

**SOCIAL CONTRACT IN HIGHER
EDUCATION: LESSONS FROM
PATKAI CHRISTIAN COLLEGE**

Prof K Kannan

Vice Chancellor

Nagaland University

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May I congratulate the Principal, Rev Judson Rungsang and his colleagues of Patkai Christian College on initiating the Convocation for their students, this day, 30th June, 2009. For me personally it is indeed a great honour to share the dias with two leading lights of Nagaland, The Honourable Minister Dr Shurhozelieie Liezietsu, the force behind promoting Tenyidie through Ura Academy and Rev Dr Tuisen Shishak, the Visionary Principal who along with Dr Vichazellu Iralu opened a bank account in the name of "Naga Christian Leadership Training Fund", way back in August 1959. The feeling of the thinkers of that time in 1967 was the necessity of a Christian Liberal Arts College to provide quality higher education for the youth of Indo-Burma. Leaving a comfortable life in USA Dr Tuisem Shishak, his Lady Wife Margaret and son Wungram returned to Dimapur on 2nd October 1973 to make the dream come true. In spite of several hurdles for his family, Dr Shishak entered into a Social Contract through Patkai Christian College.

Dr Tuisem Shishak has demonstrated by action what is meant by Social Contract in Higher Education. He renewed the relationship between the State-Higher Education-Environment, in order to promote sustainable development in Nagaland. This campus is a testimony to how important it is to have a salubrious environment.

Social contract and higher education

I have always wondered about the nature of Social contract the teachers and students are supposed to have in the university. Are we aware of the moral responsibilities as a teacher? Social Contract essentially is that a person's moral and/or political obligations are dependent upon a contract or agreement between them to form society.

Let me illustrate this further. Interestingly our ancestors had a very well organised and structured, sustainable society more than 2000

years ago. It was sustainable through an institution, popularly called *Morung*. Ao's institution of the *Morung*, which was called *Ariju* can be taken as a case study to illustrate how it played a central role in every aspect of an individual's life. This system became the fundamental basis of Naga cultural heritage. This can be compared to modern day school, college and university, all combined into one. The nature of training was a mixture of education and skill development and thereby propagate ideas. The *Ariju* was one of the oldest and strongest means of social control and served as an agent of community protection. This institution served Naga society for centuries and incorporated life-centred learning, values and exposure to customary practices and experiences including traditional knowledge and governance. Personally I find it a very innovative approach to education, leadership building and societal training contributing to Naga life, history and functioning.

This innovative approach changed with the advent of Christianity. The American Christian Missionaries and later by the British led to introduction of English as a language. Through this, the English system of education was introduced. This forged direct linkages with education and employment, especially in the government sectors. This virtually destroyed the indigenous religious, cultural, ethical, and linguistic base of our *Morung* based education. The objective of these educational endeavours was to enable the Naga people to read and write the Bible and to man offices. The people were eager to become pastors and teachers since the creation of the first school in Nagaland in 1878. This led to elite class of teachers and schooled people. This led to creation of more primary schools, middle schools, high schools. The demand for higher education was felt in the 1940's which led to colleges. The colleges were affiliated to the newly established North Eastern Hill University campus(Nagaland) in 1978. In 1994 Nagaland University was formally established with headquarters in Lumami. The colleges were few in number as population was also not much in the 80's.

Do we need to renew the Social Contract in Higher Education?

Has the number of colleges kept pace with increase in population in Nagaland? As per Census of India in the last 27 years (from 1981 to 2008), our population has increased by around 1.4 million. That means 70% of our population are below the age of 30. Further between 18 to 35 years of age constitute almost half of our population which is much more than our present working force. If this is true, how are we going to address the larger issue of employability? Further government jobs are saturated and can account for only 20 % of jobs. Thus the need to ensure adequate growth in employment opportunities. The problem is perceived to be especially severe for educated youth, who have high expectations about the quality of employment opportunities that should come their way.

Nagaland University has currently 51 affiliated colleges and six schools in the University with a total intake of around 17000. Nearly 40,000 youth are getting educated outside Nagaland. Only two schools of the university provide professional education. So far, the university has only provided manpower in Agriculture, social sciences, some sciences (Botany, Zoology, Chemistry, Geology), Humanities and Education. Important subjects like Physics, Mathematics, Anthropology and Psychology will be introduced very shortly. The State Government has over the years struggled hard to provide professional training by sending talented students outside Nagaland.

The national data is that less than 20 % of the graduates are considered suitable by employers for direct employment, making skills shortage one of the key risks to sustainable growth. This calls for a fresh look at the nature of Social Contract in higher education.

On the other hand we also have the classic employment problem wherein there are many jobs available in the society that are not taken by our youth and they are actually availed by migrants from neighbouring States resulting in significant portion of the economy

and income being in the hands of the migrants. The question is why can't our youth take up these jobs? One reason has been lack of relevant skill sets amongst the youth in particular with regard to jobs in the unorganized sector. Another reason is the lack of interest shown by many amongst the youth to become entrepreneur or take up jobs involving labour or in retailing and hawking vegetables etc. This co-existence of low employability of the available work force alongside vast numbers of unemployed is a classic Human Resource Paradox. Goldman' Sachs' recent report on India identified 13 variables that are crucial to productivity and growth sustainability. These 13 variables include Rule of Law, Corruption, Political Stability, Life Expectancy, Inflation, External Debt, Government Balance, Investment, Schooling, Openness, Computers, Mobiles and Internet.

Action Plan

Need

We at Nagaland University need to look back at the words of Late Shri Rajiv Gandhi, on 5th October 1987 while laying the foundation stone at Lumami said, "Our Universities still geared to produce the same type of graduate, who in today's India is finding it harder to get a job, to use that education for future. ----- At this University, it will be our attempt to recast the curriculum and to have the subjects tailored in such a manner that those get degrees from here, that pass out from this University will find it useful in building their future lives, in helping them get a job and earn."

Need of the hour is to not only educate 1.4 million youth but also provide skill based training. We as teachers need to expose them to ideas which will empower them to make Nagaland self sufficient and sustainable.

Approach

One needs an integrated action plan on a priority basis. For economic growth we may focus on

- Increase agricultural production and post harvest technology
- Strengthen Education and Healthcare at all levels. Provide bridge level courses for adults to get back to pursue new areas.
- Leverage the national and international information and communication technology for above two areas.
- Reliable and quality electric power, water supply, surface transport, roads to do effective marketing
- Create industries without disturbing the environment and ecology.

Benefit

The university should develop curriculum focussing on above mentioned economic growth areas. Now that Nagaland University has enough of its own land in all campuses, it should be able to provide capacity building, be it short term or long term by creating incubator facilities in each of the campuses, in each of the above mentioned areas. This can immediately translate into economic development and increase the earning capacity by providing trained manpower.

Competition

These are areas where there is enough room to operate without much competition. With Village Development Council and Communitization already in place in Nagaland, we have machinery to implement each of the programs.

We at the university are convinced that to leap forward from Agriculture to knowledge driven economy, we have to leverage tools of technology to reach one and all in Nagaland, by providing skill based training and education exactly as our ancestors did through *Morung*.