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Political elite and their roles in Nagaland

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ABSTRACT

The political elite emerged in Nagaland after the creation of Nagaland statehood. Many Naga leaders were of the opinion that political elite emerged out of nationalist activities that most of the leaders who held an important leader in the Government and political parties after its statehood were formerly the leaders of the Naga National movement. The introduction of the Universal adult franchise and representative democracy under the constitution paved the way for periodic elections which build popular leaders who were not necessarily from the ruling elites but commoners who have faith in democracy. The real power shifted to legislators who became the decisions makers in the new Parliamentary system of government in Nagaland. The elected leaders were empowered to act independently in the decision making with enthusiasm and knowledge that they were not only architects but became a responsible leader for the future of the people.

Keywords— Emergence of political elite, Role of political elite

1. INTRODUCTION

Nagaland is the sixteenth state of the Indian Union. The State is located in the extreme North East region of India, with its capital located in Kohima and covers an area of 16,579sq.kms. [1] It is bounded by the Assam in the West, Myanmar on the East, Arunachal Pradesh and parts of Assam on the North and the Manipur in the South. The total population of Nagaland is 19,80,602 as per 2011 Census, of which males constitute 10,25,707 and females 9,54,895 [2]. The state consists of eleven Administrative districts namely Kohima, Phek, Mokokchung, Wokha, Zunheboto, Tuensang, Mon, Dimapur, Longleng, Kiphire, inhabited by 17 major Tribes along with other sub-Tribes. [3]

The political elites in Nagaland are those who have direct access to political power. The political elite of Nagaland is the representative of the people and most of them are either Member of the State Legislative Assembly or Member of Parliament, the former MLAs or Member of MPs or defeated candidates and the political party functionaries who aspired to get elected. They establish their popularities and power through elections. The roles of the Political elite are backed by the general support and consent of the masses. The political elite in Nagaland has all the greater responsibility because of the special provision of Art 371 (A) of the constitution of India. [4] Besides, it needs to be instrument of transaction in approach and thinking for the future generation while implementing policies in respect of religious and social service practices of the Nagas, customary law and procedures, administration of civil and criminal justice involving decision according to customary law and ownership and transfer of land and its resources wherein it says that no Act of parliament shall apply to the state of Nagaland unless Nagaland Legislative Assembly by a resolution so decides.

This paper is a humble attempt to study who are Political elite and the role played by them. It will be helpful to the scholars and academicians to know and understand the political elite in Nagaland addressing the various issues.

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Historically, the word 'elite' has been used in various connotations. During the 16th century, the term 'elite' were used simply to mean a choice. In the 17th century, its usage has been denoted commodities of particular excellence and subsequently was used to refer specific social groups occupying the certain superior position. [5] The concept of elite made its way into the scientific thought of the nineteenth century when the English word 'elite' was first used for the first time in sociology by Pareto. Pareto defined elites as "class of the people who have the highest indices in their branch of activity". [6] According to Oxford Dictionary thesaurus (Indian edition) elite as a "group of people regarded as the best in particular society or organization." Rupert Wilkinson, explain 'elite' as a distinctive group holding high status in its community and closely knitted together by a strong group feeling, ethos, and style. [7] J.B.McKee stated that political power rest in the hands of the elite. [8] The chief exponent of elite theories includes Pareto, Mosca, Michels, C.Wright Mills, James Burnham, and Lasswell. According to them, "there may exist in any society a minority of the population which takes major decisions in the society." [9]

The elites are defined as a social group distinguished by its high level of qualification and its ability and willingness to achieve or by its particular value or performance. It refers to a minority in whose hands power, wealth or privilege is concentrated justifiably or otherwise [10]. Despite being a minority group, it effectively controls all the effective center of political power. There is a strong assumption that however much one may try to be democratic in one political system. There is a strong element of oligarchy in every organization. However, in reality, every society is governed by an elite, either chosen or non-chosen. There can be no organization without power and power always resides in the hands of a few small sections of the 'chosen few.' [11] The core of elitist thesis is that in any society, there is, and must be, a minority of population which makes the major decisions in the society and rules over the majority [12]. Political elites of a democratic system are backed by the general support and consent of the masses. There are people participating in public affairs but in practice, power is and has always remained the privilege of dominating by few [13]. But this does not mean that society is not democratic. The governed can always act to remove the political elites and force them to take a decision in the interest of many.

3. THE EMERGENCE OF POLITICAL ELITE IN NAGALAND

In the pre-colonial period, each village was a republic of its own system of governance in most of the tribes like that of Greek City-State. A Naga village actually was a 'Village State' and is the only recognized sole political and social unit. [14] The laws, customs and their method of governance is quite different, the village administration was managed by a council of elders and man of influence who were recognized as elite. [15] The customary laws served as the bedrock of their social and political behavior. [16] The custom that had collective wisdom of the people used to keep the people discipline and the king or chieftain was treated as the repository of God's favor and their behaviors and treatments towards general mass were sound and reasonable" [17] However, sovereignty is jointly exercised by the chief, councilors and the common people of the village as a whole. [18] The Chieftainship combining political, administrative, military and priestly as existed in Konyak tribe. The chieftainship among the Sumi tribe as power existed with the combination of Political, Administrative and Military. The Akukau (Chief) was the supreme judge and tried all civil and criminal cases in consultation with the elders of the village. [19] The chief was a ruler, protector, and guardian of the village. [20] Both the tribes' chief commanded absolute power over his subject. The Republican system of Government among the Ao tribe, in which elected council members called 'Tatar' from different clans controls the social and political organizations of the village states. This council includes elected men belonging to the eldest age-group representing all the clan living in the village become the members of Putu Menden. [21] This system exist from ancient till today and is found to be one of the best village administrative system in India [22]. There was an extremely decentralized power structure among the Angamis (Tribe) where there was neither any chief nor any council to administer the day to day administration. The chief of the village had to be consulted and used to issue a formal order in all religious matter whereas, the secular matter, decisions taken at public meeting become final. [23] They maintained warrior ship to meet any foreign challenges and had never been subjugated under any foreign rule until the advent of the British administration.

With the coming of British, the spread of its administration eroded the power and prestige of the chiefs permanently. The political, administrative and military power of the village chiefs and the council of elders were made subject to the British law. The spiritual power of the chiefs also declined with the spread of Christianity and erosion of traditional faith. However, it contributed an important role in sowing the seed of modern education that led to the early educated Nagas became conscious of the changing ideas, values, and aspirations of the people. [24] In course of time the middle class became dominant in the new and emerging power structure. These educated leaders were the first few "educated elite in the vanguard of the Naga Politics". [25] The General Assembly election to the Assam Legislative Assembly in 1957, three Nagas namely, Shri. Khelhoshe Sema, Shri. Chubatemsu Ao and Subedar Satsuo Angami filed their nomination papers for the three seats from the Naga Hills District to Assam legislative assembly and elected uncontested. The introduction of money as a medium of exchange reduced the traditional power structure in many ways. Monetization helped in the creation of permanent assets which ultimately created economic classes used it as a flexible tool of power to transform in all power relationship. [26] Consequently, the political elite formally emerged only after the statehood of Nagaland although its development had started way back in 1918 during the formation of Naga club which led to the political awakening. Many Nagas were of the opinion that the political elite emerged out of Nationalist activities, most of the leaders who held an important leader in the Government and political parties after the Nagaland got its statehood was formerly the leaders of the Naga National movement.

The introduction of the Universal adult franchise and representative democracy under the constitution brought about profound changes. Periodic elections build popular leaders who were not necessarily from the ruling elites but commoners who have faith in democracy. The real power shifted to legislators who became the decisions makers in the new Parliamentary system of government in Nagaland. There were thirteenth elections held so far since the statehood of Nagaland was inaugurated in 1963. The elected leaders were empowered to act independently in the decision making with enthusiasm and knowledge that they were not only architects but became a responsible leader for the future of the people.

4. ROLE OF POLITICAL ELITE

In a democracy the ruler is the representative of the people and for the welfare of the people who are then recognized and authorized to make political decisions [27] according to the needs of the situations. The people's participation is indispensable in ruling the society at least in the sense that it could exercise a choice between the rival elites. The development policies should be revised to meet public needs on the basis of free and fair participation in development and fair distribution in all benefits comes out of it. [28] It is naturally not necessary that political elite takes a decision because their expertise has greater political power and authority. However, in modern times political issues are becoming increasingly complex and the common people even though not having sufficient knowledge to properly formulate the policy but the decision of the political elite always lies in the common will of a political community. Well-developed patterns of social and economic interaction between leaders also as unifying factors in the power structure. [29] There are many factors like the structural character of various institutions in society like the competence of the masses, political stability, cultural heritage and the political pattern etc. which affect the prosperity of a state or its development.

The political elite in Nagaland not only perform natural functions as the duty of representatives, however, considering the social, economic and political situation prevailing the political elite have a greater and different role to play. They are bound to take any decision on urgent public issues whenever the need arises. The political elite mobilizes of all the available resources and political energies in order to achieve its development policy. Several new challenges have been thrown up with the advent of the 21st century due to social changes, economic and technological advancement. This has resulted in the changing patterns and complexity while dealing with the multiple roles of the political elite. The development process has to be in a partnership with joint efforts between the Government and the people. [30] It is indispensable for the political elites to build the strong relationship with the people of that particular constituency from where he is represented. It is in the capacity of representatives the problem of the community has to be addressed with a tangible solution. In Nagaland, the Political elite is the backbone of a people aspiration. As a representative of the people, he or she has to adopt different strategies to build a relationship with the people of a constituency for a better outcome in the process of development of collective interest. The individual members sometimes revolt against the party leadership and even go to the extent of losing their seats for defying the command of the whip. However, they survive politically because the public respects such display of courage and would likely to vote back them to power. The service and expectation of the people depend on the role of Political elite keeping close touch with the people of his constituency as well as with fellow political leaders. The decision of Political elite depends on the great expectation of a people that they have faith in their leaders who can solve they're personal as well as community interest at large. Therefore there is a rising expectation of the people demanding more on the greater professionalism and specialization of both civil and police administration in regard to law and order, Quality control works of all developmental activities monitored by technocrats and policy-making by the intellectuals are properly implemented reflects the images of the political elite. The expectations of the people have a powerful impact on those leaders whom they trust and respect.

The political elite of the former and present have initiated various measures to reduce the disparities in terms of social and economic development and strengthened to ensure faster development and better governance, several innovative initiatives in governance like Village Development Board, Communitization of institutions and services, Mission Mode Programmes like Nagaland Empowerment of People through Economic Development (NEPED), Nagaland Beekeeping and Honey Mission, (NBHM), Nagaland BioResource Mission (NBRM) etc. [31]. Besides the state has done tremendous improvement in Sports and Music at both the regional and national level winning prizes and recognition. There has been consistent effort to encourages and promote the entrepreneurship and capacity building under Chief Minister Corpus Fund which has benefitted thousands of youth, many of whom have attractive placements in various parts across the country. Besides, the political elite is committed to moving forward with action-oriented pragmatic plans and policies for the development of the state and the people.

The political elite had been playing a very important role to secure a negotiated settlement of Indo-Naga political problem acceptable to the people. The Government of India and the NSCN (IM) have been under the ceasefire since 1997 and reached out framework agreement between the two parties in 2015, to bring out the final settlement once for all. They maintain a ceasefire in letter and spirit and decided to continue and work as facilitators. The consultative committee was established in consultations and involvement of all the political parties in pursuit of permanent peace. The Joint Legislature Forum (JLF) was constituted on 27th Nov.2009 under the leadership of Democratic Alliance of Nagaland (DAN) government inclusive of Opposition bench in the legislature and irrespective of all party affiliations. They played a role of the legislator in the assembly and Influential political leaders outside the assembly in dealing with various needs and situations of the people and society for better progress and prosperity of the society.

However, corruption and favoritism become a way of life in the system of both social and political life. There had been many hindrances to the political elite in Nagaland while discharging their roles in the past and present due to various reasons. The power monger attitude of the political elite and lack of statesmanship also very apparent in the system of governance is undeniable. The political elite of the former Government, as well as present Government, is committed to fight corruption, and to bring about peace and development in the state. However, Nagaland has one of the highest ratios of Government servants to population, which is about 1: 15. For a population of about 20 lakh, the state has about 1.4 lakh Government employees including the work charged and casual employees, there is a case of fictitious or bogus employees, unauthorized appointment without the sanctioned post being done in many departments until proper census and verification is done. At present Non-Plan expenditure keep mounting every year due to salaries and pensions eat up more than 60% of the non-plan expenditure. [32] It has become a major challenge to the political elite to make good governance.

Since after the statehood, the Political elite in Nagaland had much concern towards Naga political issue has dominated the social and political discourse of the Nagas for the last six decades, and it has been at the top of the agenda of every political party and government in Nagaland. Till today, the problem of the political issue remains unsolved in spite of loud agenda put before the people in every election as the topmost priority by the political parties to place them in power. On the other hand, the people of Nagaland are tired of want permanent peace and want to grow to be a self-reliant state on equal term with another advanced state of the union.

5. CONCLUSION

Despite its drawbacks, the role of political elite had been of great importance. Since its emergence as political elite to till date, they had played a very important role in all aspect of not only political administration but the socio-economic development and cultural life of the people in the state. As a representative of the people, the political life of a leader requires involvement and participation in both social and political activities such as social gathering like tribal festivals and community recreational activities, church conventions, political meeting, campaigning, political rally etc. This is the foundation of the political life of a leader who is always acting as facilitators of the civil society that strengthens democracy. The positive role of political elites in Nagaland cannot be denied whether they could fulfill the aspiration and wishes of the people in a fullest according to expectation of the people or not, yet they are group of people who holds the center of power in the state, and thus, decisions taken by them have a profound impact on masses.

6. REFERENCES

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APPENDIX

List of persons interviewed

- T.A. Nguillie Ex-Minister
- Kiyezhe Aye Ex-Minister
- K.G. Kenye Secretary General NPF Nagaland and sitting Member of Rajya Sabha
- E. T. Ezung Former Minister and Speaker NLA
- Shingya Khiamnigan Ex-MLA Advisor to C.M
- Rikonicha Ex-Minister
- T. Kikon Ex- Minister
- Ihezhe Zhimomi Ex-Minister
- Vihepu Yephthomi Ex-MLA
- Medokhul sophie Ex-MLA
- Khetovi Kinny President RJD Nagaland
- Rev. Dr. Zelhou Keyho, General Secretary, NBCC
- Rev. Dr. Hevikhu Achumi Executive Secretary WSBK
- Gen. Thenosilie President Naga National Council
- Apong Pongener working President NPF
- Hukiye Tissica NPF candidate
- Kasuho Yeputhomi G.B, President Eastern Sumi Kukami Association
- Tia Meren Retired Government Servant