

***Hazi* in the Context of Socio-Cultural Perspectives of the Nagas: A Sociological Discourse**

Lhipe Naro

Assistant Professor

Department of Sociology, Dimapur Government College

Dimapur, Nagaland

(Principal Author)

Dr. Yelhi Vero

Assistant Professor

Department of Economics, Dimapur Government College

Dimapur, Nagaland

(Corresponding author)

Abstract: Substance abuse is one of the major threats to the global peaceful community. The phenomenal rise of substance abuse amongst the younger generation has become an alarming factor in the families and societies. Of late, this issue has been more systematically addressed by international agencies under the United Nations. Consequently, many governments, particularly those of the developed countries, have undertaken many political, military or economic interventions in the recent past beyond their sovereign boundaries for curbing the emerging threats posed by substance abuse in terms like; *firstly* politico-ideological position vis-à-vis security threats, the danger posed by the play of market forces, the movement and nature of the substance addiction and abuse across borders of different states. *Secondly*, there is also the need to study on sociological dimensions and implications related to it. The present paper is thus an attempt to study the indigenous beverage of Chakhesang Naga community which is popularly known as *Hazi* (rice beer). *Hazi* was part and parcel of the traditional food item. However, with transformation of the socio-cultural aspects of the society, it has now being treated as unethical particularly due to excessive use and consequences of abusing it. The food system of *Hazi* rice beer in Chakhesang Naga has been interconnected much with social-cultural aspect in the society and thus requires a sociological discourse.

Introduction:

The society of the present day is undergoing many challenges to have a peaceful co-existence. Amongst which, alcoholism is one of the many challenges faced by the Naga society. It is one of the most growing concerns for the last four decades especially among the younger generation. The uniqueness of this social problem has captivated the minds of sociologist, policy makers, NGOs and the lay people. Many communities have its own special type of food item as seen in historical perspectives. So also, it has much impact on socio-cultural aspect in the community lives of the people. Similarly, the Naga society also has such food items which are commonly used during the festivals of the community. One of such items amongst the Naga society is rice beer, which is locally known as *Hazi* in *Kuzhale*¹ of Chakhesang Naga community.

This study is focused to examine the Naga community on the use of local beverages (*hazi*) with special emphasis on Chakhesang Naga tribe of Nagaland. Chakhesang Naga tribe is one of the major tribes in Nagaland. Amongst the Chakhesang Naga tribe, there are four ethnic groups speaking different dialects such as *Kuzhale*, *Chokri*, *Poula* and *Sümi*. All these people cordially shares common ancestral and historical lineage. Hence, all of these people shares similar food items and common socio-cultural behavior of the community. In olden days when the community lived a secluded live i.e. before the advent of Christianity and British administration, one of the important aspects of community live was feast and festivals. In such occasions, food and beverages were treated as utmost essential elements in every household. Accordingly, the society honoured those who could effort high quality food and beverages in abundance. Apart from rice, meat such as pork and beef are the central food item while *Hazi*, which is also known as rice beer², was the main beverage. Hence, *Hazi* was one of the main items in feast and festivals of the Chakhesang Naga community.

¹ *Kuzhale* is the dialect spoken by Kuzhami ethnic group of Chakhesang Naga community.

² Here after *Hazi* refers to “rice beer”

The present paper, thus, shall attempt to understand the use of *Hazi* in sociological perspective of the Chakhesang Naga community. It shall attempt to examine the role of *Hazi* in socio-cultural context and also how it came into conflict with the present socio-cultural setting of the community vis-à-vis the religious aspect of the new religion.

Sociologically, it raises various sets of questions such as why has the name *Hazi* occupied the centre problem for decades? Historically how did it started? Is it normal or pathological? Is the problem of the use and abuse of *Hazi* just a cut off relationship with God as the early Naga Christians popularly believe, or is it possibly a form of symbolic resistance against the diffusion of the animistic culture with the coming of Christianity in Nagaland? Why the use and abuse of *Hazi* remains unabated in spite of declaring itself as a dry state since late 1980s? In the light of these questions it is pertinent to address the core issue of the problem that is embedded in it. Thus, this paper attempts to give the contextual framework of the use and abuse of *Hazi* in Naga society with special reference to Chakhesang Naga tribe and also analyze the conflicting situation that still persists.

***Hazi* in Socio-Historical Context of the Naga Community**

The use and abuse of alcohol had been known in India for long. Locally made liquor like bang and rice beer is extensively used particularly at the social and religious functions. Also it has been a part of the daily diet of the tribal people in India (Majumdar and Madan, 1985). The Nagas have a long history of consuming *Hazi* which can be termed as alcohol in a much generalized manner as it contain a variable percentage of alcohol. The term *Hazi* used here is synonymous with alcohol as the term *Zisomi* (*Hazi* users) is also applied to those alcoholics in Chakhesang terminology. Each Naga tribe has their own traditional name for this substance, for instance in Ao it is called as *YI/Azu* (in different varieties *Pya* and *Machumtsu*), for the Lothas it is called as *Chumcho/Zuchu*, for the Sumi it called as *Aji*, in Angami dialect it is called as *Zu* and it is also available in different varieties like *Zutho*, *Ruhi*, *Thutse* and *Khe*. Chakhesangs called it as *Hazi* and it comes in different varieties like *Meneh*, *Etse* and *Zihde*. Oral traditions and historical records prove that *Hazi* was more than a drink for the Nagas, it is also a staple food (Nienu, 2015). *Hazi* constitutes an important component of the social and cultural practices of the Nagas and thus it also forms as part of Naga identity.

***Hazi* as a beverage:** The use of *Hazi* as a traditional beverage is as old as the Naga society itself. It is intricately woven as part and parcel of their daily beverage and cultural practices. *Hazi* was not something that one could buy and sell in an open market. Each family brews its own *Hazi* irrespective of family's social standings which is made almost daily to keep pace with an unceasing consumption. Moreover, it has to be made with great care so that individual household can produce the best *Hazi*. The art of making or preparing *Hazi* is very delicate and it involves certain steps, which has to be followed meticulously. First the rice is pounded, and then it is put to soak for about an hour. It is then put to dry for two to three hours and pounded again. After this it is mixed into a *Chiphi/vat* with cold water and left to stand for two to five days, according to the weather. Rice beer for certain Naga communities formed as part of daily diet as it was served at all meals. Indeed it was the product of their yearlong hard work, dedication and was seen as blessing from the rice harvested from their fields.

***Hazi* in socio-cultural events:** Apart from the community, the Chakhesang families also serve *Hazi* to friends, visitors and others. Indeed it was one of the most important food items used by the Nagas to entertain their close friends, relatives, neighbors and guests (Furer-Haimendorf, 1939). It is customary for the Nagas to serve *Hazi* during the celebration of festivals and feasts and no other beverages are served. In any social gatherings, *Hazi* was first served followed by other food items like rice and meat. Folk songs and folklores forms an important part of Naga social and cultural life and in all these acts *Hazi* forms an important component. Moreover, *Hazi* was even considered as the most important source of energy (Nienu, 2015) and nutritious food by the Nagas. There is a belief that it gives stamina, energy and strength and thus till today it is openly used by the Chakhesang wrestlers during competitions. It also forms an important food item during the time of bereavement, marriage parties, festivals and social gatherings. Furer-Haimendorf (1939) states that, to the Aos a feast without rice beer is unthinkable and without rice beer the life of the Angamis is little more than a bad dream, it was one of the most important food items used by Nagas. *Hazi* forms an important part of Naga culture and Naga identity.

Although there was extensive use of *Hazi* by the Nagas in the past it did not pose many problems to the social health, primarily due to the traditional moorings and acceptance, and social taboo that emphasized on self-restraint. Abuse and addiction of *Hazi* thus was an uncommon thing until the use of these traditional beverages was prohibited by the Christian Missionaries who came to the Naga Hills in 1872.

Impact of Christian Missionaries and British Administrators:

With the coming of British administration and the Christian Missionaries in Naga Hills, sweeping changes were brought about in the fields of economics, politics, social and religious set ups. The Christian Missionaries brought a totally new and alien world view which challenged the very foundation of the belief system. The teaching of the Missionaries sowed the first seeds of inferiority in the minds of the natives as the age old customs, food habits including the use of *Hazi* were portrayed as bad. Thus, besides changing the course of Naga history it also altered the social and cultural practices of the Nagas. Four interesting observation can be made with regard to the impact of Christian Missionaries and the colonial administrators on the use of *Hazi*.

Firstly, with the introduction of Christianity to the Nagas by Rev. Clark and his wife Mary Mead Clark in 1872, the Missionaries prohibited the Nagas from using *Hazi*. Rice beer which was served on all occasions, ceremonies, festivals and social gatherings lost much of its significance as it came into direct conflict with the teachings of Christianity. The new ideological conception that was propagated by the Missionaries was that those who continue to use *Hazi* will live in hell (Furer-Heimendorf, 1939). Hence, for the new converts among the Nagas, this became a Christian hall mark. Thus to be a Christian is to abstain from using *Hazi*. This ideologically motivated translation of *Hazi* as a sin served as the basis for Naga Christianity. Even in modern day Naga society, a committed Christian is seen as someone who is a teetotaler and the Church strongly upholds this value. The prohibition of *Hazi* by the Missionaries produces two conflicting thoughts. For the Nagas this is seen as a direct infringement on their social and cultural practices. But from the perspectives of the Missionaries, proscription of *Hazi* was both social and economic as they saw that the Nagas are poor people with no savings. Thus prohibiting the use of *Hazi* can lead to more saving of rice at the end of the year. Further, they have also seen that problems in the family and other social vices have become a regular feature in Naga families hence prohibition (Clark, 1907).

Secondly, another observation made by anthropologist and sociologist was the disappearance of Morung (keyike and Kehroke). The institution of Morung is very central to every Naga tribe. The Morung is a dormitory where young villagers come and live/stay together especially during the night. According to M. Horam, 'Morung is the centre of social, religious and cultural life' (Horam, 1977). Morung also serve as an institution for training folksongs, folk tales, dances, craft making, war tactics and leadership qualities to the youth. Hence, it served as knowledge transferring centre which (Singh, 1994). It was also a normal practice of the Nagas that *Hazi* was used in the Morungs. Indeed for the Nagas, life in the Morung would be incomplete without *Hazi*. The American missionaries believed that one of the best ways to prevent Nagas from drinking *Hazi* was to prevent them from going to Morung. Hence, missionaries actively campaigned against the institution of Morung and it was discarded as the house of non-believers. The advent of the British administrators and Christian missionaries has led to the defunctionalization and non operation of the same (Furer-Heimendorf, 1939). Also, with the introduction of modern educational schooling system, which was attended by many boys and girls of the village- the Morung's role as a traditional educational institution has declined. The informal adoption of Christianity by the majority of the people, like the *Wanching* community in Mon district has deprived their Morung and the roles of their Morung as a centre of learning and ritual activities were shut down (Furer-Heimendorf, 1939). With the decline of the institution of Morung, the discipline and orderliness particularly among young people deteriorated and a vacuum was thus created in the village social organization.

Thirdly, traditional institutions came into open conflict with the new institutions under the administration of British Colonial rulers and American Missionaries. Ceremonies, rituals and festivals which form as part of Naga life were made completely redundant. The feast of merit which signifies the conversion of material wealth, *Hazi*, cattle and others into a social position was discouraged by the colonial rulers and the missionaries. A person who offers a feast of merit is much respected and honoured in the community. Each feast entitles him to social distinction not only for himself but for his family, his clan and his village. He is entitled to wear certain type of dress/attire called *kelichirah* and he is also entitled to build a different type of house called *kelichikeh* that distinguishes him from the rest. During these feast of merit the supply of *Hazi* is made in abundant (Clark, 1907). The feast of merit thus serves both economic and social functions. Hence, it was limited to the hard working and wealthy people. However, with the advent of missionaries and British administration, these traditional practices, rites and rituals became a taboo to the new generation and were viewed as lavished, individualistic, and a heathen culture. Also, the new religion (Christianity) believed the use of *Hazi* as a sinful way of life. Although, the Nagas to this day are still very much fond of community feast, the system has undergone many changes, for instance, *Hazi* has been replaced by various kinds tea such as corn, millet, rosella tea, etc which are a non-alcoholic beverages. These changes have been attributed to the role of American missionaries.

Fourthly, the modern alcoholic beverages like Rum, Whisky, etc. were introduced to the Nagas by the colonial administrators. For instance, Haimendorf writes about their early interaction with the Konyak Nagas:

“the Angh of Sheanghu brought a goat as gift of welcome, and Mills (the then Deputy Commissioner of the Naga Hills) entertained the Angh with a few cups of Rum and he (Haimendorf) gave several packets of cigarettes and then they went happily home. Curiously enough those Konyak who are only used to chewing their own rough, home grown tobacco, greatly valued cigarette when they are offered to them” (Furer-Heimendorf, 1939). In another similar case, a statement is made regarding the white and Rengma Nagas contact, where Major Butler recorded his contact with the Nagas in his travels and Adventures in the Province of Assam, “---a few Rengmah Nagas visited us, and presented a fowl and a little rice, for which civility we gave them a bottle of spirituous liquor, which they prized more than money or other remuneration” (Elwin, 1969). The conclusion that can be drawn from these social encounters reveals that the Nagas were open to accept new food habits without any systematic resistance including a shift from *Hazi* to modern alcoholic beverages.

Conclusion:

The problem of alcoholism is far from over. The use and abuse of it has been considered as the root cause of all social evils. Thus, the Naga Baptist Churches and the Naga Mother's association ban the consumption and sell of *Hazi* as early as in 1980s. The Nagaland Baptist Church Council and Naga Mothers association lobbied with the State government which resulted in the Nagaland Liquor Total Prohibition Act 1989. Technically, Nagaland is a dry state, yet the nature and purpose of using these traditional beverages have changed in recent times. The regulated consumption of *Hazi* now exhibits more of a hybridized cultural preservation as in practice and, at the same time, the ‘cultural’ beverages are abused more than ever in an unrestricted manner leading to harmful addiction on the other hand. With the impact of modern forces like modernization, Christianity, industrialization, westernization, rural-urban drift, socialization and education, and liberal economic systems, the Naga society underwent rapid changes in creating a conflict with one's own traditional culture. The stresses and strains of modern life have rendered individuals much more vulnerable to substance abuse than ever before, and this does not exclude traditional continuity of *Hazi* habits.

Today, there has been an increasing debate regarding the Prohibition Act itself. One of the main reasons for the failure of the Prohibition Act is the failure on the part of the implementing agencies to internalized and understand the real issue from its core. Further, the contradictory role of the State is also visible as *Hazi* has been popularized as a soft light alcoholic beverage and gained popularity with the State sponsored festivals like road shows, mini hornbill, and hornbill festivals. Hence, the important question that arises at this juncture is, will the prohibition act be lifted ever and if it does, will *Hazi* as an alcoholic beverage lose its sheen and value as people have more access to stronger alcoholic beverages?

References:

- [1]. Clark, M. M. (1907), A Corner in India, Philadelphia, American Baptist Publication Society.
- [2]. Elwin, V. (1969), The Nagas in the Nineteenth Century, Bombay, Oxford University Press.
- [3]. Furer-Haimendorf, C. V. (1939), Return to the Naked Nagas: an Anthropologist's view of Nagaland, 1936-1970, London.
- [4]. Horam, M. (1977), Social and Cultural Life of the Nagas, Delhi, B. R Publishing Corporation, Delhi.
- [5]. Majumdar, D. N. and T.N Madan (1985) An Introduction to Social Anthropology, Noida: Mayoor Paperbacks Publications
- [6]. Nienu, V. (2015), Naga Cultural Milieu, an Adaptation to Mountain Ecosystem, Dorylus Publhing Group, 2309, Noriega st, San Francisco.
- [7]. Singh K. S. et al., People of India: Nagaland, Vol. XXXIV, Seagull Books, Calcutta.