

## **Culture of Peace: A Panacea to the Naga Peace Process**

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**Abstract:** No societies, across the globe, whether rich or poor, developed or un-developed, have ever been entirely peaceful. Every existing culture, as such, is inflicted with conflict of any kind at one point or the other. It is impossible to subsume that there can ever be a fully peaceful culture. In the light of this, this research article will make an efforts to explain that Naga culture though mostly considered violent in nature, if provided a space for peace culture to be permeated in their society, can open a window of hope to progress the otherwise protracted Naga peace process.

**Keywords:** Peace, Conflict, Peace Culture, Naga Culture, Naga Peace Process, Federal Relation

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Generally, many writers accepted that aiming for complete peace in the world is a utopia. "There will be neither total peace nor total health...what may happen is a better balance between peace and violence, meaning more and better peace and less and 'better' (less evil) violence – a betterment of the human condition"[1]. The aim, therefore, should be creative peace, peace that allows the process of "shifting balance in movement". Meaningful and sustainable peace is the incorporation of both the positive and negative concept of peace. Peace is not concerned only with resolving tension, problem, conflicts, or war; in a deeper and more meaningful way peace is concerned with the question of establishing justice and removing imperfection in a socio-political structure. Peace when viewed only in the negative sense as merely an absence of war is incomplete and immature because even if war is in backstage, yet the possibility of outbreak of war or conflict constantly follows peace. Thus, to make peace a reality and not only exist as utopian, positive peace (recognising the fundamental rights, democracy and justice of human being) must be given equal importance. True peace lies in sacrificing selfishness, the hope and the desire to gain maximum at the expense of the more unfortunate party. Peace must be receptive to adjustment and must create conditions possible for negotiation to end conflicts. Such notion of peace is found to be closely associated with the principle of "Peace Culture".

Of late, while dealing with the concept of peace, the need of inculcating the ideal of "Culture of Peace" for a sustainable and meaningful peace has become important. The concept of "Culture of Peace"

was developed and expanded in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and the UNESCO formally introduced the concept in 1995. Acknowledging the importance of inculcating the spirit of culture of peace in everyday business, and in order to give true peace a chance, the UN General Assembly declared the year 2000 as the International Year of the Culture of Peace. Frequent mention has been made that the central philosophy of culture of peace lies within the idea that "Just as wars begins in the minds of men; peace also begins in our mind" [2]. It emphasises that culture of violence must be replaced by culture of peace. The concept of peace culture embodied that the three facets of peace, that is, cultural peace, structural peace and direct peace, must come together [3]. It primarily focuses on "training of human mind or consciousness". "As a matter of fact, aspects which are most clearly drawn upon and emphasised within the cultures of peace approach are human consciousness and transformation. Without awareness and reverence for life, global transformation of both the form and substance of human culture will not be realized" [4]. A peaceful culture embraces peaceable discourses, teaches human qualities such as empathy, compassion and respect and benefits the societies and countries to have a greater ability to imagine peace [5]. Many agree and opined that culture of peace signifies not only the training of mind to oppose and prevent violence but also the motivation of such trained mind in promoting peaceful and harmonious relations. In short, when people learn to solve their differences peacefully, the culture of peace can be prevailed.

Culture of peace emphasises that since every society actively influences the thought process and

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behaviour of individual, certain institutions that induce men to be peaceful and 'peaceable' and despise violent conflict are necessary. Peace culture, thus, draws attention to establishing an educational institution that will aim at teaching non-violent peaceful solutions for any conflicts. According to Rivera, UNESCO helped construct a new vision of peace by developing a culture of peace based on the universal values of respect for life, liberty, justice, solidarity, tolerance, human rights and equality between men and women [6]. In a sentence, the original concept of Culture of Peace stressed the importance of education specifically directed towards teaching non-violent solutions for conflicts.

### **PEACE CULTURE'S PRINCIPLE REQUIRED FOR ADVANCING THE NAGA PEACE PROCESS**

Culture refers to the customs and folk beliefs, history, traditions, language, art, literature, social organisations, way of life and worldviews of a particular group of people. It is something that gives identity to someone. Culture is a habit or a usual behaviour that people have grown up with and it is something that is hard to stop doing. It is a value passed down or inherited from one generation to another within a society. It can be modified or invented or develop with the passing age in order to fit in with a particular circumstance. Culture is the medium through which humankind realises what it is to be humane, and help realise those factors that destroys humanity. In essence, every aspects of human's life are largely impacted by the cultural set-up in which he or she lived in. Of late, it has been commonly held that the "culture of war" that dominated the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and the centuries before, need to be replaced by a "culture of peace" for the well-being and sustainability of humankind's future often greatly threaten by the possible tendency of nuclear holocaust in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Against the general background of a nuclear threat looming large in today's global scenario, culture of peace which is a set of values and attitudes that not only spurn violent conflict but also find ways to prevent conflict from recurrence must be saturated even in a small society like that of the Nagas.

As mentioned earlier, no culture across the globe is completely violent or completely peaceful. All culture is a juxtaposition of violent as well as non-violent social activities. In other words, the term "culture" involves both peaceful as well as non-peaceful potential. History of humankind indicates that various cultural encounters have paved the way for subjugation and imposition of one culture by another resulted to various forms of violent conflict. For instance, the long-drawn "Indo-Naga" conflict, which has mostly violent overtures, revolves around the grudge Nagas' hold that their cultural identity will be overwhelmed by the "mainland" Indian identity, once

they are made a part of the Indian Union. They consider forceful integration of their land with the Union of India as a form of "cultural invasion or cultural imperialism". Nonetheless, Nagas' aggressive anti-Indian resistance does not serve the cause of peace, but rather the cause of violent armed conflict which has made Nagaland and the Indian sub-continent restive for a very long time. It invited direct violation of their rights and peace, thereby, driving what Johan Galtung emphasises as "direct peace" and "structural peace" far away from Nagaland, paving the way for "cultural violence". By "cultural violence", Galtung means those aspects of culture, the symbolic sphere of human's existence exemplified by religion and ideology, language and art, empirical science and formal science (logic, mathematics) – that can be used to justify or legitimise direct or structural violence [7].

Peace culture stresses on the importance of the notion "agree to disagree". It means having a mentality that does not treat any difference of opinion as a confrontation. Rather any differences should be treated as an opportunity to constructively and cooperatively address the misunderstandings in order to mutually leap forward together. It upholds the importance of the Jainist philosophy of *Anekantavada*, which simply means plurality of viewpoints, inferring that there is no single or universal truth or reason or opinion. Diversity of views must be respected in order to arrive at a solution that satisfies the contestants as well as to preserve social harmony and peace. According to some, the uniqueness of the culture of peace is that it insists upon the elements of participation, dialogue and consultation, along with the peaceful management of differences and conflicts, despite the history of differences, injuries and killings which would otherwise have kept the participants apart [8]. Culture of peace promotes the values, attitudes, behaviours and ways of life based on: non-violence and respect for all human rights; inter-cultural understanding, tolerance and solidarity; sharing and free flow of information; and full participation and empowerment of women [9]. In short, the goal of the culture of peace is to institutionalise a new way of living together in society by making the values of a culture of peace to become the laws, standards, habits, customs and common sense practices of all social institutions [10].

Although still debatable, it has been vastly accepted by those who are engaged in peace and conflict research that conflict could not be eliminated completely; it can only be transformed or transcended or upstage. "Transcend", according to Galtung, produces diagnosis, prognosis and therapy perspectives on how conflicts can be transformed and peace built [11]. Transformation of conflict is a necessity so that the contesting parties can, not only avoid violence, but also to live creatively and non-violently. The basic idea of transcendence is a constructive future-oriented

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approach to conflict, not destructive past-oriented [12]. “Transcend” means conflict resolution by peaceful means; or a value commitment towards “peace by peaceful means” [13]. It may, however, be noted that the ideas of peace culture intersect the point of conflict resolution, settlement, or conflict transformation. As a matter of fact, any outcome of conflict must be directed towards achieving true and sustainable peace necessary for the maximum development and prosperity of the people. The debate as to whether any successful peace process should be termed as either conflict settled or resolved or transformed, does not appear to occupy prior importance as long as the spirit of peace culture is applied as a means to achieve the ends.

Culturalisation of peace is a completely new dimension in the Naga society inundated with violent political conflict with the Indian Government for several decades. Comprehending the hard life that a conflict has brought about in their life, the Nagas of late, seem to have turned towards the principle of peaceful culture. Today, peace is a mantra being chanted repeatedly in Nagaland. They have started assuming that if they can instill the spirit of culture of peace in their day to day conduct and make an effort to sort out their differences with the Indian Government in a peaceful, non-violent manner, then perhaps, their ongoing peace process can turn towards a more conducive and constructive direction.

Most scholars described bravery, fierceness, “headhunting”, hospitality, generosity, and freedom loving as common cultural traits of the Nagas. Of all the traits, Nagas have been passionate about the protection of their freedom and this passion has encouraged them to zealously guard their basic rights of freedom from any outside force(s). Their enthusiasm for freedom or independence from any outside control or domination was the direct causal mechanism of Nagas’ violent armed conflict with the Indian State, often termed as an intruder of their freedom. The Nagas’ culture of the desire for freedom has been transmitted from generation to generation in oral tradition as well as in written literature. It can be surmised that the curbing of right to self-determination has led to the “Indo-Naga” violent political conflict that has been going on for more than six decades. Hostility of the Indian Government towards Nagas’ aspiration seems to have inscribed in the minds of the Nagas that their right can only be realised through violent retaliation. As such, they adopted non-peaceful means to realise their objectives. Yet, it will not be wrong to assume that this adoption contrasts the philosophy of peace culture.

In the pre-Christian period, every cultural mannerism of the Nagas was imparted from their age-old system called *Morung* (youth dormitory), wherein, Naga youths infused their customary thoughts from their elders. It may be theorised that Nagas learned the

art of warfare, administration, relationships, politics, hospitality, etc. at *Morung*. For a very long time, the Nagas practice the culture of “headhunting”, which was often esteemed as an act of valour rather than violent and inhumane act. In fact, those who were struck by the Nagas’ practice of “headhunting” described the Naga Hills as the “paradise of head-hunters”, wherein, “the taking of a head is symbolic of courage, and men who could not were dubbed as women or cows. There is nothing more glorious for a Naga than victory in battle by bringing home the severed head of an enemy” [14]. Such culture of the Nagas makes them who they are – a fierce, powerful, violent, proud and a strong race. It, in a way, brought them a greater masculine power. The culture of “headhunting” was infused with their life. It can be hypothesised that if Nagas can learn the art of bravery at *Morung*, they can also inculcate the art of peace through the establishment of peace institution. Sensing that the stereotyping of Naga culture as violent and anti-peace can be transformed into a more peace loving culture, if given a fair chance, the Nagaland State Government in the year 2012 propagated a plan of initialising a peace institution in a conflict-ridden Naga society. However, such plan is yet to materialise in actuality.

Since 1997, with the signing of the cease-fire agreement between the Indian Government and the National Socialist Council of Nagalim - Isaac and Muivah (NSCN-IM) – one of the strongest and most organised Naga revolutionary groups claiming to have the mandate of the Naga people – have been engaged in a peace process. The road to peace in Nagaland, which they have been walking for nearly two decades, have been undertaken with the hope that their problem can be resolved more amicably by peaceful means rather than by violent means. Today, Nagas seem to uphold that any peace process that does not keep in mind, culture of peace, cannot achieve a true peace. In the context of the Nagas, their central focus of culture of peace revolves around the principle of respect for human rights and enjoyment of justice. In essence, culture of peace - which is a set belief, way of life, mores and values that rejects violence and bloodshed - can point the Nagas towards the path of true and just peace. Absence of peace culture in the Naga Hills had handicapped their lives for nearly 70 years since the independence of India. The 17 years (and counting) of peace negotiation is unlikely to produce lasting peace and permanent solution unless the inalienable political and historical rights of the Nagas as an indigenous people are respected by the Indian Government.

Directly, the process to peace in Nagaland is related with the issue of human security, which is also the central focus of a peace culture. In simple sense, human security refers to security from war and crime. In its broadest sense, human security includes job, food and health security, along with personal security from

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violence; the environmental security provided by adequate water supplies, clean air, and the management of natural disasters; the “community” security provided by being able to safely have an ethnic identity; and the political security of having human rights and press freedom [15]. In other words, the security dimension is closely related with the protection and enjoyment of human rights and justice that will pave the way for all round development of the people in general and an individual in particular.

Of late, many assumed that the “Indo-Naga” political peace dialogue appears to have turned towards the aspect of transcendence. For instance, the proposal of a “shared sovereignty” or a sort of “federal relationship” that came up after many years of negotiation is something that aims to go beyond the long-standing Naga conflict. One can deduce that the NSCN-IM’s model of “shared sovereignty” is similar to Wallensteen’s mechanism of “shared control” for transcending incompatibilities. From shared control, according to Wallensteen [16] one can learn four things. Firstly, the contesting parties decide to rule together over the disputed resources and it may require some degree of trust. Secondly, it may also be a temporary arrangement for a transitional period. Thirdly, the conflict can be successfully transcended even if the contesting parties agreed only for a predetermined period. Lastly, at the end of the period the conflict situation is very different from what it was in the beginning. In the light of this, it may be said that the proposal of “shared sovereignty” appear to have the potential to transform and transcend the long running “Indo-Naga” conflict. Many also pointed out that the model of “shared sovereignty” has been arrived after several rounds of discourses on the 30 points demand laid down by the NSCN-IM have been narrowed down. The model upholds that “both sides have agreed on a separate flag for Nagaland, new names for its Assembly and Governor, and a pan-Naga cultural and social body (that can protect the cultural interests of the Nagas wherever they live)” [17].

Sizeable Nagas feel that “federal relations” or “shared sovereignty” (the idea first brought to light among the Nagas by Suisa Rungsung) might perhaps prove to be a better option for true peace in Nagaland. Chawang remarked, in the yesteryear of the Naga political struggle “there was none (among the Nagas) who could negotiate the Indian leaders as Suisa did with Indira Gandhi” [18]. Many Naga leaders failed to understand Suisa’s proposal of “federal relationship” between the Government of India and the Nagas, and thus rejected. Those were the days when the catchwords like “Nothing less than Independence”, “Absolute Sovereignty” and “Complete Independence” were indoctrinated in the minds of many Nagas. Of late, it has become visible that more and more Nagas appear to have come to term “Federal Relations” (in the line of

Suisa’s proposal) as a more practical and desirable solution. Many younger Naga generations held that in the age of Information and Globalisation, a solution that has some sort of relationship between the Government of India and the Nagas will be the best option in order to lead them towards the path of lasting peace. Yephthomi asserted, “Even if sovereignty is given to us (Nagas), it would be a very difficult task to carry on the sovereignty business” [19]. One Congress MLA named Longkumer also remarked, “In the present context, it would be impossible to achieve sovereignty. Naga people are still dependent on the Government of India economically even after 50 years of statehood. In order to become a sovereign state, we should first of all, be economically independent” [20]. Contrariwise, some Naga revolutionary groups like the Naga National Council (NNC) headed by Adino Phizo and National Socialist Council of Nagaland – Khaplang (NSCN-K) among others are unlikely to accept any solution that is less than complete sovereignty. They often asserted that any solution short of complete sovereignty is no solution. With due consideration to the interest of the Naga public, these contradictory viewpoints among the Nagas on the issue of sovereignty can be resolved by imbuing the principle of culture of peace which strongly propagates to solve any differences through peaceful means.

#### **CONCLUDING REMARKS**

For peace process to be successful in Nagaland, both the conflicting parties must understand and respect each other’s limitations, differences and difficulties. Ao rightly pointed out, “Naga must know what India wants and India must know what the Nagas deserve and make a settlement” [21]. Man may come and go; leadership may change over time; history can be written and re-written; but geographical structure will remain intact and compact. Whether Nagas become independent from India or remain as part of India, one fact that remains is that they will forever exist as neighbours topographically. Therefore, to solve their differences in the line of the principle of peace culture will be the best possible option. So long as the Nagas and the Indian Government manage to negotiate for true peace and freedom without alienating their rights and justice as human beings, one may consider that the overall peace process in Nagaland is moving in the right direction. Just as every problem has a solution, every conflict too has a solution if one seeks earnestly and sincerely. James A. Schellenberg pointed out, “even the most intractable and bitter conflicts can yield at least to a partial resolutions, which eventually may finally get resolved in one way or another” [22]. In order to transform the culture of violence towards tranquility, reconciliation and development, the conflicting parties need to inculcate the philosophy of “culture of peace”.

Another observation concerning the contemporary Naga peace process is that peace in

Nagaland will remain questionable, as long as the Naga leaders does not sagaciously address the impending instability within the Naga society as a consequence of factional killings among the Naga brethren. Therefore, the process of reconciliation that constitutes one of the fundamental principles of peace culture can be contemplated as the antidote to control the spread of unpleasant hatred which is destroying the Nagas from within. For true peace to prevail in Nagaland, all the various Naga revolutionary or militant groups must reconcile their differences, but not at the cost of the historical rights of the Naga political movement. This is exactly what the Naga civil organisations are trying to achieve by initialising “Reconciliation Process: A Journey of Common Hope” in 2008. They also repeatedly reiterated that as long as all the Naga tribes that form the rubric of the Naga family rise above their “tribal affinity or loyalty”, there could be both sustainable and meaningful peace process in Nagaland. In a sentence, apart from the sincere efforts of the Indian Government, reconciliation within the Naga revolutionary groups and the removal of “tribal loyalty” will pave the way for a lasting and peaceful solution to the Naga political struggle.

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