

DOCTRINE OF NO WAR ZONE AND ‘PUKREILA’ OF THE TANGKHUL NAGA.

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ABSTRACT

War is as old as human race and continues to indulge in spite of knowing its destruction and suffering to human kind. Tangkhul Naga, a warrior tribe and head hunting ethnic tribe practices different kinds of war. They also practice Head hunting in traditional time base on their religious faith and social significant. However in spite of seemingly a wild people they have war strictly following the code of customary laws of the land. In spite of practicing headhunting and various kind of war all around , there is a unique and a rare custom which define and demarcate a land where it is safe and free from any kind of war known as “*Ngalei khamor*” (No war Zone). It is a kind of safe haven for all. Another unique customary practice of the Tangkhul is Pukreila (Women married to another village) who act as ambassador of peace during any fighting or war. The Tangkhul Customary Laws amazingly empower’ pukreila’to stop any kind of fighting at once with her word of order. She is respected by all and immune from any kind of harm to her.

KEY WORDS

WOMEN AS A CHANNEL OF PEACE.

Introduction

War is part and partial of our life. Human being sometime tries to avoid it but the more he tries the more he is dragged in the war. We fought a war not to have a war; we have a war to avoid a war. In order to have peace we fought a war. We fought a war for war. We fought a war for security and integrity. We also fought a war for dominance and power. This craze for power and dominance is inherent in human .Therefore war became necessary evil which became part of human life. The Nagas particularly the Tangkhuls are not exception to it.

Like international laws of war, the Tangkhuls although they are primitive in traditional times, has strict adherence to customary laws. If any village or individual breached such customary laws of war, the culprit is jointly punished severely. Although war and head hunting are related they are quite different from one another. Head hunting is more of personal affairs whereas war is more of public or village affairs. Therefore, war is not necessarily head hunting and vice-versa.

Among the Tangkhul there are five types of war. They are:

- i. General war/ Declared war (phar-rei-rai)
- ii. Secret war/ undeclared war (ngathirai)
- iii. War of challenges (ngasungrai)
- iv. Khel/ Clan war
- v. War of hostage (kharingtuk)

All the above mentioned wars are fought under strict customary laws of war.

Head hunting if we judge today in our present perception, it seems to be barbarous, inhuman and uncivilized. But it will be wrong to judge the past tradition from the present context. For them head hunting was glorified in many reasons. They value human head more than anything else. It has religious sanction, economic utility, political consideration and receives social status. Some of the value and important things about head hunting were:

- i. The Nagas had their own belief about the value of human heads. They believed that by bringing human head from head hunting it will add fertility of the soil in the village. So they will have bountiful harvest.
- ii. There was social recognition. A person who can bring head has higher social status. A boy who had not taken any head is hard to find a woman for marriage.
- iii. Another reason for head hunting was for the cause of justice. When the village boundary was violated or a woman is unreasonably divorced and sent back to her village. This vengeance for justice sometime leads to head hunting or war.
- iv. There was a religion belief that a person who can take the head of other on his death his luggage will be carried by the victim in the land of death.
- v. The other reason is that a warrior who got maximum number of heads is most respected in the society. He has the best chance to marry the most beautiful girl in the village. And there are some Naga tribes that a person who has hunted the most heads is made the chief of the village.
- vi. It was belief that the spirit is bliss when human head is brought to the village so there will be no disturbances from spirit in form of natural calamity, insect, animal etc.
- vii. A village that can bring many head is fear by neighboring villages. Therefore it is a kind of deterrent for others and security and safety for that village.

About the importance of head hunting of the Nagas, Dr. Verrier wrote that “It stimulated the crop to grow better, especially when the head was that of a woman with long hair. Moreover, the Nagas have always been a warlike race and the warrior, especially the young warrior who has taken a head is held a great advantage over his fellow persons in attracting the most beautiful girl of his village for marriage. Indeed, it is said that youth who had not taken a head finds considerably difficult in obtaining a wife at all”.

So Nagas, since they are war like race; war and head hunting became part of their life. As stated that this war are fought under strict customary laws. And in the customary laws of war there is peculiar and very human character which is present in their custom, it is known as “NGALEI KHAMOR” which means no war zone, or neutral zone. If any person enters this zone no crime could be committed. If he commits any kind of crime like. Theft, rape, dacoit, etc. in time of war also, the vanquished party if they run and enter the zone they cannot be attacked or do any harm to them. Reaching such zone, any person is completely immune from being assaulted, attacked or killed on that zone. That area is declared jointly as “*No war zone*”, which is treated like sacred place. So any person innocent, culprits, criminals whoever it may be or man , women, children whoever enters into this “NGALEI KHAMOR” (no war zone) they are safeguarded and may return home from *ngalei khamor* free from injuries or harm.

In case of any person or village who violate this customary rules; the neighboring villages will jointly organized and attacked the village as a punishment. Ngalei khamor (no war zone) is also known as ‘No man land’. But there is not even an inch of land which is not unoccupied or which does not belong to anybody. This words ‘no man land’ or the concept of ‘ngalei khamor’ (no war zone) come into existence when there is boundary or certain strip of land which is disputed between the neighboring villages or individual. None of them would like to give up its claim and none of them would like to be responsible if anything happen in this disputed area. It is a tradition that whatever happened in their village or within the boundary of their village they are answerable to the problem. In order to avoid such problem and the unsettlement of the disputed area, both the village declared it

to be un-administered area or no man land (which is misnomer) and declared such zone as '*ngalei khamor*' (no war zone area). This is how it came into being. It is not a new phenomenon. It has been there since time immemorial. Once it is declared as no war zone all other villagers also recognized and respect it.

Another reason for having such safe zone is that:

- i. Traditional social practice particularly head hunting has no season. It is done throughout the year. So it is danger everywhere and, all the time. But if they have such safe zone they may relief for a while for they know that nothing will happen when they are in no war zone.
- ii. Criminal are also after all a human being so, they should have some safe place for refuge. So that hunters do not assault, hurt or kill for their crime or for their head.
- iii. The inter village war should have a definite place so that it does not spread beyond the limit and exterminate all.
- iv. Any village that surrendered during the war and enter such safe zone should be respected so that no further damage is done.
- v. Any criminal or offender who took refuge in such area are spared and given chances to live and reform himself.

Pukreila

There is another interesting customary practice of the Tangkhul which is called 'Pukreila'. Pukreila are those women married to another village. In spite of constant village rivalry and war there still exist and practiced inter village marriage. A woman who is married to another village became equal distance of relations. Therefore, she can play the role of ambassador of both the village of her parents village and her husband's village i.e. a man from a X village marry a woman from Y village. The woman becomes '*pukreila*' of both the village. In case of war between X and Y villages, as she belong to both village she remains a neutral person. Therefore she can be a mediator for peace. Usually head hunters do not like to take the head of pukreila because there is danger of revenge from both the village. As she is related to both the villages she can play the role of mediator and peace maker.

The term '*pukreila*' is most likely derived from the word PHA KHARALA meaning tattooed woman. Because tattooing (pha khara) is very common among Tangkhul women. According to Sothing W. A Shimray, the syllable PUK and REI (LA is a suffix for women) does not form a meaningful syllables considering the very nature of pukreila. As such judging from all these, it is very likely that pukreila is a derivation from the word PHA KHARALA, PHA into 'pu', KHARA or KHAREI into 'krei' or 'rei' and LA as 'la'. Thereby, PHA-KHARA (REI) – LA- into PU-KREI-LA or PUK-REILA which means coming to the village by marrying.

When the two warring villages is fighting and inter into serious clash even death or when the *pukreila* feels that they have fought enough and do not want further bloodshed, she will hold a long 'Y' shape stick and enter into the field and she will shout '***Stop! It is enough***'. Then suddenly hearing the command of pukreila the entire warrior at once had to stop the war. Pukreila in any condition cannot be harmed as per customary laws. She was highly respected for her neutrality and sincerity, for she is related to both the village. In case of any harm or disrespect to her command, serious punishments are given. This is one of the unique customs of Tangkhul. There is a saying that "war begin from woman and ends with woman". The Tangkhul Naga regards women and keeps it in a high status in the society one of the example is the 'Pukreila' her role and status in the customary laws of the Tangkhul.

Conclusion

War is the root of destruction, suffering and also creating enmity of human being, yet sometime it is unavoidable necessary evil. This has been there from time immemorial. Tangkhul Naga a warrior tribe, in spite of fierce and wild in nature it is found that they are governs by religious ethic and strictly base on customary laws. They have unique and minutes in details about day to day life including laws on war. The role of women (*Pukreila*) and Doctrine of No war zone (*Ngalei khamor*) indicate that they are truly genuine and elements of humanity and civilization exist which cannot be seen from far outlook. They have their own world which cannot be judge from alien's prism. On the other hand today, when humanity and integrity of human being is at the lowest ebb in modern world, maybe we have something to learn from this people whom they were earlier known as savage and wild tribe of India.

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Glossary

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| 1. Khel | - Clan |
| 2. Kharingtuk | - War of hostage |
| 3. Ngalei khamor | - No war zone |
| 4. Ngasungrai | - War of challenge |
| 5. Ngathirai | - Secret war |
| 6. Phar-rei-rai | - General war |
| 7. Pukreila | - Women married to other village. |

