of a childless master slaves became heirs,⁵⁷ indicating that women's status were lower than slaves. There were laws of the sabbatical year on the family property,⁵⁸ where the lands and property taken as debts were to be returned after some years. There also existed the law of the fifth year.⁵⁹ Both these laws protected the family heritage from being alienated from the family.⁶⁰

⁵² Ronald de Vaux states that since this book represent a postexilic text, it shows how fathers had absolute freedom to distribute property or it was to show that Job was wealthy, or Job and his family represent the family ideal where all members are treated alike. Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions*, 54.

⁵³ 1 Kgs.9:16.

⁵⁴ Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions*, 21. The family institution can be understood in the concept of goel, which means, "to buy back," or "redeem," "to lay claim to," and "to protect." If an Israelite had to sell his patrimony, the goel had the priority over other buyers, so that family property was not alienated. For biblical reference check Lev. 25: 26; Jer. 32: 6f.

⁵⁵ Eze. 46: 16-18.

⁵⁶ Johannes Pedersen, *Israel: Its Life and Culture Vol. I*, edited by Jacob Neusner, et al. (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1991), 93. The manner in which the book opens, "now it came to pass... famine in the land" describes that the old custom belonged to the former days.

⁵⁸ Deu. 15: 1ff, 12ff; Ex. 23: 10ff, 21:2; Jer. 34: 14-17.

⁵⁹ Found in Lev. 25: 13 & Ez. 46: 16-18.

⁶⁰ Charles Lincoln Taylor, "Old Testament Foundation," *Christianity and Property*, edited by J. Fletcher (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, Mcmxlvii), 19.

2. Theology of Inheritance

- a. The sovereignty of God was the main teaching about property in the Old Testament.⁶¹ All properties belonged to God who is the Creator. Humans were not absolute owners.⁶² There were warnings against pride of possession since all property and wealth is God's.⁶³ It can be noted that the favour of God was connected to wealth and property, and disobedience resulted in loss of tangible property.⁶⁴ The central theological affirmation of land in Deuteronomy was that it was the gift of God to Israel.⁶⁵
- b. Israel's status is known as "choice" or "treasured possession"⁶⁶ signifying "to be set aside" or "a property." Israel's value came from God's love and affection whereby she became God's property.⁶⁷ The decisive requirement for admission is not natural kinship but readiness to submit to the will of the divine Lord of the covenant and to vow to this particular God,⁶⁸ who holds all property including the human beings.
- c. They had the notion of common responsibility, where wealth and property belonged to the whole family or

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁶² Gen. 1:26-29; Ex. 19:5; Ps. 24: 1,50: 12; Job 41: 11.

⁶³ Deu. 8: 18; 1Kgs. 11:1-16, Eze. 28: 2-8, Ps. 49.

⁶⁴ Gen. 26: 12f, 39: 2; Ps. 65: 98, 112: 3.

⁶⁵ Patrick D. Milles, "The Gift of God: The Deuteronomic Theology of the Land," *Interpretation: A Journal Of Bible and Theology* XXIII/4 (Oct 1969), 455-456.

⁶⁶ Ex. 19:5

⁶⁷ Walter C. Kaiser, *Towards an Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1978), 105. For Biblical reference check Deu. 32:8-9, Israel is termed as Yahweh's "portion" and the "lot of his inheritance".

⁶⁸ Walther Eichrodt & J. A. Baker, *Theology of Old Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1961), 39.

community.⁶⁹ In Canaan Israelites were "tenants" and "aliens" in Yahweh's land.⁷⁰ Israel was given the knowledge that land entails responsibility and cannot simply be treated as "Communal property."⁷¹ The responsibility was to bless all nations, for each of them was the mediator of life to the nations.⁷²

As a community embedded in patriarchal culture and values, women were perceived as quasi-chattel where the various laws treated them as men's property; marriage was the transfer of women to another men, the right to sell her into slavery, rape as a violation of men's property. All these were part of the framework of property rights of husband or father.⁷³ Consequently women became the sacrificial group in order to create security for the inherited property of the community. Although there was an understanding that Yahweh gave to all Israelites their land, this law discriminated against women with few exceptions; in fact even men slaves were entitled to

⁶⁹ Even as Israel settled into village life, then cities and commerce, in conquest, poverty and foreign exile this old nomadic principle continued, though at the time of monarchy this ideal was threatened. The prophets rose in defense of the communal principle of God's ordinances. The priestly documents make a further orientation when one looks toward the covenant at Sinai here God not only promises land and children to the patriarchs but God promises to be their God and their children's God. For Biblical reference check Ex. 6.7; Lev. 26: 12; Deu. 26: 17f; 2Sam. 7: 24; Jer: 7. 23.

⁷⁰ Lev. 25: 23.

⁷¹ 1 Kgs. 21:3.

⁷² Gen. 12: 3, 18:18, 22: 17-18. From the early times the legal right of the poor man was based on the duty that the well-off show kindness, even at the risk of losing property since the greater profit lies with God c.f Neh. 5; Job 31: 16-22; Isa. 3:14,15, 58: 6-8; Jer. 22:13, 5:26-28; Ps. 72: 25; Hos. 3: 17f; Mic. 2:18

⁷³ Rosemary Radford Reuther, "Sexism and Liberation: The Historical Experience," *From Machismo to Mutuality*, edited by E. C. Bianchi & R. R. Reuther (New York/ Paranus, N. J/ Toronto: Paulist Press, 1976), 9.

inheritance. Thus we see contradictions in their ideology of inheritance and the practice of it.

The New Testament Interpretation of Inheritance

The Greek word *kleras*⁷⁴ not only expresses what is received from the past, but also looks forward towards the future. In the New Testament it is a spiritual inheritance, which comes through the kingdom of God and the promise of eternal life.⁷⁵ It also means the right of property and succession, universally based upon the principles regulating the life of the family in its extended form as clan. Property was seen not as an end, but as a means for prosperity.

1. Jesus and the Concept of Property and Ownership

Jesus did not directly address the issue of property and inheritance. He did not involve himself in the economic and political issues confronting him, but the concept of property and its transfer can be derived- from his central theme of the kingdom. Christ's prime concern was the kingdom, pronouncing the poor as blessed, and teaching that wealth was a barrier to the kingdom. It is in this context that Jesus' teaching of property can be understood. Jesus taught a religious state of mind that warned against the distraction of riches. It is not property that is evil⁷⁶ but rather the will that is evil and must be surrendered.

⁷⁴ *Kleras* is derived from *klau*, meaning to break. Lots were drawn to discover the will of the gods. Since land was divided by lot, *kleras* came to mean a share, land received by lot, plot of land and finally inheritance. Cf. J. Eichler, "Inheritance, Lot, Portion," *Dictionary of New Testament Theology Vol. II*, edited by Colin Brown (Devon: The Paternoster Press Ltd, 1976), 296.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 295.

⁷⁶ He further paid temple tax (Matt. 17: 42-27), contributed to the temple services (Mk. 12: 41-44), warmly commended the costly perfume poured on him (Mk. 14: 3-9), his disciple Joseph of Arimathaea was a rich man (Matt. 27: 57, the apostolic company kept a small store of money for the supply of necessities (Mk. 6: 37), Jesus and his disciples gives alms (Jn. 13: 29).

Jesus condemns the scribes for attacking and devouring widow's houses and the Pharisees for practicing extortion.⁷⁷ He warns against theft and extortion.⁷⁸ These two verses assume private property, but he also looks upon poverty as an evil, which must be relieved.⁷⁹

The parable of the Laborer in the Vineyard and the Rich Fool⁸⁰ reveals in different ways the true owner of all things and the lack of absolute human possession. Jesus' teachings of detachment of human's heart from all material wealth and the love for one's neighbours as oneself rebuke all self assertive claims for the rights of property.⁸¹ Humans are God's concern and their welfare is the end for which human property exists. Property is held in trust from God and becomes a way of proving loyalty to God through love to one's brother/sister.⁸² For Jesus property had no rights that were not relative to this great law of human life that everything is to be judged as having sanction of God only so far as it sub-serves the divine idea of humans as created for spiritual likeness to himself.⁸³ Jesus did not condemn the private use of property; he rather taught that it should be used for those in need.⁸⁴ He showed respect to private property by commanding not to steal, by paying taxes demanded by the government, and by helping the needy.

⁷⁷ Mk. 12: 40.

⁷⁸ Mk. 7:21,27.

⁷⁹ Matt. 25: 31-46.

⁸⁰ Matt. 20: 1-10; Lk. 12: 16-21.

⁸¹ Vernon Bartlet, "The Biblical and Early Christian Idea of Property," *Property its Duties and Rights: Historically, Philosophically and Religiously Regarded* (London: Macmillan & Company Ltd., 1913), 94.

⁸² Lk. 16: 10-12.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 95.

⁸⁴ Brenda Soane, "Property," *The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Ethics*, Second Edition, edited by James F. Children & John Macquarrie (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1998), 507.

2. The Apostolic Age and the Concept of Property

In this age there was the same stress upon the teachings to set one's heart on things above and not on things of the earth. There was the same urgency of the imminence of the Lord's coming. The same stress upon brotherly love as revealed in giving alms to the less fortunate brother/sister. The difference was that in contrast to the pre-Pentecostal days, now a vivid community self-conscious fellowship of believers had been formed.⁸⁵ The Early Church approached property teachings indirectly from the religious point of view.⁸⁶ They shared their property as a result and a proof of their fellowship, without any compulsion in the community. The right of the individual to possess private property seems to be assumed.⁸⁷ The early church did not attempt to change the property system of the empire since they thought the end was near, and they were also too small in number to effect any change.⁸⁸

Equality was the principle of the early Christian. The central law was not to elevate oneself above others, rather lay emphasis upon helping the poor and avoiding avarice.⁸⁹ In the writings of Paul we find no suggestions of communism but we do read that some were abusing the generosity of the table, which was the common wealth of the fellowship of the church.⁹⁰ Paul rebukes laziness and the misuse of property, and because of

⁸⁵ Richard Stanley Merrill Emrich, "New Testament Teaching," *Christianity and Property*, 38.

⁸⁶ Acts. 4: 3.

⁸⁷ Some examples are: Acts. 4: 36,37 Barnabas sold his land, brought the money and laid it at the apostle's feet. In Acts 5: 1-11, Ananias is condemned for lying to the Holy Spirit for holding property as his own.

⁸⁸ Richard Stanley Merrill Emrich, "New Testament Teaching," *Christianity and Property*, 39-40.

⁸⁹ George Wilhelm & Friedrich Hegel, *Early Theological Writers*, translated by T. M. Knox (Chicago, Illinois: The University of Chicago, 1948), 88.

⁹⁰ 2Thess.3: 10-11.

the sinfulness of the world he insists on stewardly use of property.⁹¹ In some of the Deutro-Pauline letters, inheritance is always interpreted as coming from God as a gift to all believers in Christ.⁹²

3. Theology of Inheritance

- a. The New Testament sees a perfect world, as one in which there shall be universal riches.⁹³ The kingdom⁹⁴ is a gift of the Father, which is bestowed upon Jesus' disciples. By submitting to God's reign one receives the spirit of the kingdom and enters into the enjoyment of its blessings. Paul also uses the term heir and inheritance in reference to the kingdom of God.⁹⁵ Inheritance of property is secondary to the inheritance of the kingdom. This resulted in the stewardly use of property on behalf of God and of society.⁹⁶ Jesus by forbidding theft, fraud and ill-gotten wealth was speaking about stewardship of possession.⁹⁷ God as the Creator is the owner; humans in inheriting property were mere stewards with responsibility of using it according to the will of God. In the early church the

⁹¹ Sharing of property was a by-product and part of Christian love, seen in alms that were sent to the church in Jerusalem. (1Cor 16: 1-14). For biblical reference check 1Tim. 6: 17-19, 1Cor. 12: 25, 26.

⁹² Eph 1:18, Col 1:12

⁹³ Charles Ryder Smith, *Bible Doctrine of Wealth in its Historical Evolution* (London: Epworth Press, 1924), 159.

⁹⁴ The Basileia is not only the dynamic reign of God and the realm of salvation, but it is also used to designate the gift of life and salvation. The word heir designates the gift of God's rule in the coming age (Matt. 24: 46). Cf. George E. Ladd, *A Theology of The New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: W. B. Eerdmans, 1998), 70.

⁹⁵ Through the justification of their faith the Gentiles become co-heirs of all the blessings (Rom. 4: 11-12).

⁹⁶ Vernon Bartlet, "The Biblical and Early Christian Idea of Property," *Properties its Rights and Duties*, 97.

⁹⁷ Matt. 25: 14-30.

custom of community goods was practiced out of love and not by force.⁹⁸ This was probably a natural and spontaneous product of meekness seen in Jesus and his disciples. Property of society belonged to all and individual possession belonged to those who needed.⁹⁹

- b. Paul's concept of inheritance is Christo-Centric.¹⁰⁰ Just as in inheriting the kingdom Jesus becomes the example to be followed by believers so also in inheriting anything of the world his example of love, justice, humility, and meekness should be applied. And all believers with the help of the Holy Spirit are entitled with the inheritance through Christ, which includes the same authority and power he exercised.
- c. The Pauline context of the expressions "new creation" and "new humanity" reveals the two quintessential values that characterize the community of faith.¹⁰¹ This means that new standards of unity and peace replace the old standards of judgment and divisiveness. It is applied to every believer who participates in the new humanity.¹⁰²

In the New Testament, property and its system of inheritance was hardly an issue. They referred to property in so far as it was in connection to the central message of the Kingdom of God. In the early Christian community the concept of community property included women in its ownership.

⁹⁸ Acts. 2: 44, 4: 32ff, 5: 4.

⁹⁹ Charles Ryder Smith, *Bible Doctrine of Wealth in its Historical Evolution*, 163.

¹⁰⁰ E. Kasemann, *Perspectives on Paul* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), 89-90. For Biblical reference check Gal. 3:26-4:7 and Rom. 8:14-17.

¹⁰¹ Gal.6: 15, Eph. 2: 11-22, Col. 3: 10-11.

¹⁰² J. R. Levison, "Creation and New Creation," *Dictionary of Paul and his Letters*, edited by G. F. Hawthorne, et al. (Leicester, England: Intervarsity Press, 1993), 189-190.

Towards A Liberative Theology of Inheritance

Property ownership forms an important element in society no matter how primitive or advanced it may be. The way ownership is divided reflects the status and identity of an individual, group, and community. Thus, the inheritance of property especially, landed property has been an issue affecting economic, social, mental and theological arenas of life.

The tribals are very protective of their land and inheritance because they believe that they need to preserve ancestral land, which becomes a narrow concept and results in tribal and ethnic clashes. The main reason behind these issues is because in the tribal set up more importance is given to the ownership in terms of ancestors and not God. In other words the question of identity is related to land. This limits their view of who can be owners of their land. Inheritance of land is not so much about what belongs to a group as it is about what responsibility it entitles. A liberative theology of inheritance is based on the concept of God as the source of all life. In both the Old and New Testament God is shown as creator, sustainer and provider of all creation. God gives freedom to all to participate in the world. Inheritance that is given or gained through ancestor, community or family is to be seen as possible because God provided and gave to our ancestors before it comes to us at present. This implies that the law of inheritance exists for the glory of God, and it must follow those teachings that reflect God's existence in our lives, therefore all foundational principles on its concept are to be laid on the law of God.

The Ao Nagas are seen as people who do not wish to share their land on the one hand and on the other they occupy major chunks of land in urban areas, which are not part of the village land, and this has eventually resulted in the town areas being populated by a majority of Ao Nagas. The Ao Nagas are buying lands that belonged to other people and yet they are not willing to provide the opportunity for others coming and occupying a part of their land. This attitude negativizes the relationship of the Ao Nagas to the other people. All properties of God is given with the intention of creating relationships, not breaking it. As

in both the Old and New Testament whenever inheritance was given it created a relationship with God and Christ. The Old Testament talks about a covenantal relationship with Yahweh, where the inheritance forms only a part of the relationship; in the New Testament, the New Covenant with Christ, broaden this relationship to all believers. Just as it is understood that creation is from God, and inheritance is a part of God, which demands responsibility, this results in a relationship with the one who gives the inheritance. Therefore a theology of inheritance must work towards a relationship between God, Christ and humans.

A liberative theology of inheritance considers the liberation of women from all discrimination of women far more important than preserving land of community by a system of oppression. Rights to property are not only an issue of property rights but it also means empowerment of both the women and men. This is important especially in the Ao Naga context because land is an important asset dictating identity and status. In this context women are seen as strangers because women have no right of inheritance. In the Ao community strangers do not have land nor can they inherit land. Since women are not deeply rooted in land they have no identity, which implies that they are not responsible citizens.¹⁰³ As a law in relation with God through Christ, it must aim at inspiring and creating opportunity, unity, freedom, justice, equality and peace at the levels where it can penetrate.

A liberative theology of inheritance takes into consideration of the fact that all are a community of God. The customary law as such was developed at a time when Ao Nagas had an attitude of suspicion and were waging head hunting among themselves and among other tribes, 'but the sense of community was always there. The customary law limits the understanding of community to Ao Naga men; it therefore needs to see beyond this. A liberative theology of inheritance takes the whole community

of God, binding them with a sense of responsibility and duty towards each other.

The law of inheritance must not only include laws concerning the rights of individuals but it must seek to perform better and create a better society in each context. This means that there is no goal higher than the Kingdom of God and no responsibility greater than expanding God's ministry of the Kingdom of God. All the other goals and laws become secondary to God's law and therefore all laws, behaviors and norms must have its foundation in this.

The inheritance law must not be limited to what property right it entails, but must also include its wider functioning in reflecting the divine will. It is to understand that inheritance does not end in itself but has the responsibility of doing God's will. It also means that this responsibility is not restricted to any particular group or clan or tribe. There is no greater identity than the one based on God as our Father. The writer in understanding the customary law of inheritance looks at the bigger picture of what entails community, law and custom. Is one's tribal identity, one's law greater than laws of God? One is likely to conclude that customs and traditions stand above everything but this is totally a wrong thinking for far beyond it stands the law of God given through Christ. This law stresses on the importance of all human beings where all are given equal importance and none is discriminated or left voiceless thus fulfilling God's will.

¹⁰³ A. Wati Longchar, "Issues in Feminist Theology," *Transforming Theology for Empowering Women: Tribal Study Series No. 4*, 21-22.

NO JUSTICE WITHOUT MOTHER EARTH: ECOFEMINISM IN NAGA CONTEXT

S. Temsulemla

Introduction

One of the most important items in our agenda for our times is how can we live with our Mother earth in a way that promotes sustainability and balance. People who want to protect the earth and promote a sustainable life-style started the ecological environment, which challenges us to examine our way of thinking about nature.

Ecologists enable us to see our anthropocentric sinfulness in relation to other living beings. They call us to a new pattern of relations with all beings in the cosmos based on mutuality, interdependence and life-giving values.

Feminist movements all over the world have also raised a radical cultural critique of our way of living. They have identified the cause of women's pain and struggle. All these struggles are the direct consequences of the existing patriarchal system and its approach to creation.

Many theologians have recognized the extent to which cultural situation, ethnicity and gender contribute to ecological crises and alienate people from God, people from people and separate women and men. In response to these, a combination of Feminist theology with a concern for ecology emerged as a new breed of

theology called ecofeminism. It emerged predominantly in North America, although the term was coined by French Feminist Françoise d'Eaubonne in 1974¹ to describe women's potentials to bring about ecological revolution. It grew out of various social movements such as feminist, peace and the ecological. This movement became popular in the context of numerous protests and activities against environmental destruction, sparked off initially by recurring ecological disasters.²

By definition it refers to a connection between patriarchal domination of women and non-human nature. It recognizes the interconnectedness between human and nature, women and nature, the parallels between the domination of "and the sexism of women by the anthropocentric hierarchical and patriarchal cultures." Ecofeminists also analyse the cultural ideology and social structures that dominate women and nature. It is believed that all the present ills are the result of non-inclusivistic, dichotomous and sexist orientations. Ecofeminists assert that sexism, racism, classism and ecological destructions are the disturbing factors of the patriarchal society. Ecofeminists' practice is anti-hierarchical and to them life on earth is not a hierarchy, but an interrelated web.

Ecofeminist committed themselves to the solidarity with the oppression of women in the societies. Let us look at some of their views on ecofeminism in the footnote.³

Ecofeminist approaches are not one, but many and each perspective attempts to describe women's oppression: Liberal Ecofeminism, Radical socialist, Nature and Cultural

¹ Heather Eaton, "Ecofeminist Contributions to an Ecojustice Hermeneutics" in *Readings the Perspective of Earth*, ed., Norman C. Habel (England: Sheffield Academic Press Ltd, 2000), 55.

² Vandana Shiva and Maria Mies, *Ecofeminism* (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1993), 13.

³ Irene Diamond says, "Ecofeminism is great and difficult. Great because it finds hope and powering our bonds to each other and the earth, difficult precisely because these bonds have been so tattered in the contemporary era" [Irene Diamond, "Introduction" in *Reviewing the World: The Emergence of Ecofeminism*, ed.

Ecofeminism. Each theory has taken up issues of relationship between women and nature with an object to improve the new gender relations.

Like most of the communities, Naga society is a patriarchal one. To certain extent Naga women may be better off than the entire societies in the experience of both domestic and public violence. However, that does not mean that there is no violence upon them. They too struggle for fuller humanity because we share common concerns that emerge from an invisible global politics in which women worldwide are en-meshed in their everyday life. The Nagas and their land, forest and natural resources are stripping bared because of urbanization and different economic developmental programmes. Some of the causes of ecological crisis in Nagaland are:

Modernization

Modernization, urbanization and various developments processes have rapidly increasing in Nagaland today. There is a big migration from villages to urban set up in search of jobs and higher education. Towns and cities are crowded and expanding the territory rapidly. The developmental model is based on capitalism with individual self interest and profit making. The mass media and globalization processes have brought the western culture and consumeristic lifestyles against

Irene Diamond (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1990), XV]. Chung Hyun Kyung notes: people who share both Feminist and ecological world views and participate in the movement for a Feminist and ecological new world call themselves eco-Feminist. [“Chung Hyun Kyung, Ecology, Feminism of African and Asian Spirituality” in *Eco-Theology: Voices from South and North*, ed. David G. Hallman (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1994), 176]. Ivon Gebara observed that Eco-Feminism is born of daily life, of day-to-day sharing among people. [Evone Gebara, *Longing for Running Water* (Augsburg: Fortress Press, 1999), 2).

R.L. Sarkar defined Ecofeminism as radical ecology. It is deeper than deep ecology. It is more social than ecology. [R.L. Sarkar, *The Bible, Ecology and Environment* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2000), 69]

the traditional lifestyles and values. A few decades past, through their own social customs, the Nagas had an inbuilt system of environmental protection. The land, forest and property were shared among the people and it was not their custom to commercialize and exploit them, especially the land. However, with rapid urbanization and development, people have become more conscious of money and wealth and are thus involved in selling land today.⁴ With the rise of capitalism, land has been regarded as a commodity like any other, treated as an object of speculation and reduced it to one more possible source of financial profit. As a result a sense of communitarian life, sharing, and welfare of the community is lost.

Deforestation

Tremendous pressure is exerted for deforestation in Nagaland due to meet the ever-increasing demands of industry. Though there is no viable industry as such in Nagaland, due to the development projects in other parts of the country, non-renewable natural resources like forests, oil, coal and other natural resources continue to be exploited. Moreover, the commercialization of forests is taking place on a large scale often with the full support of vested political interests. The poor villagers cut down the trees indiscriminately and sell them because they are often driven to poverty; while some are involved because of the greed.⁵ This deforestation resulted in drying up the streams and rivers in dry season, extinction of wild lives and losing of forest products for rural people. This also affected in the climatic changes of our atmospheric system.

Shifting or Jhum cultivation

Many experts say that shifting cultivation too contribute to ecological problem in the region. Shifting cultivation was and

⁴ A. Wati Longchar, “The Traditional Ao-Naga Worldview and Its Contribution Towards a Christian Understanding of Creation”, Unpublished D.Th Thesis, Serampore, 1996, 167.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 166.

continues to be a major economic activity of the Nagas. In fact, it is not only a major economic activity but it is indeed a part of their culture. This cultivation system involves slashing the vegetation and burning it before the onset of the monsoon, raising a mixture of crops on a temporarily nutrient-enriched soil for a year or two followed by fallowing the plot for regrowth of natural vegetation, and eventually returning to the same plot for another cropping phase after a few years. Due to modernization, urbanization and population growth, the space available for cultivation has been reduced and so the duration of shifting cultivation year has drastically reduced. Moreover, due to short cycle of duration the soil cannot recover the fertility within a span of few years. Hence, the soil cannot yield abundantly like in the past. As a result the production is decreasing every year and this leads to further economic crisis in the land, particularly in the rural places.

Deforestation and shifting cultivation lead to soil erosion, extinction of wild animals and deprived poor people of their fuel resources, food and fodder because villagers mostly depend their livelihood on forest products.

Women are the worst affected people by this ecological crisis. Women carry the burden of collecting fuel, fodder and water and therefore suffer the most. Their workload has increased tremendously as the environment is degraded. For example, women have to walk few miles longer than before to collect fire wood, twigs and drinking water. Many women in the villages have overworked and suffer by malnutrition. The economic conditions in the villages are getting worst in spite of the advancements and modernization. As a result, the Nagas are facing survival crises. This has wounded both women and men, yet women are the most victimized group since their working day has been drastically lengthened and doubly burdened by scarcity of water, fuel and fodder.

Taking into consideration the fact that ecological degradation and women's struggles are on rise, an attempt is made here to take step toward addressing some issues of injustice in relation to ecology from, feminist perspective.

Women - Nature: Nexus Patriarchal Exploitation

In the opinions of the ecofeminists the present ecological crisis is responsible for the patriarchal and hierarchical structures. The western patriarchal concept is maintained through a series of inter-related dualism such as woman/man, body/mind, non-human/human, etc. the male/female dualism identifies women with the material, the earth. Traditionally, women were not considered to have life except in relation to and serving the need of men. Likewise, nature had no meaning except to provide human wants. On the other hand, men are identified as strong and rational whereas women are weak and emotional. The same notion is applied to the human and non-human. The human is conscious and the non-human like plants and animals are not. The earth and female are identified with each other and then stand in dominant relationship to both.⁶ Hence, ecofeminist now recognizes the patriarchal exploitation of women-nature nexus and notice both as "the oppressed", "the alienated" and "the other". Ecofeminist therefore sees an interlocking in the oppression of women and nature; rejects all kinds of oppressive elements in the patriarchal culture in order to be replaced by an alternative culture. This section deals with how women and nature are seen to be connected in the Naga patriarchal culture. An examination of the patriarchal exploitation will enable to develop Naga Ecofeminist methodology.

Invisibility of Women's Work

Starting from the family to the outside world, women perform certain services, which constitute her labour power. This includes household work, child bearing, economic activities within and around the household. However, her work in the confines of the home is not considered as "work".

Invisibility of women's work in Naga community is because their workload is considered as subsistence production by direct interaction with nature and hence is not counted as "work" as

⁶ M. Rongsen, *Development and Ecology* ((Delhi: ISPCCK, 1999), 51.

it does not enter into the monetary market. Hence, the time and energy consuming work of Naga women, which sustain the family, have been labeled as a natural role for her. Her work, which is directly related with nature is considered valueless and thus becomes invisible, ignored and taken for granted. Thus patriarchal structures within the family in Naga community is prejudiced against women's work and devalued. Even if women are not employed in the organized sector, they are busily engaged in socially productive and reproductive activities, all of which are absolutely necessary for the survival of society. The problem is that the role of women as home workers and mothers is not recognized as social and economic activity or given market value.

Women's Workload

Nagas believe that women are destined to do all the domestic works. There is also a wide difference in working hours between women and men with women working several hours more than men. Most of the wives express that their husbands never realized the time and energy they spent for the family from the dawn of the day till sun set. These women's household labor is defined as non-productive, non-work but housewives alone. It is worth quoting Crystal David, who writes, "Since women are basically looked upon as house keepers, the productive work which they perform tends to be overlooked".⁷ Along with the domestic work women play an active role in agricultural operations. The labour input from women is not less than 70% of the total labour used⁸ in jhum cultivation.

After a day's work in the fields, women carry minor forest products or vegetables and firewood to their homes. They also

⁷ Crystal David, "Violence against Women at the Work Place", in *Empowering Society*. Ed. Prasana Kumari, (Madras: Navashakthi Graphic Arts, 1995), 478.

⁸ Ellen, "Role of Women in Naga Jhum Cultivation" in *Building upon Traditional Agriculture in Nagaland* eds. Amenba Jamir, (Bangalore: NEPED and IIRR, 1999), 163.

take the surplus products to the local markets and sell them for the night food. Women often work tirelessly both at home and in the fields and at times, at the cost of their own health but often less valued.

Women's Struggle: Men's Control

Men are considered to be the head of the family where they themselves are considered biologically superior, more capable and more experience therefore control women/wife/daughter.

In the family, boys are given higher value (son preference) and socialize them to carry on the "bread-winner" role and further the family lineage, whereas girls are considered a burden, a temporary member of the family and socialized to take care of domestic work and prepared to lead an adult life outside of her natal home.

Domestic and public violence are considered natural, sexual division of labour benefits boys/men, since women/girls are engaged on productive, reproductive and domestic work, having no access to the rest of the world. Thus Naga society perpetuates patriarchal ideology through gender based socialization/control in which women are the most victimized one.

Control over women's body/sexuality

Traditional understanding of women's body is as an object to be manipulated. Men control women's reproductive capacities and they decide how many children she should bear and in what frequency that decide the number of "sons" or "heirs" to be born. Women who produce daughters alone are seen as having some biological problems. Some of the Naga tribes believe that having sex with women on the day for fishing/hunting makes them unsuccessful. Women's chastity is seen as the condition for the safety during fishing/hunting of men in the river/forest. Thus sexual control is enforced by catching/hunting fish/animals dependent on the women's faithfulness. Thus by maintaining control over women's bodies, men continue to subjugate women to a great extent.

The Naga traditional theology which has been mainly patriarchal raises serious questions in an ecological context. It

has become an imperative task for the Naga ecofeminist today to challenge those dominating, 'oppressive theology and concept of women of the so-called second person and the second best and to deconstruct the age-old culture and traditions'. It is also necessary to reconstruct the divided thoughts and minds for an interconnected eco-just society.

Situating New Methodology

To situate an alternate Naga Ecofeminist Methodology, theological discussions with efforts to transform the patriarchal/non-centered worldviews which underline domination of women and nature need to be initiated. The present Naga culture has produced unending ecological crises, and failed to bring about holistic development. Therefore the growing environmental crises in Nagaland challenge us to search for an alternative developmental method/culture to meet new situation and to replace exclusive tradition for creating an inclusive culture related to the real needs of the contemporary Naga society.

It is now to be realized that there can be no liberation for Naga women and no solution to the ecological crises if the fundamental model of relationships continues to be one of domination. Let us sketch some of the alternatives that can be helpful for the development of Naga Ecofeminist theology.

Alternative Holistic Model

One important characteristic of the ecofeminism is that it speaks of a whole new creative way of understanding life and doing theology and resolving conflicts, schisms and dualisms that have been generated. So this is an attempt to create actions for sustaining life. The ecofeminist vision emphasizes the life that is in everything, the value of all God's bounty. It challenges limited view of development that measures the value of the gifts of creation only in terms of their use in the marketplace.⁹ It

⁹ Aruna Gnanadason, "Women, Economy and Ecology", in *Ecotheology: Voices from South and North*, ed. David G. Hallman (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1994), p. 184.

affirms the sacredness of all God's gifts in creation- the animate and the inanimate. It rejects anthropocentric worldviews, which legitimate and even seek biblical sanction for the extraction of more and more from the life-giving mother earth. It emphasizes the connectedness between women and nature, as between humanity and nature.¹⁰ Some steps for alternative holistic model are:

1. Community-Living

Community living requires a new architecture, which balances private and cooperate dimensions of life. It could be that the task of house keeping, child-raising, food procurement and preparation would be communized and spread between women and men, because one sexual group would no longer be structured into exclusive responsibility.

2. Work-Home-Family

The interrelationship of home and work would allow women and men to take an equal hand in both nurturing and supportive roles and also in work and political life. The gender role that divides women and men should be abolished. Not only would women be allowed the participation on the larger social processes that historically been denied, but men also would recover the effective nurturing roles with children and other people who have been historically denied.

3. Non Sexiest Personality Development

Sex-role stereotyping or sex-personality stereotyping should not be encouraged. Instead of being forced into a model of masculine or feminine 'types' each individual should be given freedom to enjoy with the full potential feeling, activity

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p, 184.

and receptivity. This personality development should be started from the family itself. At the same time patriarchal model that devalues nature and women should be overthrown by holistic model of development.

4. **Cosmology/Anthropology**

The deep rooted traditional cosmologies that alienate, women and nature from the dominant male have long been suffered throughout the centuries. Therefore we need an alternate cosmology, a more healing creation story that will establish eco-harmony. Rosemary Radford Ruether, who has undertaken a study of religious and scientific cosmologies notes, “the new cosmology must be inclusive of all humans, no longer mandating unjust social hierarchies. It must call us into a life sustaining relation with all of nature”.¹¹ Therefore, new cosmology and a new anthropology can be achieved only through the recognition of life and nature which includes all living beings maintained by means of cooperation, love and mutual care.

5. Must take serious consideration of the *natural* nexus between them (women) and nature in the traditional Naga culture because the present nexus between them is under the capitalistic and patriarchal domain of exploitation.

To renew the traditional eco-spirituality is important. It needs to redefine and reinterpret the role of women in the light of Christian faith and universal hope for a holistic liberation of nature and humans. We believe that the liberation/development of Naga women is in the total context of divinity, humanity and nature.

¹¹ Rosemary Radford Ruether, “Patriarchy and Creation: Feminist Critique of Religious and Scientific Cosmologies”, *Feminist Theology*, 2 (January 1993), 67.

WOMEN AND GLOBALIZATION: LESSONS FOR NAGA WOMEN

Talijungla Longkumer

Introduction

As we start to live in the new millennium, the ideas of collective ways of solving social problems have lost ground to arguments that the rules of competition are inevitable in the face of globalization. Where diversity in economic and political institutions was once tolerated, uniformity is now demanded by international institutions. Uniformity is the product of globalization. Today, globalization is the most frequently used buzzwords, repeatedly on the lips of politicians, academicians, media and marketing people, television executives and environmentalists among others. Globalization, meanwhile has become a major topic of study in universities, especially in cultural, media and communication studies; sociology; international studies and in newly emerging areas like global studies. This article attempts to introduce the principles surrounding globalization with particular reference to so called 'globalization and its implication on women' and make it available to reader' more particularly to the Naga women a few ideas, issues and perspectives on this pertinent concern.

Globalization

Globalization broadly refers to the expansion of global linkages, the organization of social life on a global scale, and the growth of a global consciousness, hence to the consolidation of world society. Such an ecumenical definition captures much of what the term commonly means, but its meaning is disputed. Globalization is historically complex; definitions vary in the particular driving force they identify. The meaning of the term is itself a topic in global discussion. The term is not neutral; definitions express different assessments of global change. Among critics of capitalism and global inequality, globalization now has an especially pejorative ring. The following definitions represent currently influential views:

- “Globalization, in general, is the result of the mind-boggling communication technologies, due to which space and time are so compressed that one can reach anywhere in the world from a particular place on the same day or can come to know instantaneously of events happening anywhere in the world.”¹
- Western desire for domination of the rest of the world- a desire that has continued since the time of Columbus”²
- “It is a process of social change in which geographical and cultural barriers- are reduced. This breakdown of barriers is the result of transportation, communication and electronic communication. It creates by the help of media, a mono-culture- a culture of rich and powerful.”³
- “The inexorable integration of markets, nation-states, and

¹ Fr. Jacob Kavunkal, “A Theological Response to Globalization”, paper presented at the National Consultation on The priorities of Theological Education in India, Chennai, 22-23 May 2001, p. 1.

² Bo-Myung Seo, “Overcoming of Globalization and the Task of Theology in Asia” in JTCA, Vol.2, 2003, p. 218.

³ Wati Longchar, “Globalization and Indigenous People: Challenges for Doing Theology in Asia” in CTC Bulletin, Vol XVIII, No 2- Vol. XIX, No. 2. December 2002 - August 2003, p.6.

technologies to a degree never witnessed before-in a way that is enabling individuals, corporations and nation-states to reach around the world farther, faster, deeper and cheaper than ever before ... the spread of free-market capitalism to virtually every country in the world” (T.L. Friedman, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*, 1999, p. 7-8).

- “Globalization is like a giant octopus with huge tentacles. These tentacles have been appropriately labeled as economic domination, cultural aggression, political imperialism, ecological devastation, and global terrorism”⁴

Globalization, thus, has many facets. While it has brought the whole world into relationship, the fruits that this relationship bears stand questionable. The fruits also come in many facets, while some are becoming healthier and healthier by eating from it, majority of the world population are becoming thinner and thinner by eating from it resulting even in death because of infection. Wati Longchar remarks this process as “Great promises, but only a few can enjoy”.⁵ Globalization describes a complex phenomenon, full of promise and treat. It promises to bring millions of people into active participation in global economic life. Yet it threatens to marginalize millions more in countries and situations unwilling or ill-equipped to adapt to its torrid pace.

The fact that developments linked with globalization have enhanced the quality of life for many cannot be overlooked. It does have its positive aspects. For example, the production of goods for consumption on a massive scale has brought not only a better and more varied goods available to every citizen, but also has brought enormous change in people’s value system. Those who have and are able to buy the goods have attained greater comfort, speedier communication and faster travel. Information technology has converted the world into a “global

⁴ Hope Antone, “Asian Women and the Globalization of Labour” in JTCA, Vol. 2, 2003, 97.

⁵ Wati Longchar, “Globalization and Indigenous People... *Op. cit.*, 7.

village". The events of far-off lands are easily accessible in our living rooms. This process has promoted exchange of ideas and customs between peoples of different countries. In addition, live communication of facts makes us partake instantaneously in the events of history. It also creates and promotes global concern. We now have the possibility of immediate worldwide attention to global issues, particularly to people in emergency situations.

Globalization has given people access to a wide range of products and services from around the globe. Because of the merging of global economies, we can buy cheap apples, bananas and pineapples even in off season, can have foods that don't grow in Nagaland, year-round. We can also surf the internet and find out about life on the other, side of the globe. We can indulge ourselves in African and Latin music and can watch the latest Hollywood movies and Soap from the West. And, we can drop by at our neighbourhood flower shop and pick up low-cost and beautiful fresh flowers on the coldest winter day. Flowers from all over the world are in our garden, 'Thailand Impassion', 'German rose' and so on. Cosmetics, clothes used and worn by the people in America, Singapore, China are available at our 'foreign *dokans*' in an affordable price. For this reason, it is irrational on our part to reject it outrightly but at the same time an uncritical attitude towards it is unwise. The concern of this paper is on later aspect.

The ideology that underpins globalization focuses on trade as the vehicle for improving the conditions of people everywhere. However, the restructuring associated with globalization doesn't even attempt to promise anything to those traditionally disadvantaged in our society: the unemployed cannot expect jobs, the poor cannot expect prosperity, and women and other disadvantaged people cannot expect equality.

The negative *inclinations* of globalization in general are: *The unbridled dynamics of world trade*: All over the world, politicians who have a say in economic policy are faced time and again with the same dilemma. Their legislation ends at the national borders. Where as, larger corporations easily transcend

it. The turnover of these large transnational corporations is much higher than the gross national product of many of the smaller industrialized countries due to their power; these transnational corporations have long become a danger to the democracies of this world. Under this pressure, which can create or destroy jobs, democratically elected governments often have only one choice- they must subordinate their politics to the interests of the transnational corporations and insure a favourable investment climate; *The Global ecological crisis*: Two of this planet's central protective mechanisms are: the ozone layer and the greenhouse effect. Experts say that it will take fifty years for the ozone layer to be restituted. Until then, the rate of skin cancer will increase and nature's and human beings' immunity to illnesses will decrease. Added to this are great changes in the greenhouse effect, in itself natural, which protects the earth from low temperatures that would render the planet unfit for human habitation. The burning of fossil fuels such as natural gas, oil and carbon which emit carbon dioxide and other gases increases the greenhouse effect to such an extent that temperatures are produced which would threaten to turn the planet into sauna. Today, there is scientific proof that the velocity of winds is increasing, large areas on the earth are drying out and becoming infertile, glaciers are melting, sea level is rising, and regions inhabited by about a quarter of the world's population risk being flooded. No doubt, this climate catastrophe is a consequence of the energy-intensive growth economy that the North has developed to perfection and today due to the globalized economy it is spreading over the whole world; *The world wide gap between poor and rich widens*: the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) publishes an annual report on human development and arrives at dramatic data such as the following included in its most recent report. The report says that number of the absolute poor has risen to 1.3 billion people; they are chronically undernourished and have no access to clean water. At the same time, scholars are also expressing fears that globalization is leading to increased inequalities between men and women. 368 billionaires of this

world own as much as 48 percent of humanity; the North of this world own 87 percent of all cars; 45 countries of this earth need to pay almost 2000 billion US dollars in the form of foreign debt. Those who say that the developing countries are relatively better off than they were a few decades ago are, unfortunately, wrong. According to the UN, 89 countries with a population of about 1.6 billion were worse off in 1997 than they were in 1986; *The unbridled world money market*: the sentence “money makes the world go round” was never before more true than today. There is news about interest rates, currency devaluation, and events leading to the reinvestment. On the financial markets, the globalization gives the world’s leading banks immense power. Under this policy, both nationally and internationally, they pursue one goal and rely on one means. The goal is growth and the means is development of the free market. This growth is being achieved by means of a labour saving technology that saves on human labour and will only further divide society. That means, increasing growth and wealth on the one hand and more unemployment and poverty on the other; and *The Diminishing Cultural Diversity*: Globalization is a phenomenon that crosses and erases geographical and political borders and makes all countries start to look the same. As a result of globalization, local products, services, and cultures disappear into a global culture, a culture defined not by the global citizenry but rather the world’s economic and political superpowers - mostly North America-owned corporations. Because of globalization, people on every continent are exposed to and consumed by a North American ‘culture’ defined by free market ideology, Nike running shoes, MTV, Coca Cola, McDonald’s Bruce Willis, Madonna and semi-nude pictures. Some people have re-named the process of globalization and called it McDonaldization or CocaColonization or Americanization. This culture seeps in everywhere. Even the poorest states like ours, wealthy elite import Western luxuries. Cultures are open as never before to question, challenge, and influence from outside. No walls can keep out satellites and cyberspace. Western culture is ubiquitous, but it is not always welcome. There is a growing backlash-

rather, a growing number of distinct, independent backlashes-against Western culture, not only from Islamic fundamentalists⁶ but also from those who question the U.S. model of laissez-faire capitalism. One example of such clash of cultures is the recent killing of a 16 year old Muslim girl by her father, a Kurdish Muslim in London: “Abdalla Yones, 48, cut his daughter Heshu’s throat and left her to death. He had subjected her to months of beatings before killing her in frenzied knife attack”, because he disapproved of her Western way of life... Heshu used a mobile phone, preferred to spend time out with her friends rather than at home and wore make-up.⁷

Women and Globalization

Among the hard-hit group of people by the ‘developments’ of globalization, women are the most effected. Feminization of poverty, feminization of labor migration especially in developed countries, violence against women, dehumanizing treatment of women etc defines this impact. Fr. Jacob Kavunkal laments that, ‘As far as India is concerned, the tribal people, the Dalits and women have become more easy victims of poverty and social exclusion’⁸ brought by globalization.

Globalization has also led to deepening global poverty, increased stress and workloads in both the paid and unpaid labour force, and environmental destruction. Women have been particularly affected. Women and other marginalized communities have suffered disproportionately from free trade agreements. At the same time it has decreased the quality of many of their paid work opportunities. Women are already overrepresented in low-

⁶ Cf. Akbar S. Ahmed, *Postmodernism & Islam; Predicament and Promise*. (London: Routledge, 1999).

⁷ Sue Clough and Sean O’Neill, “Father killer in clash of Culture” in *The Telegraph*, Guwahati, Wednesday, 1 October 2003, p. 4.

⁸ Fr. Jacob Kavunkal, “A Theological Response to Globalization”, paper presented at the National Consultation on The priorities of Theological Education in India, Chennai, 22-23 May 2001, p. 3.

paying, labour-intensive sectors where women's nimble figures, flexibility, and ability to work hard are needed. One of the hardest hit industries has been the garment industry.⁹

Globalization has also severely impacted women's relationship to food and the production of food. The liberalization of trade and the subsequent global spread of a market economy for more on the market economy have forced many impoverished countries to stop growing food for themselves in favour of growing food for export. This has led to greater food insecurity, reduced nutrition, and has moved women in exporting countries into low-paying, undervalued agricultural work such as picking and packing tomatoes for export. Thousands of indigenous women in many countries have lost their own land. At the same time, huge number of poverty stricken girls and women accept the promise of a good job or a kind husband but find that they have been tricked into commercial sex.

Globalization affecting women: Areas of concern

Many scholars, women activists and critics fear that globalization, in the sense of integration of a country into world society, will exacerbate gender inequality. It harms women, especially in the South, in several ways. Let us note few important areas of concern:

a. Globalization and Industry of Clothes.

Check out the tag on the shirt you're wearing. Chances are it was made far away from your own home. In the last few decades clothing production has moved quickly from our own homes, to places hundreds and even thousands of kilometers away. Being able to buy clothing instead of having to make it ourselves, liberates women by giving us time to pursue other

⁹ For example, in Canada, 30,000 jobs in the garment industry have been lost since the advent of international trade agreements few years back. Most of those jobs were held by women.

activities. The global market also offers incredible variety of styles and textiles; the beauty of cloth and design connects us to women all over the world. But clothing also connects us in more uncomfortable kinds of ways.

The textile and garment industries are among the most globalized of all industries. Clothing is produced in nearly every country in the world, often for sale elsewhere, and together the garment and textile industries make up the largest source of industrial employment in the world. That means 30 million people are making clothes and textiles across the globe. And of these 30 million, most are women. For instance, the Canadian garment industry has been one of the industries hardest hit by economic globalization. In 1986, there were nearly 8000 people working in Manitoba's clothing industry. In 1996, that number was closer to 5000.¹⁰ Across the country more than 30,000 jobs have been lost in the garment industry since 1988.¹¹ And once again, because most of the workers in the garment industry are women, it is women who have been hardest hit. Working in a garment factory has never been an easy job. Operators are not paid by the hour but rather by the number of pieces they have produced, therefore a person's pay depends on how fast she is able to work. Engineers decide how much time should be used to produce each pocket, zipper, and sleeve. If a worker does it faster, she is operating at over 100% and gets paid more. But if it takes her longer, she is operating at less than 100% and will be paid less. If she makes a mistake, she must fix it on her own time. Despite the low pay, the work is hard. Repetitive strain injury and carpal tunnel syndrome are common experiences among operators, as well as chronic back and neck problems. Because of pressure to produce, workers are more reluctant to take breaks to stand up and stretch or even adjust their chairs.

¹⁰ *Statistics Canada*. 1996 Census. Nation Tables.

¹¹ Russel Kowaluk. "Stability Prevails in the Garment Industry". *Statistics Canada*. Catalogue No. 34-252-XIE, 1998

Stories from cloth factories tell an even more disturbing story. In many Asian countries including Indonesia and the Philippines, workers are lured to factories with the promise of high wages and good conditions. Impoverished rural families sometimes encourage their daughters to move to the city in search of paid work in the hope that they might be able to earn money to send home. Upon arrival, girls discover fenced 'factory cities' called Export Processing Zones (EPZs) filled with workers like themselves. Along with the typical low pay and difficult work comes impossibly long hours, forced overtime, health and safety violations, stiflingly hot factories with poor ventilation systems, and unclean drinking water or none at all. Forced pregnancy tests, sexual violence, and discrimination against workers trying to organize unions, including unjust job terminations, are also common.¹²

b. Globalization and Food: Profits over people

Farmers, fisher folk and indigenous people, especially women are producers of food and other primary products suffer from the globalization in most countries. Women's work and women's lives all over the world have long been intertwined with food. In every country, it is women who assume primary responsibility for preparing and serving meals for themselves and their families. Not only do women prepare and serve food, in many parts of the world women also grow food. In Sub-Saharan Africa women contribute 60-80% of the labour required for food production both for household consumption and for sale. In Asia women account for 50% of food production over all. In the Pacific women play a dominant role in fisheries and food marketing as well as in labour-intensive production of cash crops such as palm oil, vanilla, and cocoa. It is clear that women have a lot to do with food. But do they really?

Vandana Shiva, an Indian feminist, calls women the "world's original food producers." But over time, women have

¹² Naomi Klein, *No Logo* (Toronto: Knopf Canada, 2000).

become a little-recognized force in the series of processes that moves food from fields to tables. Much of women's work around food has been labeled 'unproductive.' Because it is unpaid, it does not count as being part of the monetary economy. Economic globalization- the process of opening up regional markets for global consumption- has played a large role in the transformation of agriculture from family gardens to a huge industry characterized by agribusiness.

Commercialized agriculture relies just as heavily on the work of women as did the family farm. Women are dogs in the machine of a globalized agriculture industry: picking tomatoes in Mexico, harvesting rice in India, planting tea in Uganda, packing peaches in Ontario and fish in Nova Scotia. But while women still play a role in agricultural production, women's control over the means of food production has been significantly weakened. The forced migration, environmental contamination, and hunger that have resulted from this transformation, have been devastating. Eglá describes conditions in the camps where migrant workers live: few *latrines* if any, dirty water, little space for cooking and living, dangerous shelters or none at all, no electricity, and an environment that breeds disease without recourse to health care. Wages are low and working hours long and while in the fields, workers and their families are exposed to another danger: pesticides. Children as young as nine years old work in these fields and those too young to work accompany their mothers.¹³

When a woman has her own land, she can always grow a few vegetables for her family. She may be poor but she and her children will still eat. Large-scale agricultural production requires

¹³ Guadelupe Martinez a single mother with five children worked at a banana plantation in Honduras. She describes work at the plantation: "It was grueling. We worked 12 hours straight, from 7 am to 7 pm, with only two 15-minute breaks, an hour for lunch and a half-hour for dinner. If we had food, we ate. If we didn't, we watched everyone else eat. After I finished work I would go home and make dinner for

a lot of land, land that was often once-owned by families who used it to satisfy their needs. When families lose their land, they also lose their livelihoods and are forced to migrate to places where they can find work, often on those lands that has been taken away from other small farmers. In their new jobs, farmers are working for corporations, not for themselves, and their earnings may or may not provide enough for them to survive.¹⁴ It also means they are subject to environmental hazards of large-scale agricultural production like pesticide use. Many Women risk their lives in order to grow crops for export. The push for production encourages new technologies like genetic-engineering. Genetically-altered seeds often have strict pesticide requirements, another expense for a farmer with limited funds, an expense that often threatens the health of the farmer, her family, the community, and the earth. In the end, globalization stresses profits over people, production over care of workers. Women and children are often the most vulnerable members of society and are the most exploited; in many countries Indigenous women are at greatest risk. Like the globalized garment industry, the globalized agriculture industry survives on the women's hard

the children and do some housework. I had to prepare food for the children's breakfast and lunch. We worked six days a week. Then on Sundays, I would get up very early in the mornings and wash clothes and clean the house all day because there was no time during the week. There were many Sundays when I'd still be washing clothes at 7 at night. Then I'd have to be up by 4 the next morning to make breakfast for the children. children's breakfast and lunch. We worked six days a week. Then on Sundays, I would get up very early in the mornings and wash clothes and clean the house all day because there was no time during the week. There were many Sundays when I'd still be washing clothes at 7 at night. Then I'd have to be up by 4 the next morning to make breakfast for the children.

¹⁴ Today, 826 million people are chronically and seriously undernourished although the world can nourish 12 billion human beings - twice its present population - without any problem, said Shukor Rahman, *World Food Programme*.

work and nimble fingers yet is unable to provide for or protect them.

c. Globalization and Feminization of Migration

Migration is not a new thing. People have always left their homes in search of better economic opportunities, both within and outside of their own homeland. But economic globalization has put a new spin on global migration, causing global uprootedness and human displacement on an unprecedented scale. Because economic globalization exacerbates the inequalities between nations, migration for many becomes not a choice, but an economic necessity.

Among increasing¹⁵ migrant workers, the percentage of women is growing remarkably. In case of the Philippines, the largest migrant labour exporting country, some 65% of overseas migrant labourers are women. In Hong Kong, some 100,000 Filipino women are working as domestic workers, in Singapore some 60,000 Filipino women.¹⁶ They often have to face none or under-payment, physical or sexual violence by employers or their families.¹⁷

Many migrants arrive in the form of migrant workers who are simply looking for a job. Estimates say that nearly 1 out of

¹⁵ It is said the number of overseas migrant labor has reached almost 1 billion, the largest number in history. People in such huge numbers have to leave their countries for survival.

¹⁶ Gabriela, Philippines. For more information see: <<http://members.tripod.com.gabriela>.

¹⁷ The case of Sara Barabagan, 16-year-old Moro (Muslim minority) woman from Mindanao, illustrates the plight of female migrant workers. She was sentenced to death for the murder of her employer in a Middle East country in 1995. It was reported that she was threatened with a knife and raped by her aged employer; then she wrested the knife from him and stabbed him many times. Her case drew the attention of the whole world, voices of protest and support arose in many countries, Filipino women demonstrated at home and in Hong Kong as well. As a result, Sara's death sentence was reduced and finally she was released to return

6 people in this world, more than one billion people, are crossing national borders as migrant workers. Of these 1 billion, 13 million are from Asia and 72% are women.¹⁸ The work that migrant workers do is usually dangerous, dirty but poorly paid, low-status work that citizens are happy to pass on as an 'opportunity' to migrant workers escaping poverty. Two of the most common jobs found are domestic and farm labour.

i. Domestic Labour

Women and girls from poor country are recruited to be domestic workers. In Africa and Asia girls from rural areas are often expected to move to urban areas and become domestic workers in order to help support their families financially. In North America and Europe, women from South America and Asia work in the homes of the rich sending money back home to their families abroad. Common experiences of domestic workers include low wages, long working hours, no time off, loneliness, verbal abuse, being forced to wear uniforms and act in roles of servitude, heavy work demands, homesickness, the denial of a family life of one's own, racism, and vulnerability to sexual abuse and HIV.¹⁹ Many domestic workers leave children and families behind choosing to care for others' children in order to feed their own. Filipino women make up the majority of domestic workers in the world. Gabriela from the Philippines estimates

home. Sara is only one of the many victims of abuse of Asian female migrant workers.

¹⁸ Enashki Dua. "Beyond Diversity: Exploring Ways in which the Discourse of Race has Shaped the Institution of the Nuclear Family" in Enashki Dua and Angela Robertson. Eds. *Scratching the Surface: Canadian Anti-Feminist Thought*. Toronto: Women's Press, 1999. 237-260. Quoted in Helene Moussa "Global Surge in Forced Migration Linked to Colonial Past".

¹⁹ Abigail Bakan and Daiva Stasiulis, *Not One of the Family: Foreign Domestic Workers in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997).

that between 6 and 8 million Filipino women are living abroad.²⁰ As journalist Christa Wichterich comments, "So long as women earn more from housecleaning and child minding overseas than from teaching in their homeland, they will tend to set off and leave their own country and children behind."²¹

ii. Farm Labour

Farm workers make up another large percentage of migrant workers. They work up to 15 hours a day.²² Migrant farm workers face hard work for low pay and are subjected to health and environmental hazards such as farm accidents and chemical poisoning. Because they are migrants, they face the additional challenges of a foreign culture and language, and often experience increased levels of depression, loneliness, suicide, alcoholism, and the risk of HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases. Living conditions are often very poor. Temporary migrant workers go for months at a time, creating social upheaval for these families left behind and forcing women to assume all day-to-day responsibilities for raising children. Sometimes migrant farm workers take their families with them. This creates other forms of upheaval as women and children are moved from place to place and schooling and other health and social opportunities are disrupted as they follow the work.

When inequalities between the countries become greater, the desire for citizens of poor nations to leave their own countries also increases. Millions of people worldwide, many of them women, leave their homes in search of work in other countries. Each year thousands of farm workers come to developed countries each summer to harvest fruits and vegetables. Many

²⁰ GABRIELA Philippines. For more information see <<http://memberstrinod.com.gabriela>.

²¹ Christa Wichterich. *The Globalized Woman: Reports from a Future of Inequality* (New York: Zed Books, 2000).

²² United Farm Workers of America - Canadian Office. Report of Migrant Farm Workers in Canada. 2001.

mothers in the countries like the Philippines and Thailand have seen their only option, is to go overseas and work as domestic servants for wealthy people. Many a times, these women displaced by the market economy, become part of the global sex trade.

d. Globalization and Sex Trafficking

The woman is approached with the promise of a good job in another country, and lacking better options at home, she agrees to migrate. Once overseas, however, she is delivered to her employer. In these new surroundings, the woman has no control over the nature or place of work, or the terms or conditions of her employment. What is more, when the woman learns she has been deceived about the nature of the work, she finds escape both difficult and dangerous, given the coercive and abusive situations in the brothels.²³

The situation in Britain illustrates this scenario. According to research conducted by the University of North London's Child and Women Abuse Studies Unit, six out of 10 women in London's brothels have been 'trafficked' from countries such as the Ukraine.²⁴ And once the women arrive in Britain, they are informed by the gangs responsible for their journey that they owe the gangs thousands of pounds for accommodation, fees to the brothel and advertising. In most cases, the manners in which women have been trapped into the sex industry remind the same everywhere.

In a recent study published by Amnesty International (AI), Israel is harshly criticised for failing to protect the human rights of women who have been trafficked into the country for the purpose of sex trade. Thousands of women have been brought into the country by organised criminal rings and forced into the

²³ Experts said that close to 500,000 women are smuggled into Western Europe every year.

²⁴ Cf. Marwaan Macan-Marka, "Modern Slavery- Forcing Millions of Women into the Sex Trade". She is a correspondent for the Inter Press Service.

sex trade. They are considered to be illegal aliens and are treated as criminals rather than as victims of international crime and exploitation.²⁵

Sex Trafficking was never heard of at such intensity until now in our North East India. According to a study by member of an NGO, the Action Research on Trafficking last year; over 300 girls from the Northeast have been forced into commercial sex by an organized network.²⁶ President of Impulse NGO network Hasina Kharbhih, who is involved in the anti-trafficking movement in Assam said, "Boys and girls from North and Bangladesh are regularly smuggled to Myanmar, Thailand and Southeast Asian countries."²⁷ Sometime in August this year, I happened to read in the Nagaland Post about two men (their photos were also given) caught in trafficking of girls from Dimapur. That sound very near, isn't it? This is a reality among us too.

According to the UN Development Fund for Women, trafficking of women for prostitution is one of the fastest-growing organised criminal activities in the world, and follows, in frequency, only the trade in narcotics and weapons. The sex trade brings in \$7-12 billion annually. The United States State Department has estimated that over one million women are trafficked every year, primarily from economically unstable nations.²⁸ Many women are abducted, but others are lured by offers of good working conditions and high salaries in the sex industry, or by false offers of employment entirely unrelated to sex trade. On arrival, travel documents are confiscated so as to ensure that they are unable to escape. The women frequently endure torture and imprisonment. Psychological trauma, disease

²⁵ Lisa Delong, "Poor Protection for Victims of the Sex Trade," *Human Right Tribune*, Vol. 7 No. 2 &3, September 2000.

²⁶ Staff Correspondent, "Rescue blows lid off boy trafficking", *The Telegraph*, northeast, Guwahati Friday 22 August 2003, 15.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 15.

²⁸ Cf. Marwaan Macan-Marka, "Modern Slavery... *Op. cit.*

and denial of health services are commonplace.

e. Globalization and Women's Body

To be or not to be 'Fat' is a feminist issue. A woman can't be too fat or too thin, says every fashion and beauty magazine, every television ad, every weight loss centre and even many families, friends and doctors. Fat is bad; thinness will bring you happiness. This is being taken to extremes in the fashion industry's 'waif look: hollow cheeks and skeletal bodies. This ideology is being established as the norm due to the globalization of media which makes economy flourish.

The Beauty Myth, written by Naomi Wolf in 1990, powerfully documents the effects of the unattainable body ideal on women's physical and mental health, and indicts the fashion, cosmetics and plastic surgery industries, which benefit from women's misery to the tune of billions of dollars a year. These profits are made by creating a deep sense of dissatisfaction amongst millions of women about their bodies, a dissatisfaction that is growing with the growing gap between the 'ideal' or 'virtual' body and reality. A 1987 US study revealed that one generation earlier, the average female model weighed 8% less than the average US woman. By 1987, she weighed 23% less and today it is increasing in an extraordinary high percentage.²⁹ This increases the pressure on women to spend more time and money, and undergo more physical and psychological stress, to try to reach the ideal. But why can't women simply ignore all the ads and fashion magazines? They know from their own experiences of reality that these ideals are fantasy.

Media images do have a powerful effect, but they are also continually reinforced in everyday life. Comments on women's appearance are so commonplace and accepted that we can underestimate the effect they have on how women see themselves. Women are described in terms of what they look

²⁹ Sarah Stephen, "Fat is (Still) a Feminist Issue", *Green Left Weekly* (11 March, 1998).

like; rather than what they think or do, far more than men. Weight loss is commented on favourably by family and friends: 'You're looking so well. You've lost weight.' Approval for being thin, and disapproval for being fat, have more impact on a woman's self-perception when coming from people whose opinions matter to her.

*Few facts*³⁰ : Obsessive weight loss, depression and self-image problems are becoming enormous. A study found that one in three women between the ages of 20 and 24 were underweight. Yet another survey revealed that 45% of medically underweight women think they are too fat. 1987 studies of Australian adolescents revealed that dieting and weight control practices are undertaken by 20-45% of adolescent boys and girls, and may begin as young as eight years old. Girls presented with Barbie dolls as the ideal woman are not told that a real woman of Barbie's weight would be too thin to maintain a normal menstrual cycle. In Australia, seventy-two per cent of all teenage women want to be thinner, even though many of them are normal or underweight for their height (1994).

I have not come across such statistics yet regarding our people. But if at all there are or is conducted, the study would have hardly any difference with other countries. We have the so called 'Herbal Life' 'Slim pill' 'Slimming magnet', designed to help lose weight, being marketed all over Nagaland by private agents. I have come across people even in the villages trying it out. Children in their teens are also so conscious of their figure that some even take the extreme measure of fasting, crash dieting, taking laxatives etc. While as a student, we were told that Tamils like healthy fat women, so they chose such women to act in regional films. It was so then; all healthy looking actresses. Now the trend is different. They are also adhering to the global trend. Such is the inevitable force of globalization even among us.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

f. Globalization of Information Technology and Women³¹

Can the new communications revolution opening up before our eyes act as a magic-wand for women to get a better deal? Telecommunications equipment, the Internet, mass media transmitted via satellite, cable and fibre optics, videotext and fax machines, and databases are opening up new options across the globe. These new technologies have entered the home. They have influenced not only the individual and family life, but also age-old institutions and values. Unfortunately, everything is not positive and smooth-sailing, women don't automatically benefit from the communications revolution. New communications technologies are not as neutral as they first appear to be.³²

Even in the age of globalization of media, men are considered the first beneficiaries of innovations, while women follow and take over the positions vacated by them. The progress of women is hampered by widespread prejudices regarding their ability to learn and to apply new technology. In addition, knowledge and powers are concentrated in the hands of the privileged few who own and control the communications system.

New technologies like computers, the Internet and cell phones are available largely in cities. For example, in India, the status of women is improving only among the middle-class in urban society. Progress among the lower classes is 'Very slow'. Only a limited segment of female professionals have been empowered by the new communications technologies. Most of the rest - lag behind.

³¹ So much has been written on the affect and effect of mass media on the image of women. Therefore under this sub point, 'Globalization of information technology & women', I shall be considering only on the aspect of information technology and its impact on women's life and position in brief.

³² Says a new book on the subject from the Asian Media Information and Communication Centre (AMIC) of Singapore. *Asian Women in the Information Age*. Edited by Ila Joshi.

Staying Engaged: Lessons for Naga Women

No matter how powerful the force of globalization, women should not surrender and accept it. It is the hidden intention of global forces such as TNCs and international agencies to make the people feel that globalization is inevitable and there is no alternative to it and it was of no use to resist it.³³ They try to make the people feel powerless. However, ironically, the unprecedented scale of human suffering and misery caused by harsh mega competition, liberalization of trade and investment, in the era of globalization motivates millions of victimized people to resist and fight back for survival and human dignity.

In many countries in Asia, the women's movement is getting stronger and stronger. Their power was clearly shown in the World Women's Conference at Beijing. Many women have broken silence and begun to take action. It is vitally important to strengthen the global women's movement based on local action and with perspective for the 21st century in order to confront and break through global force.³⁴

The concerns we have discussed are global yet local issues. It is happening everywhere at varied degree of intensity. It is happening to us, to our mothers, to our sisters. At the face of all these, Naga women must also do something. The Naga Mother's Association, the Watsti Mundang, Nagaland Baptist Church Council Women Department, Church Women Wing, and various other NGOs are working against the negative impact of global evils at the local level. However, Naga women have yet to take up many more challenges. So let us strive to strengthen the women's movement in our land against global evils by taking actions in coordination with the national/global women movements. This networking will enable us to identify

³³ This is how Americans tries to impose their own selfish profit oriented globalizing policy upon the poor nations.

³⁴ Matsui Yayori, "Globalization and Asian Women" in *Globalization and Its Impact on Human Rights* by George Mathews Chunakara (Ed.). Collected from Religion Online by Ted & Winnie Brock.n.p.

with the experiences our sisters go through around the world and they with ours and the support we get from each other would empower us to combat together against the evils of globalization on women.

The following are some suggestions in staying engaged to combat the evils of globalization on women:

First, the growing women's movement has to take up many challenges. One of the most important tasks is to achieve true participatory democracy in order to force nation-states to accept more accountability vis-a-vis global forces for the interests of their people.³⁵ Women should be empowered to democratize the state, society, workplace and family.

Second, women have to change the global consumer culture such as "McDonaldization" and recover diversity of lifestyle and values. It is so important to create feminized culture based on caring, nurturing mutual help and change the prevailing masculine culture of competition, efficiency and power greed, which is the culture of globalization.

Third, women's groups should work close together in searching for a new vision for future, because it is apparent that the world in the 21st century should not be like the one we have lived and had bitter experience. We need to create an alternative society based on gender justice, ecological sustainability and local-global democracy. Women should have the confidence to change their own daily lives and the world by supporting one another. Only women's force can overcome the danger of global market force.

Fourth, unions have always worked hard to protect women in the workplace. Unionized women earn a wage much closer to that of their male counterparts than do non-unionized women. Unions also help workers who face sexual harassment and other workplace hazards and can bargain benefits like child care. Due to new economic policy, many of the 'jobs lost' have been unionized ones, while jobs created through economic globalization tend to be non-unionized. Hence women's groups

³⁵ *Ibid.*

should work close together with the unions which fight for, support and protect women in the workplace.

Fifth, seeing the danger, women should demand from the industry: not use extremely underweight women in photos; identify those images which have been digitally altered; and not use pre-pubescent girls to market adult women's clothing, especially lingerie. Another proposal is that advertisements using super-thin models be required to carry government messages warning of the dangers of being seriously underweight, similar to the health warnings on cigarettes. The weight loss industry, with an annual turnover of \$500 million, should also be forced to carry warnings on diet products.³⁶ This measures will help to educate people about both the fakery and the real dangers involved in the media ideal.

Sixth, distorted unattainable sexist images are the inevitable consequences of a social system in which those with power benefit from the exploitation of women in the home and the workplace. The most effective way to combat this phenomenon is to develop strong campaigns involving large numbers of women which aim to change women's unequal living conditions in a whole range of spheres and out of which alternative images, created by women themselves, will develop.

Seven, women groups should demand and advise governments to take action to protect women who have been victims of sex trafficking. To voice against these human rights violations in order to avoid exacerbation of trauma through detention and ill protection. If all nations were to review and ensure compliance with such recommendations, women everywhere could begin to hope for an end to the horror of the sex trade.

Eight, women with dependent children may be desperate for opportunity, but they are also especially vulnerable; rapidly changing markets put not only their businesses, but also their children at risk. Thus, women should claim and urge that reproduction and

³⁶ GABRIELA Philippines. For more information see <http://members.tripod.com/~gabriela>

unpaid work be recognized as economic activities.

Ninth, perhaps the most important, in addition to guaranteeing social and political rights and recognizing economic, social, and cultural rights, the classic conception explicitly assures women's "equality" with men. There is now strong emphasis on the importance of non-discrimination on the basis of sex and it supports the concept of affirmative action. This assures women's social rights, as well as access to the political process. Whatever rights men enjoy, in short, are to be equally available to women. Sometimes this may require affirmative action to bring historically subordinated women up to the starting line.³⁷ Women should be criticized for classic international law for excluding women as participants where decisions are made and for treating them more as passive objects' than as active subjects of international law. Unless women are present in critical numbers and are able to share their different experiences and perspectives, their concerns will not be recognized in policy debates. Therefore, the challenge is to ensure women participate fully in designing policies and decision making.

While it is generally conceded that women in fact have been and still are subordinated, the assumption remains that the commitment to rights, especially social, economic and political rights, will change consciousness and norms over time. It resounds and it may well resound most for the most marginalized women. The world we seek for our daughter is a safe and peaceful one, in which her "self-delighting" soul will flourish. This commitment represents the best hope for improving the real conditions of women's lives and a *Better World for Our Daughters Tomorrow*.

³⁷ It is also to be noted that, while feminists generally welcome the notion that women should not have less or fewer rights than men, some have criticized "equality" for incorporating a male norm—that is, for assuming that women should be like men and want what men want.

READING THE BIBLE FROM NAGA WOMEN'S CONTEXT

Asangla Lemtur

Introduction

Discrimination against women is not a phenomenon unique to the Naga society. All human relationships have been shaped and nurtured by certain basic social units - clan, tribe, class, sex and village. It is a hierarchical society with strong patriarchal control. Patriarchy can be considered as one of the major causes of women's oppression. This dominating ideology legitimizes all sorts of oppression and generates all discriminative forms of sexual regulations, which are dominated by man. Sexism is one of its results that continue to be deviling the Naga women. Aphuno Chase Roy states, "Nagas are patriarchal and the mores of society have kept women subordinate"¹.

Women in the contemporary Naga Society are constantly confronted with the double standards of an androgynous social system. Some women may experience a sense of achievement

¹ Aphuno Chase-Roy, 'Can Naga Women Birth Fire?' (in) *In God's Image*, Vol. 19 No. 4. Dec. 2000, 27-29..

especially after modern education. But majority feels disgusted and frustrated at the growing sexual discriminations. According to Limala Longkumer, “The theory of the high status and role of women in the Naga society is absolutely wrong. It misleads and gives a wrong impression about the reality of women’s role and status in the society. Women are still treated as inferior and given only subordinate roles.”²

In the economic field women’s freedom to work is dominated by men and women are compelled to remain dependent on men. They are confined to the domestic sphere while the outside world is seen as the exclusive domain of men. There is still unequal payment of wages and unequal job opportunities. In the political field, women’s suffrage did not bring an equal distribution of political power. Women’s participation in the political decision-making is null and void. A woman entering a career means giving up one’s femininity or family. A woman talking about violations of her rights means she has gone insane. In the ideological field, women are still, considered as a lower being and an object of sexual desire.

Ours is a Father right society, not Mother right. The legal and political rights of possessions and control of property and family, which is the wife and offspring, lies in the hands of the father. Two of the most oppressive elements are our CULTURE AND RELIGION. Our culture is patriarchal, so do our religion, which projects a male deity (Primal faith in the past, Christianity today). Today religion re-enforces and legitimizes gender discrimination. When women are shouting their experiences of indiscriminate violations of right, there is little or no reaction on the part of the religious leaders including the church. In order to maintain the status quo, the Bible is used extensively as the proof-text to affirm the domination of men and subordination of women.

² Limatula Longkumer, ‘Christianity and Naga Women’ (in *Transforming Theology for Empowering Women*, ed. R.L. Hnuni (ETC, Jorhat: Women’s

F.S. Downs rightly says that a number of writers other than missionaries supported the view that the status of women was very low in the traditional hill tribal societies. As long as there is sub-ordination, prohibitions in society or in church, no Christian society can be considered genuinely egalitarian.³

Naga women like all marginal groups struggle for a new identity of freedom and liberation. We want to hold on to human values of our traditional cultures. But at the same time, we are determined to fight the evils of oppressions within our culture. We are also sensitive to the distortions of new culture that destroys women’s godly image.

My concern is not to deal extensively on the status of a Naga woman, but on the relationship between the Bible and a Naga woman, and the rereading and reinterpretation of the Bible from a Naga woman perspective. The perspective I suggest in this paper is - CONTEXTUAL LIBERATIVE HERMENEUTICS. But before going into the methodology, I would like to give an overview of how the Bible is related to a Naga woman.

The Bible and the Naga Woman

In fact, we cannot call ourselves as Naga women, but women in Nagaland, unless the second-class status or citizenship is totally restored to the status of a real citizen. For example, for the Ao Nagas after every few years there is a citizenship conference (Senso Mungdang) in principal village, where male members should attend without fail. But women are excluded from this important citizenship conference where all major deliberations, planning and decision-making for the entire village is made. Like any patriarchal, male-dominated community women live in relation to the husband to serve him and before marriage to the father to obey him.

³ F.S. Downs, ‘Christianity and the Status of Women in the Hill Areas of North East India: Differing Perspectives’ (in *Journal of Tribal Studies*, Jorhat: Department of Tribal Studies, Vol. V. No.1. Jan-

The reading of the Bible in Nagaland is also patriarchal! It is biased, one-sided and male dominated interpretation. We still practice the method of traditional interpretation of the Bible, which is not liberative. The concern for women and the oppressive social realities are never addressed. Our reading and interpretation of the Bible is 'pietistic' and 'other worldly' that fail to address the existential problems of the people. Our reading is also based on the socio-religious and cultural context, which is of men's domination. Patriarchal culture and patriarchal deity have mainly influenced a male dominated reading of the Bible. Most of the Nagas are comfortable with the traditional reading, for example, Pauline arguments concerning the subordination of women in the Church and home.

The Bible is also used extensively to support specific moral claims with adverse results of domination. This can be called as proof-text method, an approach that manipulates the Bible in support of personal purposes. Few texts are usually selected as proof text to keep the women silent and away from ministerial priest-hood.

Again, many read and interpret the Bible without the technical, exegetical skills. The Bible has often been inadequately used, misused or even deemed irrelevant in the face of women oppression and any new problems, which press for urgent answers. Most of the readers and writers fail to clearly define the nature of the resources to be found in the Bible and how one must go about using them in dealing with oppressive moral problems especially in relation to women.

There are many reasons why a Naga woman is excluded from the ministerial priesthood. For examples:

- i) The general belief that Jesus Christ chose only men to be his apostles. A man represents Christ better because Christ too was a man.
- ii) The God of the Bible is male: He is (Father, Brother, King, Lord, Master...).
- iii) The God of the Old Testament speaks only to men and chose only them. The Lord said to Abraham, Moses, Jeremiah....

- iv) Only fathers beget and they beget only sons: The Bible has generation of sons of Noah. Shem, Ham, Japheth.

Most of the readers read and interpret without knowing the social, religious and cultural context of the writers. They interpret without knowing the fact that the Bible also contains symbolical or metaphorical meanings. E.g The use of "blood" in Leviticus 3: 17 (is literal) 2 Sam. 23:7 (s) symbolical and Ephesians 1:7 (metaphorical). General meaning may be clear, but determining the detailed meaning is difficult.

Re-Reading and Re-Interpretation of the Bible from a Naga Women Context:

The methodology of re-reading and re-interpretation suggested here is - CONTEXTUAL LIBERATIVE HERMENEUTICS. This propounded method may not be the absolute nor limited only to a Naga woman. It should be an inclusive method for the entire human family for partnership' and not domination, for liberation and life affirming not bondage and life demeaning. It is for all those who have a motherly character for redeeming the whole humanity- the oppressed, the plants, animals, vegetation etc.

Re-reading and re-interpretation lead us into a praxis-oriented approach to the Bible. It means, experience is brought into the text. According to K.C. Abraham, "Hermeneutics explores the meanings of the present situation in order to newly understand human experiences and situations and act within it to change inhuman conditions. It is a link between the faith story and the present reality in order to discover a 'meaningful and enriching interpretations of life, especially in the present context'"⁴

It means listening to the Bible with new ears to hear the message of freedom and liberation from all bondage. It also means an understanding mind that can relate the truth of the

⁴ K.C. Abraham, *Third World Theologies* (New York: Orbis Books, 1990), 15.

text meaningfully to our life situations. For this, one needs to go behind the text and find out the details, which are not written but nevertheless implied. This would definitely enlighten a Naga woman to come to the Bible with open mind, eyes and ears, knowing that the Bible is liberative for all in all circumstances. This would strengthen her role in the family, Church and society as the Maker, Healer, Provider, Advisor, Counselor and Sustainer (the image of God in her).

There are many profound and extensive writings on feminism and few on how to re-read and re-interpret the text. Many a times our methodologies are not enshrined clearly or not there at all. One thing I would like to mention here is that, by simply changing the masculine and feminine genders in the Bible may not necessarily lead to the true and liberative interpretation of the text unless the mind set of the people change, e.g., Isaiah 2:3 "...come let us go up to the mountain of God (or the Lord), to the house of the God of Jacob (Rachel or Leah), v.5. O house of Jacob (Rachel or Leah)".⁵

Some radical feminists would say that the Christian tradition and the scripture contain male biases and cannot be used as a source or norm; but many feminists seek liberative interpretation within the canonical scripture by using the methods of "deconstruct" and "reconstruct" the meanings of the text. According to Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, the Bible has been used and interpreted to perpetuate the oppression of women because men with a patriarchal mindset wrote it. It has been used to perpetuate the oppression of women.⁶ Fiorenza uses the Bible in the service of liberation and accepts as useful those portions of the Bible that fits her criterion.⁷

Feminist interpretation definitely challenges the distorted

⁵ *An Inclusive Language Lectionary*, Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1986, 15.

⁶ Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her* (New York: Crossroad, 1983), 32.

⁷ Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Will to Choose or to Reject: Continuing Our Critical Work*, (in *Feminist Interpretation of the*

male interpretation of the Scripture and brings the text meaningful and liberative for women as well as all oppressed groups. Every individual has the right to investigate and to interpret the Bible for herself/himself. But the objectivity that expounds the Bible as it is, as an entity in its own right cannot be ignored, replaced or reconstructed. The Bible no doubt is the inspired, self-consistent Word of God. It is the interpreters who give a distorted view of the Biblical texts. The writer's/author's may not be also deliberately writing in order to give a subordinate position to women, but we agree with the fact that their writings were conditioned and greatly influenced by their existing socio-religious and cultural context. There is the danger of subjective interpretation.

The patriarchal interpreters read the Bible solely to find in it a confirmation of one's own ideas of female subordination in every aspect of life. They are tempted to take the ancient text and apply it mechanically and literally today, without paying any serious attention to the differences in historical, socio-cultural and literary context. Sometimes one is tempted to read into the text imposing meanings which are not there.

For Christians, the Bible is the 'Charter Document' that holds a place more authoritative than any other sources. It is the motive for all ethical reflections. The Biblical materials arose out of communities, which existed many centuries ago with their distinctive culture, tradition and histories. Therefore, the intentions behind the biblical teachings on morality are violating when we try to directly apply particular teachings in a mechanical and legalistic way to situations today, which often differ from those of the biblical communities. Therefore, the concern is how to re-read and re-interpret the Bible from women's perspective beginning from the Creation story in order to discover fully the hidden roles and status of women and the liberating and transformational dimensions of faith.

Contextual Liberative Hermeneutics

The methodology suggested here could be termed as 'Contextual Liberative Hermeneutics' for the re-reading and re-interpretation

of the text. It is Hermeneutics of transformation. The hermeneutical task is to bring Scripture into critical dialogue with the reader's world. What is the text? What is the context of the text? What is the context of the present readers? The fusion of these two horizons is called Hermeneutics or interpretation accurately determining the original intention of the author.⁸ Recent approach to this subject termed it as "New" Hermeneutics' to the double awareness that the ancient text is conditioned by its historicity and that its modern interpreters stand in historical context as well.⁹ In this method, the context-general and narrower context of the Bible and the present plays an important role for correct hermeneutics of the text. The original form and context of the Bible should be relevantly related to the present context.

As a Naga woman, let us not be superficial in our reading and interpretation of text nor be a stereotyped of what other's had done. Let us try to understand the text in our own context of male domination. But understanding the text may not be as easy as it might seem. The Bible is written in human language in a male world of social and cultural settings using symbols that originated in different context in human literary forms of communications. According to R.L. Hnuni, "As written by males from a male dominated society, the Bible abounds in male language and imagery. Male interpreters have explored and exploited male language to articulate theology, the church, synagogue and academy and to instruct human beings who they are, what roles they should play and how they should behave".¹⁰ Therefore, we need to know the social and religio-political, literary situations of the author and meaningfully relate

⁸ Richard B. Hays, *Exegesis, Concise Encyclopedia of Preaching*, 1995, 127.

⁹ Anthony C, *The Two Horizons* (Grand Rapids, 1980), 10.

¹⁰ R.L. Hnuni, *Methodology of Feminist Theology* (in) *Transforming Theology for Empowering Women* (Jorhat: Women's Studies. ETC., 1999), 30.

to our own context, which should be transformative and liberative.

Text does not exist in a historical and cultural vacuum. A proper study of the background (context) will enlighten or help on what is said or recorded. The historical study is an aid to examine concepts and practices that have been historically adopted in different cultures in the Bible. This will enable us to distinguish between those texts, which can be considered absolute (literal) and that not.

The technical principles like natural exegesis and scientific exegesis or aids will help the reader to understand the Bible in its plain sense. One of the initial problems is the specific meaning of the words used. Since words are not exact tools, they can have various meanings and nuances.

They can be used in different ways as literal, symbolical or in a metaphorical sense. For example, the use of "blood" in Lev. 3: 17 (Literal), 2 Sam. 23: 7 (symbolical) and Eph. 1: 7 (metaphorical). We may find it easy to determine the general meaning, but determining the detailed or specific meaning is difficult.

The plain sense does not exclude difficult text with parables, metaphorical or allegorical meanings. Natural exegesis recognizes the presence of different literary genres. Since the original manuscript no longer exists, textual study must be pursued to establish the correct wording and meaning. This can be done through good lexicon, which gives both the original and derivative meanings. It also designates in what sense they are employed in a particular passage.

One of the most important tasks of contextual liberative hermeneutic is to determine the application. How to apply the Scriptural truth to ones experiences today for example, when Jesus gives the great commission (Mt. 29: 18-20), Does he speak only to the disciple? Or to all Christians, both women and men? When Paul tells women to pray with covered heads (1 Cor. 11: 5-6), is his request local or universal?

Here I would like to give few examples of how as Naga women we should read and interpret the text into our experience

of oppression and find sources of encouragement and affirmation of being made in God's image, equal to man.

a. Creation Story

The word "Adam" which is found in Gen. 1: 26 originally means people, humankind.¹¹ But some of the later English translators translate "Adam" as "man". The other word, which has been misused to authenticate male's superiority over females, is also taken from the second account of creation story.¹² The word used in chapter (2) of Genesis is *ezer* which is translated in some English translations as- helper.

The general meaning of *ezer* is help, support, and succor. It occurs 20 times and is predominantly used in the OT with reference to Ishmael's God. 13 of these occurrences relate to declarations regarding Yahweh's ability to share and deliver.¹³ "The idea of defense is emphasized by the fact that *ezer* is on six occasions linked with the epithet "shield" (Deut 33: 29; Ps. 33: 20; 89: 18-20; 115: 9-11). When used along with 'shield' the combined expression has the connotation of divine protection afforded to Israel".¹⁴ The word study shows that the creation account in itself does not support the idea of male as dominant creation over female. The problems may lie to certain extent with a male translations and the interpretation of the creation' story by the Church in the context of a male domain.

b. Why Paul encourages wives to submit? Eph. 5:18-33

Contextual liberative Hermeneutics should be our method to

¹¹ Willem A. Van Gemeren, *et. al. New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, Vol I (UK: Paternoster Press, 1996), 132.

¹² The writer's intention here is limited to the word study and literary analysis of a specific word, which debars her from entering into the prolonged and scholarly debate pertaining to the two creation stories in Genesis I and 2..

¹³ *Op. cit.* Vol. 3, DOTTE, 378.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 378-379.

understand this passage. This perplexing question which has been raised may be right from the day Ephesians was written. Assuming that Paul wrote Ephesians while he was imprisoned at Rome. One may say that the socio-political and cultural context of his day might have compelled to tilt his writings either way.

Paul's time during his Roman imprisonment was a time that was increasingly threatened by the social upheavals that were set to change the position of former slaves, foreigners and women in the society. These changes were considered not only threatening but also devastating for the Roman aristocracy. These social changes were sometimes regarded as the outcome of the spread of foreign religions in and around Rome.

The guardian of the traditional Roman values especially the 'aristocratic men' may have been uneasy about the new religions that challenged set values (of Roman society) like the honorable man's sober guidance to his family. Did Paul subtly want "submission of wives" a family knowing this context?¹⁵ Though Paul's strategy may be objectionable to us, yet that was his way of contextualizing the Gospel or his way to gain favors and avoid controversy with the Roman aristocracy at the very outset of Christianity at Rome.

On the other hand, a critical and exegetical analysis of Ephesians 5: 18-33 reveals those Paul talks of mutual submission and love for both husband and wives. In vs. 25 he says that husbands ought to love their wives up to the extent of giving their own life away, as Christ gave his life for the Church. The word used for love in this context is *agape*, which is also referred as 'Divine love' or 'Godly love'

In addition, the selected word, verse and passage should be interpreted in relation to the surrounding clauses and the whole Bible as a whole. For example, many interpret Eph. 5:

¹⁵ Craig S. Keener, *Paul, Women and Wives, Marriage and Women's Ministry in the Letters of Paul*, Massachusetts: Hendrickson. Inc. 2001. 146-147.

22 “Wives submit yourselves to your husbands” while ignoring verse 21, which is addressed to both men and women: Submitting yourselves to one another out of reverence for Christ. Or ignoring I Cor.7: 13-16, which teaches mutual submission and full equality of husbands and wives.

c. Learning in silence: I Tim. 2: 9-15

Various people for various goals have interpreted I Timothy 2: 11. It has been used by traditional Christians to silence and also curtail the role of women in the church. This text was probably misunderstood because certain people read it out of context or they interpreted the said text without its socio-cultural setting. Silence could also mean here: learn basic foundations of Christian faith and then speak.¹⁶ Although we know that silence was one of the ways to learn, some teachers “purportedly required long periods of silence from their pupils, probably as a form of moral discipline.”¹⁷

This silence, in the context of Ephesians meant for particular group of women who needed to learn before they start teaching people. In no way, Paul intends this to be a universal command for all the Churches, meaning women should not speak at all or teaching the churches.

In these brief examples we find that the message of the text is determined by the goal of the interpreters. Interpretation of the biblical texts should be done using all the exegetical and analytical tools available at hand. The true and original meaning

of the biblical text can only be extracted when we thoroughly investigate the *sitz im leben* (life setting) of the author and the original hearers of the biblical texts. We also know that determination of the life setting of all the biblical texts may not be possible. But at those instances where the original life setting is blurred, the interpreter should also pass on this blurred picture to the hearers rather than giving his or her own understanding.

Conclusion

Having discussed so much, we are startled at the fact that we have not progressed so far in overcoming the ideology of patriarchy, which is like a demon hovering in the air, awaiting its opportunity to seize us and wreak oppressive havoc in our lives that holds us in bondage. The context of our day in all its diversity of oppression (culture, religions) demands the re-reading and re-interpretation of the biblical text. Nagas claim to follow the Bible, yet fail to apply its principles to their own situation.

Let us not impose our prejudiced ideas into the Bible instead ask how the Bible speaks and relates to our every day experiences. Let us not go to the Bible with anger, accusations, prejudices and criticism, but in humility with openness to learn from it, be corrected and be liberated from all bondage of life.

¹⁶ Paul in I Cor. 14:34-35 means the same, where he tells women 10 keep silent. In this context Paul addresses a particular context in Corinth where a group of women caused confusion in the Church. In vs 31 he says, “prophesy one by one”, or keep silent when there is no interpreter V. 29 (addressing men in this context).

¹⁷ *Op.cit.*, Paul, Women and wives. P. 107 Also Diogenes Laertius. Lives of Eminent Philosophers. 8.1.10 claims that Pythagoras required silence from his pulpits for their first five years while using the same term here.

TRANSGRESSING THE BOUNDARIES: REREADING THE STORY OF VASHTI IN THE CONTEXT OF QUEST FOR WOMEN'S IDENTITY

Atula Tzudir

Introduction

As I started my theological journey I questioned myself about my own identity, and about how women in the Bible, particularly in the Old Testament have been portrayed. From my study I found out that the identity of women were mostly distorted and misrepresented and this brought to my query on whether such distorted identities can be reinterpreted and re-read. Among many, the identity of Queen Vashti in the Book of Esther always held my interest. With different feminist methodologies coming up I began my search for the real identity in the book of Esther and came with the answer that such methodologies will help me to find my answer to the questions that I have been trying to find. Hence, this paper aims to transcend the barriers of the traditional interpretation of Vashti and uplift her as a liberative paradigm for women.

Issues Involved in Biblical Hermeneutics

The formation of both the Old and the New Testaments was a social event of the faith of the communities of Israel and the early Church. The writers of the various Books acted as the

representatives of these faith communities and their concern was to articulate the faith of the community they were presenting and at the same time making use of their own thinking pattern and literary skills.¹ The writers and interpreters even today cannot escape from the dominant ideology of the community they are brought up in.

Firstly, the meaning of a piece of writing is seldom clearly self-evident. This is especially true for the Bible, written for people who lived in a very different cultural and historical setting. The text must be under consideration regarding who was the writer? To whom was the author writing? What was the cultural-historical setting of the writer? What was the meaning of the words used at the time of the writing? What was the purpose for the author's writing and why was he saying it the way he said it? And most important of all what does this mean for believer in the contemporary Church?² In interpretation, all understanding requires a framework or context within which to interpret. Hermeneutics cannot be limited to the grammatical -historical techniques that help the interpreter understand the original meaning of the text.³ The meaning of a text is not exhausted by what the author intended or what the text says, whether the author explicitly intended it or not. It is also what the readers today understand as part of the dynamic meaning of the text within their own historical, cultural and religious context.⁴ For the text to become alive and useful for us it must have the capability to give strength and meaning to ones life. The Bible becomes the Word of God when it speaks to us and inspires in us a positive change.

Further the biblical interpretation is not just a religious matter within the Christian community but it also has significant

¹ Joseph Pathrapankal, *Text and Context: In Biblical Interpretation* (Bangalore: Dharmaram Publication, 1993), 7.

² David S. Dockery, *Christian Scripture: An Evangelical Perspective on Inspirations, Authority and Interpretation* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publisher, 1995), 159.

³ *Ibid.*, 159.

⁴ Joseph Pathrapankal, 6.

political implication. The Bible can be used as an instrument of domination, or it can also be interpreted to work for liberation. We should keep in mind that biblical interpretation is never only limited to religious matter but rather the whole process of formation, canonization and transmission of the Bible have always been soaked with the issues of authority and power.⁵ What is written does not represent the majority consensus but rather what those writers in power thought to be right and acceptable. The prime meaning of the text is not behind the author, its original social settings, or even in the text itself. Meaning is rather in front of the text.⁶

The Scripture has its limitation in its social settings and contexts and we should be aware that power is involved in interpreting what the truth is. The interpretation of the Bible reflects the western dualistic understanding of human nature and destiny.⁷ There are questions of who are the interpreters of the text and its truth, what lays behind the text, what is the context of the text, all these are important issues, which get in the way of understanding the text. Therefore biblical hermeneutics is not just sitting and reading what the text says as right but we need to investigate and explore in depth to find out the hows, and whys of a particular text.

Feminist Hermeneutics

Bible has been accepted as a source of norm of inspiration throughout the centuries with the message of God's act of liberation in history. But today feminist theologians question the Bible as having androcentric languages and characters that dominates and oppresses women in the text. Therefore a re-reading of the Bible is important. In order to reclaim the Bible as normative and authoritative, women claim that there are

⁵ Kwok Pui-Lan, *Discovering the Bible in the Non-Biblical World* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1995), 8-9.

⁶ Robert Grant & David Tracy, *A Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Fortress press, 1984), 159-160.

⁷ Kwok Pui-Lan, 11.

certain texts and traditions, which have been critical of patriarchy. Therefore, rather than relinquishing its androcentric language, they seek to reconstruct the history of women and reclaim women's biblical heritage.⁸

In interpretation we have to search for rhetorical clues and allusion that indicate the reality about which texts are silent. Rather than taking androcentric texts as informative and objective reports of events and histories. We have to understand them as social constructions by men and for men. Therefore there is the need to read the 'silences' of women, which are not indicated by the text directly.⁹

Feminists have evolved polyvalent approaches to reading the Bible. A critical feminist hermeneutics of liberation focuses on the process of biblical interpretation that can fight the oppressive elements and at the same time work as a liberating function in women's lives and struggles. Their overall method is essentially an individual's theological perspective on the biblical traditions that determines ones hermeneutical approach to the text.¹⁰ Jonathan Culler classifies feminist reading process into three "levels" or "moments."¹¹ At the first "level," the criticism is focused on the concern of the woman character and her experiences. The second "level" of feminist criticism aims to make readers - men and women - question the

⁸ Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God - talk*.

⁹ Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, "Remembering the Past in Creating the Future: Historical-Critical Scholarship and Feminist Biblical Interpretation," in *Feminist Perspectives on Biblical Scholarship*, ed. Adela Yarbro Collins (Chico, California: Scholars Press, 1985), 60.

¹⁰ Some presuppose that the Bible is permeated with patriarchy and therefore develop a rejectionist stance. On the other hand, some still believe that the Bible itself can offer a critique of patriarchal domination and hence develop a revisionary approach. Cf. Joseph Abraham, *Re-reading the Old Testament: A Study of Feminist Readings of Gen 1-3*, 41.

¹¹ Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* (London: Routledge & Kegars Paul, 1983), 43-64.

liberating and political assumptions on which their readings have been based. In the third “level,” women readers explore alternative readings.¹²

Background of the Book of Esther

Throughout all recorded Jewish history, men had the absolute power and authority in society, homes, politics, whereas women tended the home and the babies. The book of Esther also talks about an empire ruled by absolute power, where imperial laws are irreversible, and the King as a personification of that absolute power more generally as a male, the patriarchal authority in relation to females dealing with those who dare to disobey.¹³

Women in the world of the Persian diaspora were essentially powerless and marginalized members of society. Even if they belonged to the dominant culture, they could not grasp power, as a man could. Whatever power they could attain was through the manipulation of men, the holders of power. In this sense the exiled Jews could identify with the woman as marginalized person, where power could be obtained only through ones’ wits and talents.¹⁴ Women were under the control of men, and they scoffed

¹² *Ibid.*, 51.

¹³ Bea Wylej, “Esther: The Incomplete Emancipation of a Queen,” in *A Feminist Companion to Esther, Judith and Susanna*, ed., Athalya Brennar (Sheffield: Academic Press 1995), 115. (here after referred as FCEJS).

¹⁴ By astutely using her beauty, charm and political intelligence, and by taking one well-placed risk, Esther saves her people, brings about the downfall of their enemy, and elevates her kinsman to the highest position in the kingdom. The second unique aspect of the Hebrew Book of Esther is the absence of any overt religious element. Many commentators have argued that religious beliefs, such as a belief in God’s protection of the chosen people are present (4:14). This argument may be valid: However it remains true that the presence of God is conspicuously absent. Jewish identity seems to be primarily ethic not religious. It is when Esther is that makes her Jewish, rather than what she practices or believes. This indicates that the audience

at those who were bold, direct, aggressive and disobedient. The exemplary women were those who were unassuming, quietly persistent and who gained power through the love they inspired in men. These women lived almost vicariously, subordinating their needs and desires to those of others.¹⁵

The Book of Esther narrates the way in which Esther, a Jewish maiden, became Queen of Ahasuerus, King of Persia. The events of the book of Esther took place during the reign of Ahasuerus (486-465 BC)¹⁶. The book presents three distinct voices that warrant disobedience, three timeless voices of patriarchy with which one should not comply: those that are abusive and humiliating, those motivated by fear of widespread insubordination, and those that work to eliminate all who challenge authority.¹⁷

The stories of Vashti and Esther received significant reinterpretation in the light of contemporary concern over the status of women in church and society. Vashti in later Judeo-Christian tradition was despised for her disobedience to her husband, though she shows remarkable courage in refusing to demean herself before some drunken men.¹⁸ According to

for the book was primarily in the Diaspora, where certain religious practices, such as worship in the temple, were simply not possible, and Jewish ethnic identity was in danger of disappearing in the great melting pot of the ancient Near East. Cf. Sidnie White Crawford, “Esther,” *Women in Scripture: A Dictionary of Named and Unnamed women in the Hebrew Bible, the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books and the New Testament*, ed., Carol Meyers et al. (New York: Houghton Wifflin Company, 2000), 75-77.

¹⁵ Mary Gendler, as quoted by Diana Lipton, “The Woman’s Lot in Esther,” *Bodies, Lives, Voices: Gender in Theology*, 135-136.

¹⁶ Merwin Breneman, *The New American Commentary: Ezra, Nehemiah & Esther* (Nashville: Broadman&Holman pub. 1989), 278.

¹⁷ Karol Jackowski, “Holy Disobedience In Esther,” *Theology Today* XLV/4 (January 1989): 407.

¹⁸ Barbara J. Machaffie, *Her Story: Women in Christian Tradition* (London: A & C Black, 1986), 10.

Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel, though figures of contrasts like Vashti, the first wife of King Ahasuerus who rejected men, were replaced by Esther, disappeared from view in the Bible, and it must be recovered through our own history.¹⁹

The context where the identity of Woman was formulated must be kept in mind as we attempt to do the exegetical study.

Exegetical Study of Esther 1:1-2

The opening verses of the book describe about a one hundred and eighty days feast given by the King in the third year (484 B.C.) of his reign. His guests were princes and nobles from all realms who came for a successive relay for a period of six months to enjoy the King's favour and to be impressed by the King's court and to admire the majesty of his imperial person. The motive of the banquet was to exhibit the king's wealth and power, but it ended with ironic consequences.²⁰

The king's Honour and Power (Vv. 1-10)

The display of his riches in the first section is mirrored by the display of Vashti at the beginning of the second section along with the second banquet's guest list (v.5) which is mirrored by the ranking and totality of those affected by Vashti's wrong (v. 16) and by the King's new law (v.20). The King's intention is to "show off the glory of his wealth in v.4 and the beauty of his wife and queen in v. 11. She was meant to be on display as his greatest status symbol during the grand finale of his double celebration. The King commanded her to perform, to confirm her role as the obedient, beautiful "pleasing" queen. The purpose of the King is to honour himself. Vashti's episode describes a complete and unexpected blow to the King's honour. The display of Vashti's beauty was meant to be the highest moment of the

¹⁹ Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel, *A Land Flowing with Milk and Honey: Perspectives on Feminist Theology* (New York: Crossroad, 1986), 198.

²⁰ Merwin Breneman, "Esther," *The New American Commentary*, Vol. 10, 307.

series of feasts, the final exhibition of the King's royal treasury. Her refusal effectively undermines the purpose of the half-year celebration and potentially disrupted the social order across the empire. It was perceived by males in position of control as a global threat to their honour. She had publicly disobeyed not only as queen but also as representative wife.

The "nobles-officials" and "military leaders" present in the banquet indicate the elite of the army and princes who came from all over the empire, in order to see these luxuries. His feast was exclusively for the elite who were all men. This clearly indicates the importance given to men. This feast is not just majestic; it is also very male since in the following verse Queen Vashti also gave a banquet. Vashti the queen entertained the women in a separate feast of similar magnificence. Ahasuerus' excessive drinking (of wine) confused his brain and he ordered his chamberlains to bring in and exhibit his wife before his intoxicated guests. Herodotus tells us that Macedonian ladies introduced to a similar banquet in Darius' days were basely insulted.²¹ The kingdom is so secure that all its high officials can have feasts at the King's party and then he directs his attention to the other strata of his royal dominion, namely "all the people who were found in the acropolis of Susa, from the greatest to the least" that covers several classes of people within the social order, but excluding women. This is confirmed in v.9 where the King throws this party not out of his goodness of heart but in order to secure the next strata of the social order.

V.9: The phrase "Queen Vashti also gave a banquet" depicts that a separate banquet for the women was held in the same house. Here the word "separate" can mean "unequal" because the royal house where "the women" assembled are not really theirs, but the property of king Ahasuerus.²² The main banquet excluded the presence of women because they were considered as inferior and unworthy to celebrate and share equally with

²¹ *Ibid.*, 337.

²² Bruce W. Jones, "Two Misconceptions about the Book of Esther," *CBQ XXXIX/2* (April 1977), 173.

the men. This dichotomy of feasts establishes an emphasis on sexuality and gender roles, which the king makes explicit when he “commanded the seven eunuchs who served King Ahasuerus as chamberlains to bring queen Vashti before the king with her royal crown in order to show the peoples and praises her beauty, for she was fair to behold.”

V.10: King Ahasuerus was in high spirits, which probably indicates that he was at least partly inebriated. In Hebrew anthropology the “heart” is the seat of the will and of thought. The expression “good of heart” means to be in an expansive and happy mood. But when the condition is brought on by alcohol, it also implies the impairment of judgment.²³

Vashti’s Refusal to the King (Vv. 11-22)

V.11: Having displayed his wealth and generosity, the King now sends the eunuchs²⁴ for his beautiful wife ordering her to wear the royal crown.

In those days the King had the advantage of searching for fair young virgins, whose only consideration was to please him. Consulting her was like consulting an animal, what mattered was her beauty.²⁵

²³ Frederic Bush, “Esther,” *WBC, Vol. 9*, 349.

²⁴ In Esther the term “syr” has a polysemantic range of meaning and referents, designating four kinds of Persian royal officials who were eunuchs: eunuchs in charge of the harem (Esth 2:3, 14-15), eunuch attendants of the queen (4:4-5), eunuch guards of the king’s private apartment (2:21; 6:2) and eunuch attendants of the king. (1:10, 12, 15; 6:14; 7:9). The polysemantic nature of “syr” encompasses their physical condition of eunuchs and their official position of royal attendants. Cf. Gordon H. Johnston, “syr.” Cf. *The New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, Vol. 3, ed., Willem A. Van Gimeren. (Nashville: Paternoster Press, 1997), 293.

²⁵ Letha Scanzoni & Nancy Hardesty, *All were Meant to be: A Biblical Approach to Womens Liberation* (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1975), 93.

V.12: The Hebrew text gives no reason or justification for Vashti’s refusal of a direct command from the King. The King known to be impulsive and cruel enough to kill anyone, who defied him or gave him advice that went against his will, became furious.²⁶ The text does not state whether the king intends to display Vashti in the nude, but its emphasis on Ahasuerus drunkenness when he summoned Vashti suggests that his intentions were less honourable.

Therefore Vashti’s refusal to the king was commented upon by most of the scholars that she may have known of his intent and so refused to be exhibited. Ahasuerus on consulting his chief counselors deposed her. The queen’s refusal to come at the King’s bidding marks the first and only point in the narrative where the royal impetus is brought low, just when his 187 daylong demonstrations of his honour and power are about to come to its final climax.²⁷ The King could have been furious because the queen did not fulfill his whims or refused to appear in the presence of the officers. The King and the officers could take this refusal as a serious offence.

Vv. 17-22: The first term, which deserves attention, is the verb usually translated, “wronged” which means that Queen Vashti had similarly “wronged” King Ahasuerus by disgracing him at a crisis moment of royal vulnerability.

Confronted with a new case the King reached out for advice from his experts. Memucan, one of the court officials understood the boldness of the queen as questioning not only the King’s position, but also of all the men’s position, therefore he proposed that Queen Vashti be punished by making a law to, banish and strip her of her royal status. Her transgression was that of a “woman.” That she also functioned as the queen was of lesser significance. Most surprising is his repeated emphasis on Vashti’s womanhood, when he ponders (v. 17) what the noble

²⁶ Merwin Breneman, *The New American Commentary*, 308.

²⁷ Timothy K. Beal, “Tracing Esther’s Beginning,” *A Feminist Companion to Esther, Judith and Susanna*, 95.

women throughout the empire would eventually use as justification for their own disobedience.

The banishing of Vashti was the first step in redressing her as wrong. The next step was the formulation of a law, which would prevent the effect of her act. The purpose of the proposed edict, in v.20 is that “all women will give honour to their husbands.” Disobedience²⁸ was rectified by honour and the nuance of obedience is confirmed again in v.22 where each husband is given the authoritative position of “ruler” in his own home.²⁹ According to George A.F. Knight, “was not everyman

²⁸ Disobedience and obedience are established as major motifs in the book. It is about an empire ruled by absolute power, where imperial laws are irreversible. It is also about how the king who personifies that absolute power, and the ruling class around him deal with those who dare to disobey. It also narrates the anti-Jewish pogrom ordained, and sanctioned by the state. But, by then the Persian Empire is already in a state in which executive power is established by way of subjugating a whole “class” of society. The absolute power in the Persian Empire is established as a response to the disobedience of one individual.

²⁹ This proposal reflects an analogical relationship among various social slots. For example, children respect their parents, their wives, and their husbands.

Fathers act honourably over their families as chiefs do over tribes or as elders over kin-groups. Kings become the archetypal human head, and king honour functions as the archetype of father-honour or husband honour. In Esther, the king’s edict is sent out to ensure that every man will be “ruler over his own household” (v.22). In the face of an incipient revolt of the women, the king takes official measures to reassert the husbands authority. The Persians were liberal in granting cultural and religious autonomy to the various peoples living under their rule, so that even royal decrees were promulgated in various languages. When a marriage took place between people of different people of different ethnic background, the mother’s language would normally prevail in the home and tend to become the language of the children. Nehemiah explicitly complains that when some Jews married foreign wives, their children spoke the language of their mothers (Neh 13:24-24) Ahasuerus’ edict was designed to make the fathers’ language dominant in the home which shows the superiority of men.”

already a ruler in his own house in ancient Persia?”³⁰ So evidently the writer of the book is scoffing at the dominance of the male over the female, in a land where women were treated as chattels.

This exposed Memucan’s deep concern. The noble women would hardly refer to the queen as “Vashti” but rather as “the queen”: for him as a man, however “Vashti” is dangerous precisely because she is a woman rather than because of her queenship.³¹ Since she refuses to be degraded to the position of concubine says Bickerman,³² Vashti should not appear before the King. The text certainly does not say that she was dead because the death penalty was reserved for those who appeared uninvited before the King and that precisely is what she did not do. Many commentators however understand her sentence to be a death sentence. A new queen then was to be appointed, who was not like Vashti with a well-developed sense of dignity and boldness, rather someone better, for whom only obedience is part of her character.³³

The request for Vashti’s presence at the banquet is a crude form of male chauvinism, and the reaction to her refusal is even more chauvinistic, where the courtiers magnify Vashti’s disobedience into a crime against every husband in the empire. Vashti refused to be men’s sexual object and her husband’s toy.³⁴

Thus, the message conveyed here is loud and clear where bold, direct, and aggressive women are not tolerable, since they

³⁰ G. A. F. Knight, *Esther, Song of Songs, Lamentations: Introduction and Commentary* (London: SCM Press, 1955), 29.

³¹ Bea Wylar, “Esther: The Incomplete Emancipation of a Queen,” *A Feminist Companion To Esther, Judith and Susanna*, 118

³² Elias Bickerman, *Four Strange Books of the Bible: Jonah, Daniel, Koheleth, Esther* (New York: Schocken Books, 1967), 186.

³³ Bea Wylar, “Esther: The Incomplete Emancipation of a Queen,” *A Feminist Companion To Esther, Judith And Susanna*, 119.

³⁴ Alice Laffey, *An Introduction to the Old Testament: A Feminist Perspective* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 216.

threaten the power of patriarchy, rather the worthy women are those who are Unassuming, quietly feeble and who gain power through the love they inspire in men.

Interpretation of the Identity of Vashti

Vashti's story is a common story that happens with women who are marginalized. No commentators mention any significant issues of translation or textual variants in the first chapter. Though Vashti as a person is always implied as representing something negative, however Vashti's name conveys something else.³⁵ The opening verse that reads, "in the days of Ahasuerus who reigned over 127 provinces from India to Ethiopia..." is a statement about universal sovereignty.³⁶ The static description of the kingdom, palace, and guests in Vv.1-9 signifies the status of the kingdom. Social distinction is seen in the superior status that demands obedience of the vassal, client, wife, child and slave who are under authority. The hierarchy is easily weakened when King's subordinates refuses to comply with his demands. When denied, the claim of status one

³⁵ The name "Vashti" which comes from the Persian word Vashista ("best"), is unattested in extra biblical sources." Most likely, Vashti is not a proper name, as most kings in the Ancient Near East had more than one wife, and Persian rulers were often noted for having harems, it is likely that Vashti was the "best" or "first" wife: she is called queen in the text, which is an honour usually reserved for the first wife. Cf. Lewis Bayles Paton, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Esther*, 15.

³⁶ C. Moore suggests that if this formula identifies with Xerxes the generic name Ahasuerus (lit "chief of rulers") refers to. It is true that more than one Xerxes reigned in Persia. There are several inscriptions that follow the name of the known king, and with the descriptions of the extent of his reign. But the identity of the king is not in question, the extend of his sovereignty is.

Herodotus (1:134) states that the Persians ascribed national honour according to the geographical extent of an empire's dominion. Carey A. Moore, "Esther, book of" *ABD*, Vol. II, 65.

becomes a mere object of vanity, of ridicule, and contempt.³⁷

Traditional Interpretation

Traditionally within both Christian and Jewish circle, Queen Vashti is seen as an unsuccessful heroine in an early struggle for women's dignity. There are many ways of reading the story of Vashti. Readers throughout history have tended to ignore Vashti and characters like her in the biblical texts.

According to Elsa Tamez the old anti-women custom of Hebrew culture is acknowledged as sacred, and because certain text hold to the biblical principles to prove the marginalisation of women as natural in daily life reinforces women's subordinate position.³⁸ Seldom, do they talk about Hagar, who is a "negative model."³⁹ Vashti is a negative model in this regard. Women who do not fit the model that the patriarchal society holds as acceptable roles to follow tend to be downplayed in the text.

Thus when women read the Bible, they come up against the problem of the clear marginalisation in the various passages of scriptures.⁴⁰

Some rabbis thought that she had been asked to appear with only the crown, that is nude (1:11). In Rabbinic tradition her motivation for refusing Ahasuerus' command had nothing to do with noble virtues such as modesty.

³⁷ J. Pitt Rivers, *Honour and Social Status in Honour and Shame: The Values of Mediterranean Society*, ed., J.G.Peristiany (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1965), 22.

³⁸ Elsa Tamez, "Women's Rereading of the Bible," *Feminist Theology from the Third World: A Reader*, 192-193.

³⁹ Kwok Pui Lan, "Racism and Ethnocentrism in Feminist Biblical Interpretation," *Searching the Scriptures: A Feminist Introduction*, ed., Elisabeth Schiessler Fiorenza (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1993), 105.

⁴⁰ Maria Clara Bingemer, "Women in the Future of the Theology of Liberation," *Feminist Theology from the Third World: A Reader*, 310.

The second Targum (2:24,27;2:37,30) says the King commanded her to appear naked wearing only the crown.⁴¹ Such walking naked entailed double shame as part of the socialization process in Israel; it involves awareness that public nakedness was inappropriate and unacceptable.⁴² Midrash Esther Rabbah was not sympathetic to the fate of the queen. Panim Aherim states that she was killed not because of her actions but because she would become a role model of a rebellious wife and threaten the dominance of the husband throughout the realm.⁴³

There were only few instances among the traditional interpreters that show Vashti in a more favourable light. In one case, she fights against the humiliation of being displayed naked without the text making any moral judgment against her.⁴⁴ Within the Christian tradition, Vashti has always been depicted as the one who wronged the King, and not the other way round. Martin Luther advised husbands whose wives were disobedient, "If she still refuse, get rid of her, take an Esther and let Vashti go, as King Ahasuerus did."⁴⁵ Thus Vashti is depicted as a rebellious queen in all the traditional interpretation; the label given to her has survived till today. It is only when interpretation is done through new perspectives that we can go beyond these traditional interpretations.

Interpreting Vashti as a Feminist Heroine

While Rabbinic tradition was almost consistently derogatory in

⁴¹ As quoted by Lewis B. Paton, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Esther* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1908), 22.

⁴² L. M. Bechtel, "Shame as a Sanction of Social Control in Biblical Israel: Judicial, Political and Social Shaming," *JSOT* 49 (1991), 76.

⁴³ As quoted by Bronner "Esther Revisited: An Aggadic Approach," *A Feminist Companion To Esther, Judith and Susanna*, 190.

⁴⁴ Esther Rabbah .14.

⁴⁵ Carey A. Moore, *Women in Scripture: A Dictionary of Named and Unnamed Women in the Hebrew Bible, the Apocryphal/ Deuterocanonical Books and the New Testament*, 167.

its depiction of Vashti. Today her rebellion has made her a new role model for the contemporary woman.⁴⁶ Vashti is a marginalized character par excellence.

The image one derives of Vashti is dependent upon ones' starting point. This can be seen from the patriarchal perspective of interpretations, which was quick to assign much blame and negativity to Vashti than to the King. And yet, in all these texts and interpretations, one can find something new.⁴⁷ Vashti's refusal for feminist means more today than ever before, given the work in the later half of the twentieth century toward the recovery of women's voices and women's ways of knowing and interpreting the world, which leads to a new way of reading the Bible.⁴⁸

In interpretation we must see that there are structural problems that go beyond individual actions. The foundations and constructs of society must also be challenged.⁴⁹ Vashti then becomes a symbol of resistance and a symbol of recapturing ones' voice. The story of Vashti is rewritten in the hearing, the taking to heart, and changes wrought when those by saying no give us the power to say yes.⁵⁰ Vashti speaks for the powerless, those disenfranchised by gender, race, sexual orientation, or

⁴⁶ M. Gendler, "The Restoration Of Vashti," *The Jewish Woman*, ed., E. Koltun (New York: Schochen Books, 1976), 241-247.

⁴⁷ The Bible in many ways are alien and antagonistic to modern women's identity, yet in other ways, it inspires and compels that identity" Cf. Renita Weems, "Reading her Ways through the struggle," *Stony the Road we Trod: African American Biblical Interpretation*, 59.

⁴⁸ A reading of the scripture that truly liberates responds to the situation that has motivated the reading. Cf. Elsa Tamez, "Women's Re-reading of the Bible," *Feminist Theology from the Third World: A Reader*, 190.

⁴⁹ Ranjini Rebera, "Challenging Patriarchy," *Feminist Theology from the Third World: A Reader*, 106.

⁵⁰ Gary David Comstock, *Gay Theology without Apology* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1993), 57-58.

any other characteristic upon which the powerful build exclusions. Vashti was confronted with something she considered to be injustice, thus she refused to participate in her own oppression.

Others applaud Vashti's boldness viewing her as heroic, the first woman in the Bible even though a "pagan" to refuse to be treated as either a chattel or a sex object. She was a queen who in the ideology of male dominance sets for women a fine example of female independence, assertiveness and a high concept of self worth. Vashti's action marks her as a threat to the status quo of patriarchal power, and thus she is eliminated and banished. In tradition it was not uncommon to assume "arrogant" wives as guilty.⁵¹

Gender related issues emerge strongly in the Book of Esther. Its heroine is a woman who offers a particular model for success, as one who opposes. Opposition works subtly behind the scenes, ultimately strengthening the power structure. Thus, in Vashti a number of modern feminist writers find their heroine. On the other hand the man, the King who banishes Vashti, receives no sympathy from the writer, he eats, drinks and follows the advice of others. His courtiers fear that Vashti will become a model of resistance for all wives. Others have pointed justifiably to the humorous tone here. The King's decision to find replacement for Vashti is introduced by an erotic suggestion in 2.1 as "the King remembered what Vashti used to do for him". Here what the King misses is not the person but a function. This leads to the understanding of the King's shallowness, which is portrayed as the stupid, impotent King.⁵² Thus Ahasuerus becomes a passive and manipulated tool in the Esther narrative. In

⁵¹ A misogynistic Norwegian tale of the husband who kills his shrew wife and throws her in the river, where her body floats upstream. In Norwegian tale "The Old woman against the stream" a tale collected by P.S. Asbjorsen & J. Moe, *Norwegian Folktales* (New York: Viking, 1960), 112-14.

⁵² Niditch, *Esther: Folklore, Wisdom, Feminism and Authority, A Feminist Companion to Esther Judith and Susanna*, 33-34.

Ahasuerus we see a good example of a bad and foolish ruler.⁵³

This command is not important merely as a royal decree, but as a means by which Ahasuerus seeks to turn his queen into a spectacle of female sexuality. Queen Vashti is sacrificed on the altar of the King's machismo. Vashti is the first, but not the last, to transgress the boundaries respected and established by the patriarchal society of the Book of Esther.⁵⁴ The King now at the height of his glory gave the party and sent for Vashti to show the people.⁵⁵ The King's request here is another attempt to assert his secure control over every aspect of his reign-that is, his secure positions the true patriarch and the absolute centre of the entire social order. In all this Vashti was treated exclusively as an object. She was to be brought by the eunuchs and stared at by the King and other men for pleasure.

The King's order is an attempt to secure his position as the absolute centre of the entire social order. Entertaining the men would not only affect the human dignity of Vashti, but also her vocational role within the hierarchic structure of the empire. To the King, Vashti was only a sex object to be displayed. For him there was no question of Vashti's position as queen, she was merely a woman who had to comply with the wishes and whims of a man who had power over her.

Vashti was willing to give up her status and position as queen in order to do what was right. Her dignity was of more

⁵³ S. Talmon, "Wisdom in the Book of Esther," *VT* 13(1963), 419-55, 450-51, 441-443.

⁵⁴ www.english.upenn.edu/~lwamer/esth.html

⁵⁵ As the king was at the height of glory, the people were supposed to get anything they wanted at the party. They probably believed that Ahasuerus was a generous king. If he refused, the people at the party would think that he was lying, thereby he would lose the respect of all these people who he had worked so hard to impress. He therefore sends the order to Vashti that she should appear in front of him wearing only the royal crown. Cf. www.torah.org/learning/vomtov/purim/5756/vol.1No.68.html

importance than her ties in the society. Perhaps Vashti knew in her heart that woman's right to assert herself is fundamentally more important than being the queen of the realm.⁵⁶ The King suffered from his obsession with manipulative power while Vashti exhibited the power of Tightness.⁵⁷ Vashti as queen functions autonomously within the sphere of wombs, however, the extend of power and authority swiftly becomes clear. The moment she opposes her husband, the King, the entire machinery of the status descends on her head, and she loses all status and power.⁵⁸

The reason that Vashti is portrayed as evil is the embellishment of myth, legend and tradition that has no textual basis. The identity of Vashti as arrogant does not lie with the problem of the Bible but what it teaches. While suggestions are made justifiably to change the text itself in order to make it more modern and readable and less sexist, they could hardly object to altering the way it is taught so that Vashti can be seen less brave or at least not evil in her defiance of the King.⁵⁹

Vashti has become one of the favourite heroines of the Jewish feminist movement. The maligned queen as a positive role model, dared to disregard the royal decree that would have her displayed as a sex object before King Ahasuerus' rowdy drinking companions. Her ultimate downfall should accordingly be viewed as martyrdom to the cause of sexual equality.

The Construction of the Identity of Vashti

Culture and society construct the identity of women by inscribing the body of women, as docile and submissive. The context in which Vashti lived, and the present context may differ, but the

⁵⁶ G. A. F. Knight, *Esther, Song of Songs, Lamentations: Introduction and Commentary*, 28.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 308.

⁵⁸ Sidnie White Crawford, "The Book of Esther," *The New Interpreters Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes, Vol. III, ed.*, Leander Eeck et al., (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1988), 883.

⁵⁹ [www.wujs.org.il/activist/activities/\(programs/purim/esther/html](http://www.wujs.org.il/activist/activities/(programs/purim/esther/html)

objectification of women still exist. The patriarchal power continues to shape and influence the community. A woman is regarded as weaker despite her capabilities. Many a time, she is not looked at as another human being with qualities, but rather labelled as a mere "woman." Her body influences her identity in relation to other persons in the community.

The models of behaviour for male and female are seen in the Book of Esther. It is clear that society rewards men for being direct and aggressive, while it condemns women like Vashti, for equivalent behaviour. In one sense Mordecai and Vashti behave identically: both refused to debase themselves by submitting to illegitimate demands. This inspires praise of Mordecai but condemnation of Vashti.⁶⁰

Vashti in the story conceal the identity, but she is the product of patriarchal culture, she functions in relationship to the men in the world. Vashti "wins" by losing. The patriarchal society made her body, her identity, on which men exercised their power, confining her to mere objects. Vashti was not given the freedom to do what was right, because her whole life was ruled by men and her ideology regarding the roles of women.⁶¹ Every human being has the right to ones' own body, but such right was forbidden when Vashti attempted to use it in freedom. For this, she was never allowed to appear before the King and stripped off her crown. The present age still confines women's identity to an object which society can enjoy. In the political, social, economic, religious spheres, women are still perceived as incapable of accomplishing anything, except to tend homes and children.

Vashti was a victim of the Patriarchal power. When Vashti

⁶⁰ Mary Gendler, *The Restoration of Vashti*, 158.

⁶¹ Vashti was asked to appear before the king and the drunken courtier so that they might enjoy her beauty. Esther was subjected to a beautiful body where the king and all men in the harem found favour on her. In this Esther had no power to resist because of its dominant structure that forbids her to decide herself.

was ordered by the king, he expected from her perfect obedience, she was not consulted, neither was she called to be a part of the enjoyment nor share her opinion on the various aspects of the kingdom. But, she was a mere object to be shared and enjoyed.

The violence experienced by Vashti parallels the violence that women face today. Women may not be asked to appear naked or to be exposed before men, yet when they are restricted and controlled under certain assumptions and roles assigned to them, it proves similar. In all these it is the male who exerts power over the female where the female becomes a mere thing to be used and stamped upon.

Implications for Re-Reading the Identity of Vashti in Today's Context

Reading the Book of Esther with a fresh perspective moves us to realise that power has been used as instrumental in violating the identity and dignity of women. It is a fact that women are physically different from men that makes room for such violence. A new perspective of the body seeks to go beyond the socially constructed roles, and puts emphasis on the human's purpose of creation and its capability to reflect God's image in all things, calling for a celebration of differences. Thus re-reading the Bible, without the male bias becomes an important way of respecting one another and valuing the purpose of God's creation.

The traditional interpretation of the Bible is a one sided, and male dominated interpretation. Thus it is important to re-read and reinterpret the Bible from women's perspectives in order to recover fully from the hidden roles and status of women.⁶² It is hard for an individual to breakaway from tradition that has shaped their identity. Women are restricted and controlled under certain assumptions and roles assigned to them. The story of Vashti should be used as an example to challenge anything that oppresses them and limits their capabilities. Vashti

shows us that what is important is ones' dignity and self-respect. Thus, we re-read the Book of Esther and interpret it from a different perspective giving Vashti a positive identity, dominated by male identity. Doing this, results in the implication of interpreting the present women's action and roles away from traditional understanding, which will give women freedom to decide for themselves.

In re-reading we discern how the male bias interprets Vashti's role. This gives us the clue that the values of what are good and bad for women are socially constructed by patriarchy. Thus the cultural and social understanding of women as a labelled body needs to be challenged. By criticizing tradition and culture we may find elements of a positive nature, which can be used to empower them. Tradition was made by people and is for people thus we need to be critical and challenge those traditions that are biased. Patriarchal values must not be assigned, to understand and judge the actions and roles of women as either bad or good.

The story of Vashti shows us how the feminist movement began right from the time of biblical history. Today as we live in a smaller world we become more aware of our needs, each person needs to be responsible to take that step to stop injustice. Its not about waiting for others to make that first courageous step, but we must dare to stand up against what we think is wrong. Vashti transgressed the boundaries of the patriarchal structure of her time because she did not want to lose her self-respect. This implies that women must dare to be different and must come out of any oppressive structure that forbids them to move forward.

Conclusion

The identity of women is always equated with sexuality. Men looked at women as mere sex objects. This has been the culture of society everywhere. The construction of women's body as a sex object leads to exercise men's power of violence, position and power in society that results to inequality of the sexes. This has implications for women's identity because identity is

⁶² Limala Longkumer, "Women in Ministry: A Reflection From Ao Naga Women," *In God's Image* 19/4 (Dec 2000), 40.

connected to the value or worth of a person. Such conception calls us to compare the identity of Vashti, who in her time had been confined to such identities. Thus it calls for a re-reading of the identity from the feminist point of view.

Identity is the most and important issue which effects all people irrespective of age, sex and race. Unless a person is given a chance to have an identity that reflects respects and equality, no matter what that person does, people will always equate this with the identity he/she carries. Since most people respect others for ones' identity and not by one does. So no matter how much one achieves, if the identity of that person is negative in the eyes of the people, this achievement is not always acknowledged. So women's fight for a respectable identity is a basic need and right.

Women have always been ignored in the history of human kind except for few tales of women and usually those tales are negative. Women cannot accept and pretend that all the injustices exist because women are destined for it or that tradition must always be followed. The example of Vashti should inspire us to challenge oppressive authority fearless of the consequences. This re-reading of the identity of Vashti is not only to recover and unearth the true identity of Vashti alone. But it also becomes a way of indicating to us that there are other characters in the Bible whose identity have been suppressed and therefore needs to be brought out and studied critically. Furthermore, it also implies that this same method of viewing women's identity should be applied at present for women's situation and needs.

The Bible is undoubtedly patriarchal in origins and thoughts; their particular patriarchal expressions being determined by social situations and historical circumstances. Patriarchy closely associated with hierarchy, is a way of ordering reality whereby male sex is understood to be superior to the female sex. This way of understanding the variation of the identity of men and women, men are consequently depicted as more competent, responsible, braver, intelligent, more rational, better suited for management and leadership. Usually oppression is obvious in

a patriarchal culture. Role delineation makes certain attitudes, types of behaviour and occupations stereotypically acceptable for females and extols those roles while at the same time denying women other forms of behaviour considered appropriate "for men only." Sexual role stereotyping has been legitimated by many religions for thousands of years. This has affected even the present perception of women and their roles in societies.

Re-reading the Bible thus becomes a way of breaking away from the traditional and stereotyping of women's identity. The text and its stories, characters and events are looked at with perception with the aim of empowering women. Thus it brings out the identity of women, which has been suppressed by the patriarchal ideology and interpretation and it uses such images to empower women's identity today since biblical images have affected the way women has been projected in the present.

Women have had to live within the patriarchal constructed boundaries and it has not helped women to live as equal to men. Would it have helped if the Bible's traditional concept of authority and inspiration were not in question? Would it have done well if women felt they should have stuck to house keeping because that was assigned to them? There have been people who decided to transcend beyond their assigned roles, and because of which life had become easier for many other women.

In transgressing the roles and functions assigned by patriarchy, we are doing three things; firstly we are rejecting anything that obstructs a person's right and freedom. Secondly we become examples for others though it may cause scandals, pains, if we believe in ourselves we inspire people and also we make it easier for the future generation to set out in that areas. This responsibility as a woman still continues for us today, each person need to take responsibility seriously. Thirdly, by transcending anything that binds women in moving forward in their life, careers, purpose, aim, women are just claiming their rights and their identity as human beings.

The significance of the body is about a new relationship of respect and identity, where we accept the difference in each other and use these differences to bring out the best in humanity.

This respect and identity includes the whole of the community as we relate to each other, and as we struggle to understand each other. Thus the only way for a change in the identity of women is to go beyond the understanding of body as a mere objects, and understand women as a person with their own unique identity and importance.

The basic human relationship is about I-thou, but in a patriarchal structure the relationship of men to women is in terms of I-it, where men have power and women are objects for men.⁶³ Thus, what is required here is conversion of the perspective of I-it to I-thou to have right relationship. This leads to the relationship of I-thou-we, which is about community relations where we come together with others and we are made to realize that we are accountable to others as part of a particular community.⁶⁴

None should be judged by neither any preconceived ideas nor roles be forced on any person. Identity today should not be restricted within a preconceived boundary. Identity grows in its fullest form when it has freedom to thrive and explore. Each person should have the freedom to explore and grow as one chooses, no law or ideology is greater than the purpose of God's creation in God's image which can come through only by love and respect in its various forms.

⁶³ Martin Buber, *and Thou*, trans. W. Kaufman (New York: Charles Scribner & Sons, 1970), 67.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* 28-29.

WOMEN IN THE WISDOM TRADITION OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

Jekheli Kibami

Introduction

Traditionally reference to a wise person has always been to a male who is wise in the administration of social, political, or economic affairs, for instance Joseph in Egypt (Gen 41:33,39). However, an adviser or counselor at the royal court might carry out the title *chakam* 'wise' (Isa. 19:11f; Esth. 6:13; 2 Chr. 2:13; etc.). This Hebrew adjective might also mean "shrewd, clever, and prudent" (2 Sam. 13:3). The noun derived from it is *chokmah* "wisdom". It refers to the "skill in technical work" (Isa. 3:3). The Hebrew words signify not strictly a class of professional sages who were teachers of religion and ethics. *Chakam* in wisdom literature is a generic term which refers to an institution of educators and teachers who deal with theoretical as well as practical knowledge.

Athalya Brenner classifies the denotation of "wise" into-social institutions like advisers to kings and statespersons, teachers of wisdom in its wider sense; and a loose reference to crafts persons in general.¹ She further categorizes wise women

¹ Athalya Bernner, *The Israelite Women: Social Role and Literary Type in Biblical Narrative* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1985), 33.

into: the professionals, whose services can be used to advance the welfare of the community (see 2 Sam. 14 and 20); and women who are skilled in various (traditional) vocation (Jer. 9 and Exo. 35).² In its broader sense any persons who routinely perform one or more of the following tasks associated with the wisdom tradition: authorship, scribal duties (copying, collecting, editing), counseling, management of economic resources, conflict resolution, teaching and healing are sages. Thus women can be numbered among the sages because of their practice, even where specific texts cannot be attributed to them.³

This article attempts to study the representation of women in the wisdom tradition of the Old Testament, particularly referring to the portrayal of women in the biblical wisdom books of Ecclesiastes and Job.

1. The “Wise Woman” of Tekoa (2 Sam 14)

In 2 Sam. 14,⁴ Joab the chief general of king David, goes to Tekoa and commissions a wise woman from that town in order

² *Ibid*, 44.

³ If women were not normally included among those who might receive a scribal education and the training needed to become an official court scribe, author or counselor, it is in the “private domain” of the home—the arena to which patriarchal culture routinely ascribes to them, cf. Prov 31:10-31. One more group of skilled or “wise” women in the public domain of ancient Israel can be seen in Jer 9:16f; 2 Chr 35:15; and Ezek 32:16. Carole R. Fontaine, “The Social Roles of Women in the World of Wisdom”, in *Feminist Companion to the Wisdom Literature* (second series), edited by Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 25, 29.

⁴ The composition of 1 and 2 Samuel covers the centuries from the beginnings of the monarchy in Israel to the exile and the postexilic period. It may be dated to a late ninth century B.C.E. prophetic document, extending from 1 Sam-2 Kings 10. It is attributed to the northern prophetic circles. See Anthony F. Campbell and James W. Flanagan, “1-2 Samuel”, in *New Interpreter’s Bible, vol. 2* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1992), 145-159.

to initiate reconciliation between David and Absalom. Absalom fled and was in exile in Geshur after he murdered his brother Amnon who raped their sister Tamar. David their father becomes angry over Absalom’s act of murder (not his brother’s inhuman deed) “because he loved him.” (2 Sam. 13:21). Joab knows that David’s longing for his son has already overcome his anger. Joab himself cannot plead directly on Absalom’s behalf, so he approaches the problem indirectly. As it happens, his plan is quite effective (14:20-24).

The text does not supply any proper name for the *isha chokmah* “wise woman”. Brenner is of the opinion that “it may mean ‘any women who is known to be wise’, chosen at random; or ‘a certain wise woman’ whose reputation—if not by her name is well known”. The second one is more plausible, for Joab is presented as a calculating man who plots his move carefully. While recounting her (imaginary) personal story she manages to enlist David’s support by juxtaposing two principles of social order—private blood revenge, and the basic prerogative of central government to impose order through the institutional procedures of the law (vv. 12-20). This is a political matter designed to arouse David’s interested commitment. The whole affair was probably well planned by Joab; but the skill with which the woman commences to introduce David’s problem, her talent for pursuing the analogy between her troubles and the king through recurrent references to her own case is due to her. Basing on this biblical text Brenner concludes:

The wise woman can be commissioned to manipulate a person to act the way she wants him to...She can adapt easily to changes in the atmosphere, and redirects the changes according to her purpose through improvisation. In short she is adept in both rhetoric and psychology; her service can be commanded or hired (the text does not specify whether Joab did to her) in order to mediate in, or influence the course of, personal political dispute.⁶

⁵ Brenner, *op. cit.*, 34.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 35.

2. The “Wise Woman” of Abel-beth-ma’acah (2 Sam. 20:14-22)

The account in 2 Sam. 20:14-22 shows Joab in pursuit of the rebellious Sheba, the son of Bichri, a Benjamite. Sheba’s rebellion, the aftermath of Absalom’s revolt against his father David, came to an end at the northern town of Abel. This time too, Joab was involved in the proceedings: he negotiated for Sheba’s head with a local *ha chokma* “wise woman”. She is, like her predecessor, nameless.⁷ The woman asks for Joab by name and he answers readily and cooperates with her.⁸ Joab treats this wise woman seriously though unknown to him (w. 18-21). The text states that she appeared in front of “all the people”, probably either the whole congregation or the elders’ council and, using her “wisdom”, convinced them that the prevention of imminent destruction and bloodshed is more important than the obligations of hospitality. Sheba was killed and the siege stopped at once (v. 21). In this case the local wise woman has achieved the solution single-handedly, to the relief of both parties.

The woman here is widely respected: everybody listens to what she has to say, from Joab to her fellow townspeople. She convinces the assembly that it is imperative to comply with Joab’s demands, and ensures that it is carried out. She probably enjoys some kind of a unique status or reputation. Her position

⁷ Silvia Schroer and others links the two “wise” women of 2 Samuel with that of Abigail (1 Sam 25) Silvia Schroer, “Wise and Counseling Women in Ancient Israel: Literary and Historical Ideals of the Personified Hokma”, in *Feminist Companion to the Wisdom Literature* (second series), edited by Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 72. See also Brenner, *op.cit.*, 40.

⁸ In Joab’s choice of the Tekoa woman Brenner alludes that wise women were not simply bright individuals but were famous recognized professionals. “As members of an institution, they may have worn special garments which immediately identified them as practitioners of this specific occupation (which would explain Joab’s readiness to talk with the woman from Abel). *Ibid.*, 37.

is such that she can approach the assembly (of which traditionally, only men are members) and speak to it. She uses rational considerations, persuasion and rhetoric, rather than spontaneous action, and she succeeds in achieving what she has set out to do. Dianne Bergent suggests that this story be read within the context of the distrust between the tribes of northern Israel and those of southern Judah, a mistrust that eventually resulted in the secession of the north in 922 B.C.E. The cry of Sheba, “We have no portion...” (2 Sam. 20:1) is echoed in Israel at the time of the split (cf. 1 Kings 12:16).⁹ Both stories form a frame around traditions about the revolt against the Davidic monarchy.

3. The Skilled Women of Jeremiah 9:16-17

The word *chokmoth* (the plural form of the feminine noun *chobnah*) in the two cases reviewed above has been translated “wise”. The context of Jer. 9:16-21, a call for mourning, excludes the possibility of such a translation. Whereas the two “wise” women mentioned above distinguished themselves by their rhetoric, good sense and insight, the “wisdom” of the *chokmoth* (v. 16) in this passage consists of their “skill” or “cunning” as mourners.¹⁰ These women served an important function in their society, which may be related to those of the diplomatic wise women, midwives and healers, for their work in raising an outcry over the dead expressed their people’s sense of orderly ritual at important times when the stability of the community had been threatened. They could instruct their daughters and friends in this art (v. 19f). Women who took up mourning as a vocation had to learn the formulae of their trade, which were recited in funerary services and on similar occasions.

Claudia V. Camp attempts to demonstrate that these women were representatives of a non-regular but recurrent leadership

⁹ Diane Bergant, “Women in the bible: friends or foes?” *Theology Digest* 40/2 (Summer, 1993): 103-112

¹⁰ Brenner, *op. cit.*, 37.

role for women in pre-monarchic Israel. They were either historical persons or, at least could have been recognized by readers as types of such persons. She alludes that the mere existence of such a category in Israel's repertoire of female roles provides one general basis for understanding this people's ability to image wisdom as women.¹¹

4. The Portrayal of Women in the Wisdom Books of the Old Testament

The book of Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes are clubbed as "wisdom books" in the canon of the Old Testament with Sirach and Wisdom of Solomon, al o Tobith, 1 Esdras and Baruch in the Apocryphal or the Deutero-canonical books.¹² The two main types that represent divergent tendencies among sages as seen in the Bible are-the book of Proverbs (the conservative, practical, didactic, optimistic, and worldly wise);¹³ and Job and Ecclesiastes (critical even radical in its attitude to conventional beliefs, speculative, individualistic, and pessimistic).¹⁴ The current work will deal only with the portrayal of women in the latter.

¹¹ Claudia V. Camp, *Wisdom and The feminine in the Book of Proverbs* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1985), 120f.

¹² Certain passages in the book of .Psalms, Gen 37ff, and Dan 1,2,4,5 are also seen as related to wisdom school in their content and form.

¹³ The book of proverbs also presents dual pictures of women as dignified Woman Wisdom leading the young men to life; and as dangerous Woman Folly a threat to life, who leads to death. This literary device presents women as shapers of men's destiny-both life and death. Women were seen in relation to men-as a daughter, sister, wife or mother. On the one hand female deities were highly elevated. Various literatures instruct and advice the apprentice against association with particular women. All the literature is not demeaning in its portrayal of women; nonetheless the patriarchal color of the literatures cannot be underscored.

¹⁴ R. B. Y. Scott, "Proverbs. Ecclesiastes," *The Anchor Bible vol. 18* (New York: Doubleday, 1965), xviiiif.

4.1. The Book of Job

The presence of females in the book of Job is ambiguous. In the forty-two chapters of the book, male voices are presented as well as a male God. Women are mentioned in few verses (1-2; 42:7-17) and in a single verse a woman speaks. Job's unnamed wife¹⁵ appears in the prologue with two lines of speech. There is no further mention of her neither as a member of his family nor as part of his property. Her role in child bearing is subsumed though she has presumably borne twenty children. The new daughters are singled out for mention in the epilogue (42:13-15). In the book females are either present but silent, or else absent. As Lillian R. Klein, in her critical study of the text of Job aptly states:

No female voice is heard throughout the entire central poetic section.... Women do not talk but are talked about. Although the book addresses subject matter applicable to all humanity, females as well as males, the form of the book is inconsistent with reality in that the women are entirely excluded from the central, poetic portion.¹⁶

The only one identified with Satan is, Job's wife. The significance of Job's wife's, like the Satan's, is limited to the prologue. Her skepticism contrasts with Job's constancy and serves to underscore the quality of his integrity. They both seem to be trusted associates of their counterparts, associates who enjoy

¹⁵ This reflects the male bias of the literary work. It might also imply that while the role she plays in the prologue is important, her personal identity is of little significance. O perhaps both should be assumed. Biblical literature shows how failing to have a name and to pass on one's name is tantamount to not existing.

¹⁶ Lillian R. Klein, "Job and the Womb: Text about Men; Subtext about Women", in *Feminist Companion to the Wisdom Literature* (second series), edited by Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995), 187.

a degree of confidence. Perhaps they are even alter egos,¹⁷ who can make explicit (a curse) what the majestic God and the righteous Job would never even contemplate.¹⁸ Another significant feature that she has in common with the Satan is that they both consider the possibility of Job's cursing God "Do you still persist in your integrity? Curse God, and die", (2:9a).¹⁹ It is a literal repetition of what God stated earlier in 2:3; and the second part (2:9b) seems to resemble the Satan's words in 1:11 and 2:5b. Thus for Ellen von Wolde, Job's wife repeats the words of both God and the Satan and adds a new element to them, namely 'die'.²⁰ The subtle but unambiguous association of the Satan and Job's wife-evil and woman (both personified) is consistent with and reinforces the derogatory subtext woman which is conveyed in anomalies of form in an

¹⁷ Bergant proposes that if Job's wife is seen more as a foil than as an individual she takes on a different profile. This character is a literary device serving to accentuate the quality of Job's moral disposition. The person in the story closest to Job, and the one expected to be most like him is drawn in the sharpest contrast to him thus highlighting his distinctiveness. If she is viewed as his-alter ego, the outer dialogue between the two then represents Job's personal inner struggle, and his marriage counterpart stands for his other self. Dianne Bergant, *Israel's Wisdom Literature: A Liberation-Critical Reading* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 41.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 24.

¹⁹ The word curse is a euphemistic use of brk "to bless", brk is used with the sense of cursing God only seven times in the entire Bible; four of these are in Job 1:5, 11; 2:5, 9; 1 Kings 21:10, 13; Ps 10:3. The reason for the use of the opposite meaning is not clear. The thought of cursing God may have been too objectionable actually to use the maledictory language, or the author may be playing with the antithesis between bless and curse. They are both formulaic expressions that presume the legitimate use of divine power by one who is not divine. The language is performative, effecting what it describes. *Ibid.*, 22.

²⁰ Ellen van Wolde, "The Development of Job: Mrs Job as Catalyst", in *Feminist Companion to the Wisdom Literature* (second series), edited by Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield, 1995), 203.

otherwise homogenous text. These textual incongruities consistently segregate Job's wife, paradigm of women from the male world.²¹

The kind of thinking Job's wife confronts Job with, is obviously at odds with that of Job, for he declares that she is speaking "any foolish woman" (v. 10). Job's chastising response to his wife's logical conclusions of her deliberations conveys his presumptions that her words are not thought out but spontaneous. She is the only character in the entire book who speaks without verbalizing a process of reasoning. Her words are not metaphoric, like other speakers.²² However scholars like Crenshaw sees her as the one who "exacerbated his misery in imploring Job to curse God and die. Whereas God had complimented Job for holding on to his integrity, she reprimanded her husband for doing so without cause".²³ He further writes, "maintaining his integrity in the face of this deepest cut of all, Job endeavored to instruct this woman who had uttered folly at the precise moment when her husband deserved a perceptive spouse".²⁴

The author does not reveal the motivation of Job's wife for such a response to her husband's predicament. As Bergant aptly comments, this lack of detail allows for a variety of conjectures about her disposition, all of which tells more about the interpreter than about the woman herself. Her words are foolish or shameless, a disgrace to the community. Job does not say that she is foolish or shameless, but her words are (Job 2:10). This kind of characterization has established the stereotype of the well-intentioned but senseless woman whose advice cannot be followed. She is incorrectly perceived as gullible ploy of the devil, willing to take advantage of her marital relationship in order to ensnare their husbands. Thus the characterization of the woman as the temptress is reinforced. Job's wife does not stand in

²¹ Klein, *op. cit.*, 192.

²² *Ibid.* 190.

²³ Crenshaw, *op. cit.*, 103.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

favorable light regardless of how her character is understood. Neither does anyone else who offers advice to him (cf. 13:4; 16:2-3; 17:4). The point of her characterization is not the unworthiness of women but the inadequacy of any human counsel, even which come from one's most trusted ally. Bergant rightly states, "to read it as a denunciation of female integrity is to be guilty of a discrimination not found in the text itself."²⁵

The reference to Job's daughters in the epilogue should be noted. Unlike the daughters mentioned in the prologue, these women are named (though the sons are not), so that they have a specific identity. Their names (Jemimah, Keziah, Keren-happuch) all signify beauty and delicacy, features highly praised in both the ancient and the contemporary worlds (42: 14-15).²⁶ More significant is the inheritance given to them along with their nameless brothers. This is quite an unusual gesture on Job's part, since normally a woman only inherited in the absence of a male heir (Num 27:1-8). Even then the property would revert to the clan of her origin at her death, thus ensuring the integrity of its heritage.

These are both examples of Job's good fortune and not reported for the daughters' sakes. The beauty of the daughters, a traditional chauvinist concern rebounds to his (own) reputation. The fact that they have an inheritance, even one that cannot be transferred to their husbands makes them even more desirable. These beautiful but rich women would be welcome adornment in the household of their father and later, of their husbands.²⁷

The portrayal of women in this book is consistent with a patriarchal androcentric worldview. Women are perceived and

²⁵ Bergant, *Israelite Wisdom Literature...op. cit.*, 41.

²⁶ Jemimah (dove), Ke-ziah (fragrance) and Keren-happuch (horn of eye-shadow) Klein opines that they are capable of creating desire in men and are valued for it. The text discloses that masculine desire is enjoyed when its object is beautiful, desirable and unattainable maidens/daughters. Klein, *op. cit.*, 191f.

²⁷ Bergant. *Israelite Wisdom Literature...op. cit.* 3

valued from a male perspective, and they serve to enhance the male ego and reputation.

4.2. The Book of Ecclesiastes

The search for meaning in life, either it's pragmatic-optimistic or it's pragmatic-pessimistic/realistic, or both is done from the dimension of men in a patriarchal society. There is nothing in the book of Ecclesiastes about women or what is associated with women that can be interpreted in a way that enhances their dignity or intrinsic worth.²⁸ Not only is the protagonist a man (a king, 1:1,12), but the one to whom the instruction is given is addressed as "my son" (12:12). This fact excludes the possibility of a different reading. Messages are not directed at a mixed or female audience, although many are relevant for life and thinking of both genders.

Qoheleth discusses the struggles, joys, and sorrows of men (adam 1:3; 2:12; 3:22; 6:1 etc; 'ish 9:14; 12:3), of the sons, *yeled* 4:13, 15; 11:9), but not those of women or girls. Royal allusions are to kings and princes (2:8, 12; 4:13; 8:2-4; 9:14 etc.) but not to queens; the solitary (4:8) is one who has no son or brother. Women are equally paired with men only in the reference to slaves (2:7f), and the wife is mentioned in the exhortation, directed to the man, to enjoy as long as this is feasible ("Enjoy life with the wife whom you love,...that is your portion in life..." 9:9). Both grammatically and topically women are allowed an object position and not a subject position.

There are two passages wherein female imagery appears in a positive fashion. One in 11:5 which says "Just as you do not know how the breath comes to the bones in the mother's womb, so you do not know the work of God". Here the mystery of gestation to illustrate the mysterious workings of creation is shown. The other is in 12:4 where daughter appears as a metaphor for the songbird.

²⁸ Kathleen M. O'Connor, *The Wisdom Literature, Message of Biblical Spirituality 5* (Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier, 1988), 114.

In *Qoheleth* more than the general disregard for the presence of women (as in Job and others) the distorted view of women's participation in the society, their concerns in life, can be seen. *Qoheleth*'s opinion on women can be assumed in the reference—"I found more bitter than death the woman who is a trap, whose heart is snares and nets, whose hands are fetters; one who pleases God escapes her, but the sinner is taken by her," (Eccl 7:26). This verse may not be a judgment on all women, but Bergant points out that vv 27f. "shows that he does not have high regard for any woman."²⁹ According to Crenshaw:

7:23-29 juxtaposes *Qoheleth*'s vision of achieving wisdom and the stark reality of its inaccessibility. Although *Qoheleth* determined to know, explore, and search out wisdom and the sum of things, he found one good man in a thousand and no woman among all these.³⁰

However scholars like Zimmermann claims that this and other warnings and views found in *Qoheleth* stem from the author's unhappy marital experience expressed by the speaker in the first-person mode.³¹

In spite of its highly androcentric tone, the all encompassing scope suggested by the phrase "under the sun", yield a vision of inclusivity that can shatter all prejudicial social customs and structures, whether they are related to race or ethnic origin, class, or gender. "*Qoheleth* may have been a chauvinist, but the message of this book need not add support to chauvinistic proclivities," affirms Bergant.³²

²⁹ Bergant, *Israelite Wisdom Literature...op. cit.*, 119.

³⁰ Crenshaw, *op. cit.*, 127.

³¹ F. Zimmermann, *The Inner World of Qoheleth* (New York: 1973), cited by Brenner "Figurations of Women in Wisdom Literature" in *Feminist Companion to the Wisdom Literature* (second series), edited by Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995), 59. Here Brenner opines that to present it as a sweeping conclusion from personal experience is hardly complimentary to a generalized womankind.

³² Bergant, *Israelite Wisdom Literature ...op. cit.*, 119.

5. Evaluation

In our study of the wisdom tradition in Israel, women's competence and contribution to both private and public world of the wise is expressed. The ancient Israelite society was patriarchal; women were not seen as equals with men. This however has not hindered women from making their visible presence in different levels of Israelite history. Women are presented in the Old Testament as wise women (using the same adjective *chakam* "wise" used in reference to wisemen). There are also skilled women, as the wider definition of *chokmah* includes technical skills and ability.

The role played by the wise women in the Old Testament can be taken as a paradigm for all (not only women) who are in the service of God and humanity. The narratives of 2 Sam 14 and 20 occurs in the context when Israelite society was moving towards being centralized, inherited, hierarchical, with men having dominant position. The books of Samuel are centered on Samuel's role in the phase of establishing monarchy in Israel. Irrespective of their moral qualities authority was passed down from father to sons (see 1 Sam 2:12-36). The "royal theology" of the Davidic covenant which declares a son of David will rule after him is established in 2 Sam 7.

The wise women neither belonged to the royal nor to the priestly family of Israel, nor could they be a priest or a king so long as they were Israelites at the higher place in the religious and political hierarchy in Israel belong to men. They had God-given wisdom and nothing conventional. They also had selfless attitude and they are not mentioned by their name but their deeds qualify them as "wise". They were wise not in the traditional standards set by the patriarchal society. An amalgamation of their skill and courage to carry out the given task marked out their status as "wise women". These were also women who had high moral credibility, deserving respect and attention from all the people and even by the king.

Conclusion

The overall representation of women in the wisdom tradition of the Old Testament is with patriarchal overtones. The portrayal of women in the books of Job and Ecclesiastes is from an androcentric perspective. This offers the readers with a male bias approach to these books, thereby giving an impression that women here do not have space, no voice, no face, and no name. However a brief study on the status and function of the wise and skilled women confirms that they stood beyond stereotypical functions imposed on women.

**PROTEST WITH A CAUSE: A STUDY OF THE
TEMPLE ACT OF JESUS FOR EMPOWERING
NAGA WOMEN
IN THEIR STRUGGLES.¹**

Zakali Shohe

Protest, revolution, and upheavals are usually looked upon as something that is destructive. Yet it is also a fact, that revolts has been a part of human history from the very beginning, many a times almost an essential part of any change. However, the tendency to look at it as evil at every point fails to understand the dynamics that leads to it. This approach in itself is flawed in that it emphasizes on the negative side of it, such as the break away from the status quo is projected as causing disorder and confusion, while ignoring the reason or cause that leads to the outbreak of protest. Even when we look into the Temple Act of Jesus we see his action not as something destructive but as something constructive, since through his action Jesus was saying that all humans irrespective of race and class are equal.

¹ A part of this study was presented at United Theological College, Bangalore on July 2002 entitled “Understanding Violence in the Light of the Temple Act of Jesus and its Implications for the Socio-Political Movement in Nagaland.”

In this paper the issue emphasized is the relevance of protest in order to bring about change. The writer intends to briefly study on that aspect of protest as a means or tool of change or as the last resort to resistance against perceived oppression or injustice. This protest is about resisting any form of oppressive structure or corruption and focused towards the needed changes. Towards this end, a brief inquiry will be made to the temple act of Jesus (Mk.11: 15-19) and draw out its implication for the struggles of the Naga Women in Nagaland.

The root of protest in this paper is the discrepancies of being ignored and exploited. It arises out of the negligence of certain group of people as human beings because of the imprinted customs and traditions, which leave certain group voiceless. The protest dealt with is not killings and bloodshed, but in terms of protest and disorder, mainly to do with 'the piecemeal desire to change society.'² It is the outcome of a 'relative deprivation.' Here protest and revolt are taken as that which results from the perceived inconsistency between one's value expectations and the socio-religio-political restraints.³ It is the result of dissatisfaction regarding the unfair and discriminatory circumstances.

Jesus and Protest

In the writings of John Dominic Crossan we see how Jesus attacks the prevailing social order and he is portrayed as the one bringing about egalitarianism. He differentiates between the present and the future Kingdom. In the former we have divisions, whereas in the latter it is to do away with injustices.⁴ So also in the temple act of Jesus in Mark we see Jesus standing

² Paul H. Ballard, *A Christian Perspective on Violence* (London: British Council of Churches, n.d), 15.

³ Miller D. Earl, "Violence," *Dictionary of Pastoral Care and Counselling*, ed. R. J. Hunter (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 1303-1305.

⁴ John Dominic Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* (San Francisco: Harper, 1994), 55-56.

for those who are exploited and oppressed. Here he is an active proprietor of protest. The temple area was a main target for those who plotted against Rome. Due to frequent revolutionary disturbances it was necessary for soldiers to be on guard.⁵ Thus the act of Jesus brought about upheaval, confusion, and it disturbed the daily trade that functioned smoothly inside the temple.

The same ideology is reflected in Mt.10: 34ff, where Jesus talks about bringing sword and not peace. A peace for not saying yes to everything both good and bad, but for standing for one's rights and justice as well. Other times he becomes a recipient to violence, like on the cross, a passive violence. Jesus had also preached peace; like in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus calls into the Kingdom those who are peacemakers (Mt.5: 3-9). Thus when we look into the life and teachings of Jesus we see that he was the one who propagated peace among the people. However this does not mean that he kept quiet when something wrong or unfair was done, he would act whenever was necessary in bringing about justice and change.

A Sociological Heading of the Temple Act

The reality of growing importance of sociological approach in the study of the New Testament has been impressingly portrayed in recent scholarly works. The basic idea of this approach was an idea from the sociology of literature, namely that type of literature or genre are bound to and shaped by specific types of social life setting (*Sitz-in-Leben*).⁶ Early efforts of sociological perspective concentrated on applying specific sociological theories to biblical studies. But more recent research has drawn from a wider range of social scientific disciplines and sub disciplines including anthropology, peasant studies, political

⁵ E. E. Jensen, "The First Century Controversy over Jesus as a Revolutionary Figure," *Journal of Biblical Literature* LX/ III (Sept. 1941): 263.

⁶ B. Holmberg, *Sociology and the New Testament: An Appraisal* (Augustburg: Fortress Press, 1990), 1.

science, economy, etc,⁷ also more explicit sociological concepts such as sect, cult, class, role, charismatic authority.⁸ Some of the notable works in this field (Sociological) are by Gerd Theissen, W. Meeks, A. J. Malharbe, Howard Kee, Herman C. Waetjen, Ched Myers etc.

Scholars like Herman C. Waetjen and Ched Myers have undertaken a Socio-Political reading of Mark's gospel in the present times. For Myers the reading site for Mark's gospel is the empire.⁹ With regard to his elements of approach, it is of Marxist tradition, with the theory of ideology, and a conflict model of society. Myers uses the term political, which includes a wider range of relationships like economic, cultural, etc in a given social formation. He reads Mark's gospel as an ideological narrative, an early Christian discipleship community manifesto in its war of myths with the dominant social order and its-political opponents. His reading strategies are extrinsic criticism and intrinsic criticism. The former focuses on the historical and ideological setting and the prevailing social strategies of Mark's world. The latter is the inductive study of the text employing literary analysis.¹⁰ In his strategies of social protest as ideological encounter and struggle, focus is laid on the social tensions in the Roman Palestine of Mark's period. In the economic spheres emphasis is on the basic class inequalities between the poor/downtrodden and minority elites and in political spheres, it is between the common people and the ruling class. The study depicts the structures and social groups of the first century Jewish culture with the temple intact.¹¹

⁷ W. R. Herzog, "Sociological Approach to the Gospel," *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 670.

⁸ C. S. Rodd, "Sociology and Social Anthropology," *A Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation* (London: SCM Press, 1994), 637.

⁹ Ched Meyers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus* (Mary Knoll, New York: Orbis, 1988), 10.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 3ff

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 44-45.

Waetjen on the other hand, in his socio-political reading also brings out a 'class-segmented pyramid' showing the hierarchical structure of the individual and the groups and reveals the class orientation of Jesus' ministry. In the hierarchy we have the governing class, followed by retainers and priests and at the lowest level we have the unclean and the degraded.¹²

Thus the insights from the methodological perspective of Meyers and Waetjen are taken for this study. When we look into the temple act of Jesus in Mark's gospel, we see a clash between the elite class, i.e. the temple authorities, and the charismatic authority. On the other hand there is also a clash between the cult and the charismatic authority. Thus in the light of the exegetical study, an attempt will be made to understand the temple as an economic institution where there is class division and exploitation. The text of Mark will be interpreted in the light of the socio-historical background of the Jerusalem temple. It will then have its implication for the empowerment of Naga women in Nagaland who are exploited as a result of customs and traditions leaving them voiceless in socio-religious and political fields.

The Place of the Jerusalem Temple in the Life of Jews

The temple of Jerusalem played an important part in the lives of the Jewish people. It was considered as the only holy place in the world for the Jews and its religious significance was of decisive importance. The faith of the Jewish people in the time of Jesus did not only prevail as a religion of law but also as a religion of cult. Ernst Lohmeyer points out that 'the sanctuary at Jerusalem is an image of the heavenly tabernacle', for it was regarded as the place where the most high dwelt.¹³ Thus its religious significance was of prior importance.

¹² Herman C. Waetjen, *A Reordering of Power: A Socio-Political Reading of Mark's Gospel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 5-6.

¹³ Ernst Lohmeyer, *Lord of the Temple* (Richmond, Virginia: John Knox Press, 1962), 11.

Besides being a religious institution the temple served as a commercial center. Even the temple recruits were considered as the most privileged for they were paid favorable wages.¹⁴ Mk.1 1: 15ff; Mt. 21: 12ff gives a clear evidence of trade in sacrificial animals in the temple areas. J. Jeremias points out that this trade was mainly carried on in the court of the Gentiles. Inside the temple premises shops were also found which belonged to the high priestly family, e.g. Josephus mentions Ananias (A.D. 47-55) who was a 'great procurer of money'.¹⁵ The temple was thus going to be in ruins because of the avarice of the temple authorities.

Temple Act of Jesus (Mk. 11: 15-19)

The context of Mk.11: 1-13:37 is the same, i.e., the temple. W. R. Telford points out that the heights of Jesus' ministry is seen in his criticism of the temple cultus where the leaders challenge him but he excels even in this confrontation and enunciates the temple destruction.¹⁶

The general understanding of the temple action of Jesus is that of cleansing of the temple. Waetjen points out that Jesus is not cleansing the temple but closing it down when he tries to stop the sale and the carrying of vessel inside the temple.¹⁷ The temple was polluted because of the trade going on around its premises. There are those who feel that the trade as such would not have been something new during Jesus' time, for the temple was the only place for the Jewish people where sacrifices could be offered. Sacrifice would always involve sacrificial animals

¹⁴ J. Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus: An Investigation into Economic and Social Conditions During the N.T. Period* (London: SCM Press, 1969), 26.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 49.

¹⁶ W. R. Telford, "The Barren Temple and the Withered Tree: A Redaction Critical Analysis of the Cursing of the Fig-Tree Pericope in Mark's Gospel and its Relation to the Cleansing of the Temple Tradition," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 1* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1980), 39.

¹⁷ Herman C. Waetjen, *A Reordering of Power*, 182.

and money. Thus one may question the purpose of Jesus to stop this particular use of the temple.¹⁸ The problem lies in the exploitation of the poor and the gentiles in the name of religion. Taylor refers to the scene as having taken place in the court of the gentiles,¹⁹ which is supported by other scholars as well.²⁰ Thus the main aim of Jesus' act in the temple was to expose the oppressive and the exploitative nature of the temple authorities. The temple action of Jesus in Mark will be briefly discussed below.²¹

a) Drove out those who Sold and Bought in the Temple (v. 15b)

The one's who sold were those who traded in animals and other materials needed for sacrifice, whereas the ones who bought are the pilgrims who required such things for the needs of the cultus. For any cult in antiquity commercial activity was completely a normal feature.²² The buyers and the sellers were required for the maintenance of the temple service; it was convenient for the pilgrims also to offer their sacrifice. But what Jesus was attacking here was the commercial interest mainly in the hands of the high priestly family, who used it for exploitation.

b) Money-Changers Table Overturned (v. 15c)

Jerusalem temple was regarded as the sole worshipping place for the Jewish people. Pilgrims flocked from all over to pay tribute and offer sacrifices and also to pay the temple tax during the three major Jewish festivals.

¹⁸ E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (London: SCM Press, 1985), 63.

¹⁹ Vincent Taylor, *The Gospel According to St. Mark* (London: Macmillan, 1957), 462.

²⁰ Supported by Lloyd Gaston, E. Lohmeyer, Ched Myers refers to the outer court, i.e. of gentiles.

²¹ C. Myers in *Binding the Strong Man* & Sam P. Mathew in *Temple Criticism* also emphasize these elements.

²² C. Myers, *Binding the Strong Man*, 300.

So the money-changers in the temple would have performed an essential service, that of changing the different coinage into shekel which was accepted by the temple.²³ Trapezes generally means table (Mk.7: 28, Mt.15: 27); but in Lk.19: 23 it means to put money in the bank. So looking into the context *trapeza* can mean a table for keeping money.

Jacob Neusner points out that it was only someone 'who rejected the *Torah*'s explicit teaching concerning the daily whole offering could have overturned the tables.' The presence of money changers was not a blemish on the cult but part of its perfection.²⁴ Sanders also point out that the action of overturning itself symbolizes destruction. Thus here he concludes that Jesus wanted to publicly predict the destruction of the temple,²⁵ whereas, Sam P. Mathew brings about a relation between overturning and freewill forgiveness.²⁶ Having looked into the different views of scholars we can conclude that Jesus opposed the cultic sacrifices, which was very much hard and demanding on certain group of people, i.e. unclean and impure, who needed to offer more sacrifices for cleansing.

c) The Seats of those who Sold Doves Overturned (v. 15c)

Doves were the offerings of the poor (Lev. 12: 6, Lk.2: 22-24, Lev. 14: 22. *Katestrepsen* also means to destroy. Meyers refers to this act of overturning as 'an end to the entire cultic system. This selling represented the double exploitation of the poor and the unclean who had to

²³ E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 64.

²⁴ Jacob Neusner, "Money-Changers in the Temple: The Mishnah's Explanation," *New Testament Studies* 35/2 (1985): 289.

²⁵ E.P.Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 70.

²⁶ Sam P. Matthew, *Temple-Criticism in Mark's Gospel* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1999), 143.

make compensation through sacrifices.²⁷ This act of Jesus was mainly directed against the ruling priestly families that aimed to discriminate and exploit the weak, by extracting even the little they had. He was against the powerful temple aristocrates who used religious views for their own benefit.

d) Forbade to carry Skeuos Through the Temple (v. 16)

Ford gives six different meanings for the biblical Greek word *skeue*: 'household utensils,' 'agricultural implements,' 'military equipment,' 'fishing tackle,' 'cultic vessels,' and 'luggage or baggage.' The most appropriate meaning he suggests is either 'luggage or baggage' in 11:16, a receptacle for money, which suits well with the context.²⁸ Thus when Jesus tried to forbid anyone from carrying *skeuos* it certainly would have been something to do with money, which the temple extracted from the people who came on pilgrimage.

e) The Teaching of Jesus (v. 17)

In this section we have two OT quotations; the first is taken from Isa.56: 7 where we see Yahweh's promise to his people - a house of prayer for all nations. The temple act of Jesus also clearly indicates this. The temple was thus meant to be inclusive and convenient for everyone, not just for the few privileged. But this is not what the temple is, for instead it has become a 'den of robbers' (Jeremiah7: 11). Jesus' action here is an attack on the priestly aristocracy for making it a 'den of robbers.'²⁹ Jesus was outraged with the priestly aristocracy because of their monopolistic sale of animals for sacrifice through which they extracted huge sums of

²⁷ Ched Meyers, *Binding the Strong Man*, 301.

²⁸ J. M. Ford, "Money Bags in the Temple (Mk.1 1.16)," *Biblica* 57 (1976): 249-251.

²⁹ Ernst Lohmeyer, *Lord of the Temple*, 41.

money from the worshippers. This economic policy is referred to, by Jesus, as robbery. Jesus here did not employ armed attack but rather a protest against the misuse of the sanctuary to enhance the leading priestly families.³⁰

Thus when we take the temple act of Jesus, it arose due to the exploitation and oppression of the weak and the Gentiles. Jesus was not against the temple as such but against the temple authorities, who used their power in exploiting the weak. Drawing insights from the temple act we will be looking into the socio-religio-political status of Naga Women and the needed change in this society. The change here is the need to challenge the existing gender bias and the deep rooted traditional thinking and sayings and the cultural practices from the minds of the Naga people that oppress certain group of people and deny their humanhood.

Position of Naga Women

Usually it is assumed by many that Naga women have equal status and position along side their men. Even writer such as M. Horam says “They (Women) have the same status as the men and suffer no discrimination on account of sex.”³¹ But Naga women have struggles and obstacles since they live in a strong patriarchal, male dominated with strong emphasis on tradition and cultural values.³² Maybe the Naga women in comparison to other women are in relatively higher position but this does not rule out the fact that they are still treated as the subordinate sex.

Traditionally the role of Naga women was and is still

³⁰ Ronald Sider, *Christ and Violence* (Kitchener, Ontario: Herald Press, 1979), 21.

³¹ M. Horam, *Nagas Old Ways New Trends* (New Delhi: Cosmo Publications, 1988), 41.

³² Alongla P. Aier, “A Call for Naga Women: A Reflection,” *Striving Towards Excellence* (Kohima: NBCC Women Department, 2002), 47.

restricted to child bearing and rearing, looking after the comforts of their husband and managing their household. Men are regarded as the backbone of society, and women are made to lie in the background in almost all spheres of life. From birth till death women lived under the men as she is considered inferior to men. Their roles are restricted within the family circles. The discrimination against the Naga women can be seen more clearly when one examines their roles and participation in the socio-religio and political arenas of life.

Though Christian faith and organised governmental system and modern education introduced in the late nineteenth century brought about new perspectives and attitude, there still exist some age old attitudes in certain oppressive forms.³³ At present due to modernity, globalisation and its likes, women are coming up with the realisation that their role is not to be simply restricted to their homes but they have major roles in the upliftment of the society. It is the cultural and traditional mindset, which becomes a barrier to their upliftment. Especially in areas of religion and politics they are restricted, there are still some who consider women as inferior intellectually.

Within the Naga setup women are not considered worthy of becoming members of the village councils rendering women voiceless in matters connected to their own lives in the community. The women are relegated to the household work and are barred from participation in decisionmaking ventures.³⁴ Even in the wider political scene they are either considered unfit to contest for elections or those who have tried did not get the support of the people.

Christian religion improved the life of the Nagas in general and in particular the life of the women. Yet it is ironic that the place where the gospel is supposed to be the bases on life has become the place where discrimination is largely seen. In the Churches the only roles women are assigned is either in the

³³ K. Terhuia, “Status of Women in Naga society” *Nagas’ 90* (Guwahati: Literature Committee, 1990), 19.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 18.

women, child or youth department, here also with exception to women and child department even in the youth departments men are preferred over women. Women are consequently denied leadership roles and equal participation in the ministry and society. Though there are a number of theologically trained women with not only high level of education but also able persons, yet the churches hardly make use of them. There are also only a handful of women who have been ordained. Many assume that since few Naga women are ordained it has brought about liberation of women. But this is not so, because the majority of the women are still struggling to be counted as fit for leadership in ministry, and not subordinate beings. Just because one or two women have been given a place it does not reflect the real position of all the women.

In the society and culture of the Naga people we still see the existence of customary practices such as the law of inheritance laws, which projects women as non-person. In this context women are seen as dependent on men, who have control over the important village, family assets. Because of her sex she is considered as having lower position in the family and cannot inherit landed property or become co-owners with the sons.³⁵ Many traditional practices have been discarded and some kept. People always say that the culture of headhunting and drinking rice beer were wrong practices and are glad that it was stopped, but the practices like the inheritance law which causes far greater evil are still uphold as positive part of culture and tradition.

The Naga Women as seen today are wiser and more determined about the removable of the oppressive structure. We see this in the various movements like Naga Mothers Association, the Various Tribal women movement, the various books and articles and seminars that are being held. But there are still some Naga women who have not realized the importance of participating with their sisters in their own struggle

³⁵ A. Wati Longchar, "The Land Ownership System in Nagaland" *Journal of Tribal Studies*, III/2. July - December 1999, 8.

rather taking things as they are given. There also exist the problem of the partnership with men, till today the majority of men have still not taken this issue as important, they seem to think of such issues as foolish, unnecessary and acts of rebellion against society. Women's struggle are also struggles of humanity it is as simply as that, if one section of the society is discriminated against then it is the responsibility of the whole society, especially those in better position to lend their hand and support in order to create a better world.

It is said that in the traditional life of the Naga women they were protected and preserved with out most care like precious jewels, without much exposure to the changing trends of social advancement.³⁶ But if they are the precious jewels they should be treated with respect and care.

In society they should be looked upon with respect and love. But the present problem of suppression and oppression gives a totally different picture; they are treated more like property of the male.

Implication on the Socio-Religio-Political Status of Naga Women in Nagaland

Protest and fights against any element may be seen as a consequence of oppression; of being ignored, discriminated, suppressed etc. Protest is never the first cause. Behind every act of protest there is always the hidden motivation of either selfish desires or of genuine wants to express and demand for a platform to air one's grievances. If one requires change, there must be the willingness to create some upheaval or protest, changes do not take place unless something is challenged and shaken. The temple act of Jesus shows us that the only way the situation of the Naga women can change is if people are willing to raise their voices against the injustice around them and fight for their beliefs. Protest does not mean taking up violent ways of protesting, but it means to be able to stand for one's belief.

³⁶ Gideon L. Sumi, "Changing Role and Status of Naga Women" *Nagaland Post*, May 8, 2000, 5.

What the Naga women are struggling is not an issue of equality, but it is about demanding their basic right as human beings created in the image of God. Thus it should be clear that women are just asking for what rightly belongs to them but which has been denied to them due to factors like tradition, culture, and bias attitudes.

The temple act of Jesus, though a rebellious one, was for a good cause i.e. against injustices. So is the case of the Naga Women, whose voices are ignored, their status suppressed, their identity denied and the injustices meted out to them in various forms. Therefore, in such situations if there is the desire for change, there must be protest against those structures. This protest is not only about women but it also calls men to participate in the struggle for justice for women. This protest is about raising the greater issue of injustice of humanity because of biased traditions and culture. Of course one cannot deny the fact that traditions and cultures are very important in any human society and it needs to be preserved. Traditions and cultures are human made and so that which exploit certain group of people can be remade by humans themselves into that which do not exploit any group. In doing so everyone will have an identity as humans without any biases.

The temple act is an extreme form of expression. It expressed harshly what Jesus wanted the temple to be, but instead people were swindled, oppressed, etc. Here one single individual rises to challenge the establishment-both structure and tradition, in so far as the authorities practiced exploitation. In the light of the fact that the Naga Women form a major population of Nagaland who are contributing towards the society; as women, their views are easily brushed aside, their protest and movement needs to be understood as the demand of the Naga women as a group, with distinct identity, ideals, visions and goal, and not a mere insignificant in the larger population. What the Naga women want should be expressed if they are serious about their goals and dreams.

The temple act had the desired result of making people see and listen to what Jesus had to say, regardless of whether his

view was accepted or not. The fact that after this act there was a sense of urgency to destroy him by the establishment itself is a loud answer. So the need for justice for the Naga Women has a desired effect, i.e. to try and create awareness among the people. Even the ordination of the first Naga women came about due to the struggles of certain people who stood their grounds for the ordination of women. The main intention of such movement and struggles is the outcome of social injustice. Here the risk must be taken that what is expressed may not be accepted right away, but what is important is that the Naga women must be bold in expressing their needs. Just as Jesus saw the truth, as having more value than the support of people, so also there should be willingness among the Naga Women who are fighting to be willing to stand to the truth at all cause.

Thus from the above research one can conclude that those who are oppressed, denied, etc. might seek violent revolution not because they are violent by nature but because they are provoked by the injustices; and because they see no other way out.

Our exegetical purpose has revealed how the insights from Myers and Waetjen have helped us to look at the temple act as a clash with the dominant social order. A clash between the temple authorities and the charismatic authority for bringing about justice for all groups of people. The situation of the Temple act and that of the Naga Women are quite different. But the act of Jesus against the temple authorities in bringing about justice for all groups is a challenge to the Naga Women that they need to be strong enough to fight against the injustices that exist. This also calls forward to the Naga men to give their support in order to create a better world.

For protest is the result of being ignored and denied the right of being part of society. At times it becomes necessary to react against the forces that refuse to recognise the dignity of one's identity and distinctiveness. In that, the temple act is a reaction of Jesus, who was deeply disturbed at the wrongness of what was practiced in the temple.

Being too meek is not going to help Naga women to come

up with their distinct identity as women. For long they have been made to shut off their mouths but today it is no more possible for they are raising their voices and challenging the oppressive structure, traditional and cultural values. The Naga Women voices come into being as a reaction at the recognition that women are not subordinate beings, but are also human beings created in the image of God along with men.

Some of the oppressive traditional and cultural values which are deep rooted in the minds of the people have for a long time acted and are still acting as tools of oppression. Therefore the first and foremost work of the Naga women is to find out ways to remove the oppressive mindset of both men and women.

The challenges that is left to the women is to bring forth an awareness among the people of the various injustices meted out and change of bias attitude and mindset of the people focusing to move towards the. changing of structures and values which oppress them. Many people have not even understood that the core of the gospel is the opportunity of being known as children of God in Christ, in whose community there is justice, peace and equality. Thus the hope of women and men living in a world where rights and identity of an individual exist is but a plan of God manifested in Christ. Thus, the identity of women as human beings and not as inferior beings should not be another Ethiopia but be made a reality. For achieving this Naga women have started shaking and will continue to shake the patriarchal structured society and the biased mindset of the people. Change in the society is only possible when one raises one's voice and is not a mere spectator. By doing so we will see the community of Christ where all are given importance and none is left voiceless.

Bible Studies

WOMEN: THE AGENTS OF GOD

Akhrole Kenye

Background

The passage that is taken for our Bible Study this morning is from Exodus Chapter 1. According to Exodus Chapter I, the people of Israel were already in Egypt. If we look back as to how the Israelites came to Egypt, we go back to the time of Joseph, whose father Jacob (Israel) had 12 sons and out of jealousy, he was sold to the Egyptians, and later God, through the king, lifted him up when he explained the dream of the king of the impending famine. Joseph was made one of the top officials of Egypt. In the time of great famine, even his own brothers came to him in search of food grains. Later, they settled in Egypt at the invitation of Joseph due to the famine. During their arrival, they were about 70 in number. They were given a city near the border of Egypt. They enjoyed freedom and better quality of life. But as the years go by, there came a king in Egypt who did not know Joseph, and meanwhile, the people of Israel also grew in many numbers and might. The Egyptians depended mostly on them for land economy and labour.

1:1-7: A Historical Review

Here, we see a short historical record that begins in v. 1 and culminates at the later part of the verses. The children of Israel (v. 1) - the 12 sons of Jacob, whose story has been told in Genesis 29-50, have now become The nation of Israel, v.7 - the emphasis in this story is on the amazing rapid growth of the Hebrew family (w. 7, 9, 20). This growth of the family is divinely preserved and ordained. It not only fulfils the promise to Abraham and Jacob but also made possible to conquer Canaan (Gen. 12:2, 17; 17:6; 35:11).

Enslavement of the people

We have seen how Joseph and his family came to Egypt. But as years passed by, a Pharaoh who did not know Joseph, came to the throne, which simply means he did not acknowledge with gratitude what Joseph had done for Egypt. Pharaoh was afraid that the Hebrews might make an allegiance that can turn them into his enemy. The reason was not this alone - but Pharaoh was also afraid that the Israelites were well prepared or equipped economically, that they might decide to leave the country. Therefore, he developed evil designs in his mind. He enslaved them and placed heavy burdens on them that included the building of the store, sites of the storage of government supplies, agricultural products, military equipments, etc. The Israelites were also forced to make bricks, construct dams and irrigation canals and carry out other building projects of the ambitious Pharaoh. Pharaoh was carrying out all these strict measures because he thought that by doing this, Israelites would reduce their numbers. But as we see, they continued to increase in number and might. Pharaoh's plan failed. The available record of their numbers was given as 600000 men [here, women and children were not included]. But it can be assumed that almost 2 million people were in the Hebrew family. Pharaoh became more anxious and helpless; forced labour did not bring down the numbers so Pharaoh took an extreme measure by slaying all Hebrew male born babies. Pharaoh thought that child's slaughter would solve his problem. But this later move

was defeated through the covenant care of God and the bold defense defiance of the Hebrew midwives.

Mode/Nature of Oppression

Vv. 15-22 gives the picture of the slaying of the male children: When Pharaoh saw that oppressive labour on the Israelites did not cease their increase, he decided to take even more drastic measure to destroy them. The Egyptian king gave brutal command to two midwives Shiphrah (Beauty) and Puah (Splendour) to slay the new born male children. It appears that the two of them were sufficient to fulfill the king's wishes. They either should have been the heads of the profession or influential persons in their task. Pharaoh expected these women with responsibilities to obey his authority and orders literally. Pharaoh's plans for dealing with the alien population in naive in the extreme, and he himself interviewed the midwives. According to Josephus, a church historian, the midwives were Egyptians but according to the Masoretic punctuation, they were Hebrew midwives with an order which they were most unlikely to fulfill. It does not matter, whether they were Hebrews or the midwives of the Hebrews, they were agent of life with a commission to take out the lives of the new born male children of the Hebrew community while their profession expected them to assist in ensuring life.

Women Challenge Destructive Command

These two important midwives stand as the very source of the biblical stream of life for freedom. They stand bravely when the battle begins for human survival and dignity. Shiphrah and Puah feared God and resisted the authority and destruction. These were the heroines at the beginning of salvation story in general and Exodus in particular. They were the women introduced by the king himself. The writer underplays the circumstances surrounding the command by leaving both the elements of threat and the response of the midwives to the scheme which was to require action diametrically opposed to their office - bearers of life. The author gives the real reason, which confused the king's plan. It was not because they bravely defied the king nor because

of their loyalty to the Hebrews but because they feared God. This we find from v. 17.

V. 18 informs us that the king summoned the midwives to interview in accusation form. Why have you done this? Why have you let the boys live? The midwives responded to Pharaoh: Hebrews women are not like Egyptian women. They said that Hebrew women were so vigorous that the babies were already born before they could arrive to carry out his orders. Whatever be the fact, if the midwives had obeyed the orders of Pharaoh, they probably would have been rewarded by the king, at the same time, they would have become the agents of destruction contrary to life. They would have been a strong hindrance for God's purpose to be fulfilled. But they chose to be faithful to their own conscience and did only what was right to their profession and that which pleased God, whom they feared.

Triumph of God with the Help of Trial women

The clever response serves to highlight the stupidity of the king. This is the first passage of the triumph of God over Pharaoh and it is from this initial victory that the great deliverer- Moses comes. The purpose of God for the people of Israel remains undefeated, while the brutal desire of the Pharaoh remained unfulfilled. When the midwives did not comply with the orders of Pharaoh, it was a great disappointment for Pharaoh, but the artful remarks of the two midwives surpassed Pharaoh's expectations. Thus, these humble women, by just choosing to disobey the authority of the unjust state, became co-workers with God in protecting the people of God. The contribution of these two women may not be so visible, yet, it was so effective.

Challenge for Women Today

Obedying God and fulfilling his purposes in our lives might demand our stance to confront the unjust structure or destructive powers. Shiphrah and Puah risked their own lives for the Hebrews in general and the Hebrew infants in particular. These simple women decided not to obey cruel and unjust laws, which involved destruction of life. They feared God rather than unjust destruction, which were designed by human beings. Through

their bold action, many lives were saved, including that of the one who would eventually deliver their nation. It has been part of most women's upbringing in most cultures until today to be obedient and submissive, to somehow put up with even unjust actions, cruelty and so on as women's lot.

Shiphrah and Puah remind us that there is a time when we must not submit nor even observe but must actively resist injustice done to ourselves or to others even to the extent of placing our lives in dangers. It is true in the lives of the midwives who acted for life over against death and destruction, whose acts originated the movement of Exodus and thus, the scene for liberation was prepared long before Moses appeared on the scene. How much more should the women of today in general and theologically qualified women in particular should boldly act for the survival of human dignity. Our hope for the future is that women should enjoy full human dignity in church and society. This is possible only when we challenge unequal system and unfair concepts. Do we (women) undividedly support each other and increase our self-confidence? This is possible through the affirmation that women indeed are created in the image of God and that God, out of his infinite wisdom and eternal purpose has created us as women.

Our Naga culture, our social set up which cannot be denied contains so many injustices which may be visible or invisible. The structure and the concept of our churches are still giving the inferior status to the womenfolk. Many churches and associations still deny women leadership in the church. Ordination of women is a rubbish disease to many or majority of the men-folk leaders in the church. Attitude towards women is always suspicious and negative. The ability of women is always less respected. (The hosts of women gathered here should form ourselves into pressure groups).

In our Naga society, rape case, which we never heard of before and sounds so strange are rapidly growing. Travelers, especially womenfolk, are not safe to travel alone any longer. Women are used as a toy or sex objects which can be used anytime for the physical satisfaction. We are only property with

whom others can play, as they like. Mentally and physically, women are tortured in the society, at home and even in the church. Women are last to be used in any kind of opportunity but first to be fired. How many religious and intellectual women leaders who claim to work for our society are concerned about the oppressive and exploitative system and structures? Where is the voice that challenges the unjust, unfair system, which threatens the very survival of one section of our society? We are aware that we are not free, we are in danger. Do we not have the same faith in God as the midwives had? Where are our actions that testify that we fear God? Will there be any future and any good development in our society if the same structures and practices continue? The movement of Exodus becomes a reality of blessing for many people because two insignificant midwives took their stand firmly and did what best they could do.

Do we have the same courage to say that we did our best to bring life and liberation? God is speaking to us to be his agents to bring things into right, which is disorder by human beings. Every one of us here has to respond to God's challenge individually.

May God help us and enable us to be his truthful agent, and may the scripture be fulfilled through our effective agent of God. May God bless all the Naga theologically trained women to bring about changes in our churches and society today.

RE-READING THE BIBLE THROUGH NEW EYES TO BUILD UP AN INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY

Narola Imchen

Introduction

To get a clear perspective on the theme, “Re-reading the Bible through New Eyes to build Up an Inclusive Community,” let us first try to understand the term ‘Inclusive Community’. Inclusive community may be defined as a community, in which no members feel excluded on the basis of gender, race, physical abilities or any other characteristics. It is a community in which all members feel the sense of belonging. ‘Inclusive community’ is particularly important in our Christian context, because the core message of the Gospel is meant for all people and not only for a select group of people. Therefore, our community should be such that all members feel welcomed, respected and included.

Context

If we seriously look around the condition of our church and society, it clearly indicates the strong need to reconsider the context of the community today.

But before we reflect on our society, let us first look back to the community that existed during the time of Jesus. Palestine was a place influenced by a great number of cultures namely the Greek, Roman, Oriental and Jewish. The society and its social structures were highly hierarchal and patriarchal that cut across class, race and gender. In short, it may be observed that the Greco-Roman world and the Jewish social structure were both discriminating against women in many ways:

- a) Women had a very low and subordinate status.
- b) Women remained at the bottom of all social structures.
- c) Women were most oppressed and most powerless.
- d) Women in the Hebrew culture were identified as daughter, wife and mother.
- e) Women suffered from the patriarchal system which developed posterity and generations along father's line.
- f) Women had no place in the masculine structure from circumcision to burial rites.
- g) Women did not have the privilege to be 'Israelites' as male did.
- h) Women were discriminated by social customs, traditions including religious traditions.

As we critically analyze the context of Jesus' time, we can clearly see the similarity with our own Indian context today. Our society is one - where the system continues to be oppressive in many ways and women's lives are often subjected to total submission. It denies the human person in a woman, without dignity, value and status. It has dehumanized woman and distorted their image as created in the image of God. It is patriarchal from the home to social and religious places. It is a society, where women experience double domination at all social, cultural and religious levels.

This is the context of our community today. In such a context, how can we help towards building up an Inclusive community? "Re-reading the Bible through New Eyes" becomes very important..

Re-Reading the Bible through New Eyes

Today in our context, re-reading the Bible through new eyes is very important because through the centuries, the Bible had been written, read and interpreted from men's perspective only. Throughout history, women had been ignored, forgotten and discriminated in the Bible tradition. This, I consider as one of the main reasons why we have not been able to build up an inclusive community. But today, fortunately women have learned to raise a number of questions by re-reading the Bible through New Eyes.

To understand this more clearly, let us read John 20:1-18. According to the Gospel of John, Mary of Magdala is the first one to receive this new life in Jesus- "the resurrection and the life". It is life in its fullness with a new beginning. Jesus affirms Mary Magdalene the person and woman within the context of his good news of God's reign on earth. It is a new vision where salvation and wholeness of life are together. The news embraces a new social order where there is genuine love and peace with justice, new social structure and system, new patterns of relationship including power and gender relations between women and men. It demands freedom for those who are oppressed by various form of oppression, liberation for women from all socio-cultural, religious and structural violence against them in Church and society. Mary Magdalene responds to Jesus' good news of God's reign for she experiences life anew in the garden where Jesus appears and talks to her once again.

By qualification and credentials laid down by Peter, the apostle and other male disciples, Mary the first witness and the first person to encounter the risen Jesus should be the prime candidate to fill up the position of the 12th disciple (vacated by Judas). She is the first apostle of the apostles in the community. But she is only one among many other women who were in a world that did not grant due credibility to a woman's witness.

For, when we go back to the text, we find that when the women went to tell the disciples about the resurrection, the disciples considered it-"an idle tale" (Lk.24: 11). This doubt about women's testimony is one of the peculiar characteristics

in the Bible. When we look around at our context also, often women's words are not counted. The church and the social structure make them to be silent in such a way that women are seen to be invisible.

Even though Jesus revealed Himself first to Mary, the tradition denies Mary as the first witness to the resurrected Christ. Rather, Paul claimed Peter as the first witness (I Cor. 15:2-8). And this has become the authoritative tradition of the Church. The Biblical authors just ignore the importance of women in the community and their contributions and talents are denied. Many women are unnamed, though they carry an important message to God's people.

However, in spite of what patriarchal structure has been doing to women, the good news is that Jesus calls women to discipleship as equal partners and co-workers to build His new community of faith believers. This will be a community where no one would feel ignored, neglected and discriminated. This will be the "Inclusive Community" where each member would feel loved, welcomed and wanted. And towards the building up of such an inclusive community, Jesus calls both men and women to be the partners.

Challenges and Issues

In the light of our Bible study, one fact emerges clearly and that is, the Church as an institution and community needs to re-examine critically its position in relation to women's place and role in the family, Church and society at large. As in the time of Jesus in Palestine, the Church today is subjected to critical view in its treatment of women with regard to gender issues and problems faced and experienced by women in the Church due to cultural and religious discrimination. This too includes structures of power and power relation in the Church, interpretation of the Bible and theology in relation to women, the role and participation of women as equal partners in mission and ministry.

The mission of Jesus to build a new community should become our model in building an Inclusive community. This

will mean a radical understanding of the Church, its Mission and the followers of Jesus in these terms are important. It is an imperative call to new values, a new life, a new life style and also to the total transformation of society. It calls for a total change in heart, mind and spirit at the personal as well as at social, in the structures of the heart no less than in the structures of economic, politics and all other spheres of life and systems of a society.

The challenge is - will the Church be obedient to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ, including repositioning itself in response to women in the New Creation, which will certainly help towards building an Inclusive community.

A CHALLENGE FOR COURAGE

Abeni Lotha

Today we talk so much about re-reading the Bible with new eyes, reading from our Naga perspective and from our own context. We also talk about reading the Scriptures particularly from Naga Christian Women perspective. Reading the Scriptures particularly from Naga Women perspective may sound as a bias attempt to some but this is in no way, an attempt to create a separate Bible for the Naga women. It is rather a search to reinterpret the Bible from concrete experiences of women's reality. For this I chose Mark 14:3-9 to highlight the role played by a woman; to see the way Jesus responded her.

Reading the Bible from women's perspective emphasizes on a particular context. This is exactly what many of the emerging contextual liberation theologies also stress at. According to K.C. Abraham, without a context, it is difficult to form a theology; any theological formation has its own context. Theologians of every age are committed to discovering a fresh meaning of the gospel of Jesus Christ and interpret it in a way relevant to the realities around them. It addresses itself to the contextual realities and its formation is being influenced by the contextual realities. K.Thanzauva affirms that there is no ready-made theology which would be applicable to all situations and for all times and in all places. Theology arises from human

experiences; it keeps on changing according to the situation.

In our Naga context, Late Renthly Keitzar stands as the first proponent in articulating the Naga Christian contextual theology. Thus, he proposes a concept of 'Naganess'. For him Naganess theology means a Naga theology which should evolve from the realities of the Naga context, a theology that is relevant for and inclusive of the whole of Nagas.

Similarly, R.R. Shimray proposed a term Nagaism. He tries to define the term Nagaism as the way of life led by the Naga people; a life that speaks the heart and mind of the Naga people; a life that would show how an individual Naga behaves with another fellow Naga; a life that underwrites norms and principles that will function well in the Naga community. I am proud to say that the Nagas in the past had practiced and possess seven innate Nobilities such as Simplicity, Honesty, Truthfulness, Straight Forwardness, Helpfulness, Regard for others, Fearlessness and Adventurism. Therefore, whether it is Naganess or Nagaism, these terms are related to the seven nobilities which shows the real nature of the Nagas in the past. Today, it is hard for any Naga Christian to boldly conclude whether or not the Nagas still possess these. Our attempt is to rediscover these qualities in order to be true Nagas for the cause of a better society/Church /Community.

Mark 14:3-9 tells of a woman who is unknown, unnamed, voiceless and yet a woman who loved Christ with her whole being. This act of her was an extraordinary respect paid to Jesus. What did she do? she broke the alabaster jar signifying her sacrifice; she honoured Christ with the best she had; gave Christ the thing which everyone could not afford and a thing, which everyone considered most precious than any other earthly things. What she did for Christ shows her act of love and dedication. Jesus did not ignore this woman's deed rather acknowledged her love and service and commended in vs.9 that the piece of her heroic piety would be remembered in all the world wherever the Gospel shall be preached that act of her shall be spoken of in memory of her. She neither lost her oil nor her labour.

What she received from Christ was much more precious and much greater than what she wasted. We see Jesus giving his special attention to the woman by placing her in a very high position, keeping, aside all his male disciples. Some of those among the disciples could not tolerate the woman's deed. They were saying indignantly to one another, why this waste of perfume? It could have been sold for a three hundred denari and the money given to the poor (Vs.4, 5) and they rebuked her harshly. But Jesus told them not to trouble the woman rather to let her do what she had to do, for she was doing something beautiful for his burial.

Why were the disciples indignant? Why were they angry at the woman? It could simply be because she was a woman, a woman doing something which they could not do. Anyone among them could have done that but none. Their concern was not for the poor but simply the waste of the perfume by a woman. This is how many try to interfere with perverse attitude. This attitude is apparently seen in many of our churches today, particularly in terms of women's initiatives. This is why educating women or sending women for theological study is considered by many as a waste of time, energy and of resources.

The Woman referred here could be rich or poor; she could be from high or low class. All that we learn is she gave fully, fearlessly, and served Christ with full dedication. There can be many reasons in breaking the jar; two things which are clear to us is her act of dedication and courage. She was fearless and courageous enough to do what she thought well. No matter who said what, she was not disturbed by the reaction of the crowd. She did what she had to do because she knew that if she doesn't do it, she would never do it.

What is the message for us as Naga women? What is taking place in our lives today? What would be our precious element that would make beautiful and lovely things for our God/community? What do we need in our service to both God and to people? Many women spend their precious times in maintaining flowers, selling them, running home-base cosmetic business, and so on. Many keep themselves busy in recruiting

members to increase points in whichever business they are involved in. All these activities may not be against the Bible. They are all signs of modern civilization and they are also for the edification of our living. But our concern is if these activities take the place of our time with our God, our family, our works, if these become the centre of our lives, we simply become the slaves of what we do. We are called to serve God by serving people. We are called to sacrifice the best that we have.

In spite of the fact that our contribution and our participation in all aspects are not recognized, it is time that we seriously think and do our best for active participation in building a just and peaceful world. For this we are called to face any challenge as the women despite all opposition. Today we need a common language, a common spiritual gift, a common platform of indigenous theology for peaceful existence of our community. This is necessary because of the fact that though Nagas comprise of many tribes, we worship one same God and our religion is one (Christianity).

Therefore, Christ should be our model in our service to both God and people. What do our alabaster jars contain? Are we ready to break it fully without fear of what our male-counterparts say? Are we doing something beautiful and lovely in the eyes of our God?

Are we really dedicated to good no matter what comes our way? Do we ever realize why we are assigned only to fixed roles as assistants to rest of the clergy and the main decision makers? Why are we supportive and yet not visible?

Naga Christian women today should be courageous enough to raise issues of identity, subordination, domination and stereotyped male-role. Naga women should be courageous enough to create a new cultural context to explore these issues that would mean God's *shalom* for both women and men. Naga women should courageously work towards a community transformed into God's *shalom* for both men and women.

Let us be bold and courageous and may all our endeavors be beautiful and lovely in the eyes of God and our fellowhumans that we will be remembered and spoken of wherever the Gospel goes.

Consultation On
All Nagaland Theologically Trained Women:
(Doing Feminist Theology from Naga women
perspective
(In search of new voices of solidarity and
partnership)

28th-30th May 2003 Discipleship Bible College,
 Dimapur, Nagaland, India.

*Jointly organized by the Ao Theological Association (ATA),
 Nagaland Baptist Church Council Women. Department
 (NBCCWD), & Christian Conference of Asia (CCA), Hong Kong*

The Theologically Trained Naga Women Consultation was held at DBC, Dimapur from 28th - 30th May 2003, with the theme **Doing Feminist Theology From Naga Women's Perspective**. This Consultation was first of its kind for Naga theologically trained women coming together in search of new voices of solidarity and partnership. Altogether there were 34 Participants, representing different churches and various organizations. Among them there were 6 male theologians who participated in this consultation. Rev. Dr. Wati Longchar, ETE Consultant of Asia/Pacific brought greetings from Christian

Conference of Asia (CCA) to this Consultation. This Consultation was sponsored by CCA- Ecumenical Formation for Gender Justice and Youth Cluster, we sincerely appreciate their concerns and contribution to uplift the indigenous women; we the participants, hereby gratefully acknowledge:

1. We extend our gratitude to the Principal, faculty members and staff of the Discipleship Bible College, who willingly hosted the Consultation.
2. We are deeply grateful to the Ecumenical Formation for Gender Justice and Youth Cluster of Christian Conference of Asia (CCA-EGY), Hong Kong for the financial and moral support.
3. We expressed our thankfulness to the Ao Theological Association, Impur and Nagaland Baptist Church Council Women Department, Kohima for their joint effort to initiate this timely Consultation.
4. We sincerely thank the concern Associations, Churches, Institutions and individuals for their active participation which made this consultation meaningful and a successful one.

Affirmation:

We, the theologically Trained Naga Women, hereby affirm that the Creator God has created human beings in His own image with equal rights. We believe that it is God who called 'everyone' to be responsible to the church and society. Therefore, we disapproved of any demeaning human made distinctions on the basis of any gender, and as Naga women we choose to affirm life-giving heritages. We furthermore affirm that 'everyone' has the inherent rights as human beings and as Christians to service, in solidarity and partnership for the uplift of the people and towards building an egalitarian community of the Naga Church and Society.

Resolution

This Consultation resolve to start a forum called NAGA WOMEN THEOLOGICAL FORUM, an Indigenous Naga

Women Forum that will meet once a year. A committee was appointed to organize the Forum on yearly basis and the Forum would initiate the following tasks:

1. To promote theology from women's perspective and women's empowerment through various awareness programs.
2. To search together as women, a new language of speech that would empower, us as women, to live as free and whole human beings.
3. To create a space or platform for articulation of women's experiences in doing theology.
4. To establish networking among various organizations in order to correlate and cooperate with each other for our common cause.
5. To understand the different ways in which specific socio-cultural and socio-economic formations -such as, sexuality, tribalism, and ethnicity- shape the terrain on which women's movements strive to understand and transform gender inequalities.
6. To rediscover or reclaim our Naga women's stories and to publish the 'oral stories' of women who have contributed significantly to the development of women's movements in Naga society and church, which can be used as a resource/reference books by both social movements and academicians.
7. To publish the consultation proceedings to generate further theological reflections and thinking.

ELEUTHEROUS

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Aphuno Chase-Roy is a Lecturer in History of Christianity at Leonard Theological College, Jabalpur, M.P.

Eyingbeni is a Lecturer in Christian Theology at the Academy of Integrated Christian Studies (AICS), Aizawl, Mizoram.

Limatula Longkumer is a Lecturer in Christian Ministry at Eastern Theological College, Jorhat, Assam.

Phutoli Chingmak is the President of the Elcuthenous Christian Society at Tuensang, Nagaland.

Imsopangla is a Lecturer at Working People's College, Dimapur, Nagaland.

S. Temsulemla is the Secretary to the Women Associate Pastor, Kohima Ao Baptist Church, Nagaland.

Talijungla Longkumer is the Office Assistant to the ETE Consultant for Asia & Pacific based at Jorhat, Assam.

Asangla Lemtur is a Lecturer in Christian Ethics at Clark Theological College, Aolijen, Nagaland.

Atula Tzudir is a Lecturer in Old Testament at Shalom Bible Seminary, Kohima, Nagaland.

Jekheli Kibami is a Lecturer in Old Testament at Eastern Theological College, Jorhat, Assam.

Zakali Shohe has done her M.Th. in New Testament from United Theological College, Bangalore.

Akhrole Kenye is the Academic Dean at Trinity Theological College, Dimapur.

Narola Imchen is a Lecturer in History of Christianity and the Dean of Women Studies at Eastern Theological College, Jorhat, Assam.

Abeni Lotha has done her M.Th. in History of Christianity at Eastern Theological College, Jorhat, Assam.

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

DIMAPUR

Rev. Dr.Nuklu Longkumer,DBC
Mangyang Imsong, DBC
Atula Jamuy, DBC
Kakheli-Jimomi, DBC
Narola Walling, DBC
Asani Chinzho, DBC
Mar Pongen, DBC
Wati Aier, DBC
Akhrole Kenye, TTC
Imtilemla Longkumer, RBC
Asenla, RBC
Abeni Kyong, LBC
Imsopangla Longkumer, WPC
Rev.Dr Noksangla, Chumukedima
Rokovino Sirai, Chumukedima
Anungla Ozukum, Diphupar

IMPUR

Narola Lemtur, ABTM

JABALPUR

Dr. Aphuno Chase
Rev. Parimal Roy

JALUKITOWN

Icheile Ipiung ,Tingbaeyile

JORHAT

Limatula Longkumer
Rev. Dr. Wati Longchar

KOHIMA

Rev.Dr. Kapfu, NBCCW
Arenla Ao, NBCCW
Zakheli Shohe

MADURAI

Phetuli

MIZORAM

Eyingbeni Lotha

MOKOKCHUNG

Atula Tzudir
Asangla Lemtur, CTC
Renemsongla Ozukum, ATA

PFUTSERO

Nirala Iswary

TUENSANG

Phutoli Chingmak, E.C.S P.

ZUNHEBOTO

Niholi, SBAK