Paradoxes within the Kuki Nation


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The New Year dawns amidst animosity and unrelenting conflict of interests in Northeast India in general and the Kuki people in particular. JB Fuller, way back in 1909, pointed out that the Northeastern corner of India is a ‘museum of nationalities’. Such description about diversity is not only true to the region as a whole, even our nation befall under such description and is poised for conflicting interests. Though our nationalist groups signed Suspension of Operations (SoO) with the government of Manipur and India, and there is hope for peace and settlement of decades old struggle for self-determination; looking into the Naga peace process which started way back in 1997, it will take for us quite some time to reach what they have attained now. The church unification and reconciliation movement under the Kuki Christian Leaders’ Fellowship (KCLF) is heading nowhere. Kuki Inpi, which was revived in 1993, passed through a series of unwarranted criticisms, especially from the younger generations. Notwithstanding these criticisms there is a move to expand this institution to all the cities where we reside. There is a deep gulf between the proclaimed goals and the existent practices in the religious, political, social sphere and also in the nationalist movement. This article analyses the paradoxes that exist in the various fields of our so loosely constructed ‘nation’ with a hope of introspection.

Leadership is a very popular issue and a common topic of discussion among all sections of our people. Such discussions about leaders are usually associated with disdain, cynicism and even disgust. This article primarily deals with leaders in various walks of life and their leadership.

Religion

From the first generation Kuki church leaders to the present state of religious affairs can be analysed under Marxian theory and Personality Clashes in Workplace or Conflict in Workplace theory. At the outset I would say that if we were true Christians, such analysis would have no place.

Although I do not fully subscribe to Karl Marx views on religion, his analysis about religion, like other social institutions, as dependent upon the material and economic realities in a given society has practical relevance. Marx had paradoxically stated that religion is the opium of people. Many people take this statement as a plain and simple condemnation of religion. However, Marx knew the contradiction within societies and religious institutions. According to him, religion can only be understood in relation to other social systems and the economic structures of society. And in fact, religion is only dependent upon economics, so much so that the actual religious doctrines are almost irrelevant. This is true to our society and this opium had consumed us way too long.
Looking back historically into how the existing denominations among Baptist churches emerged reveals that it was none other than the workplace conflict of the first generation church leaders that led to the spurt in forming new denominations/associations. Workplace conflict is a specific type of disagreement that occurs in a work area and is uniquely influenced by the work environment. Conflict in the workplace can arise from personal disagreements. Personal conflicts occur due to a clash of ideas, values or needs between two or more coworkers. Workers with very different personal values can experience difficulty when working in close proximity. Clash of personality conflicts do not always have an immediate solution and can require further intervention by the supervisor. However, due to the non-existence of supervisor or higher authorities in our religious institutions, it always resulted in parting of ways between the contending parties/leaders.

Hypothetically religion should be a liberating force; to liberate people not only from sins but also from the folds of myths and self-centered nature. Rather than giving us freedom it has put many of us into chains. In fact it is religion that unfolds divisions in our society. Though many theologians blame the American Baptist Mission Union and Welsh Presbytery Mission for division based on religion within the Kuki society, a closer look into the existing realities shows that there is blurring of line between the Baptists and Presbyterians. But the existent and evident division is between the Baptist churches. From the unified Kuki Baptist Convention (KBC) emerged Kuki Christian Church, Thadou Baptist Association, etc. The latest imbroglio is the split in KBC and the dissenters joining the Methodist church.

The KCLF emerged at the height of the Kuki-Naga conflict in 1993. Its aims and objectives are:

1. Unity of churches according to God’s will, (John 17:11)
2. To make God our nation’s Lord, (Psalm 33:12) and
3. The nation’s exercise of strength in unity and in God’s will.

When the national crisis slowly abated and ended finally in 1997 the organisational and personal differences began to loom large again. Apart from the efforts made by the church leaders even our nationalist groups made fervent appeal to the entire church leaders to come to terms. Several rounds of talks by the church leaders cannot even negotiate for a federally constituted union for all the Kukis.

Not with standing its shortcomings the KCLF was rechristened as Kuki Christian Leaders’ Fellowship International (KCLFI) in its Sixth Triennial Conference at Molnoi in Chandel District of Manipur in November 2009.

As a Christian, especially leaders, we need to learn from the life of Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 4:28 -33). The king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar suffered from the sin of pride and lost his kingdom for it. One day when king Nebuchadnezzar walked in his palace and said, “Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?” While the word was still in the king’s mouth, God spoke to him and his kingdom was taken from him. He was driven
away from men until he came to know that God rule in the kingdom of men, and give it to whomsoever he will.

Like Nebuchadnezzar most of our leaders have taken pride of the physical structures they had built and not of the spiritual kingdom. Although mesmerised by the things of this world God is still giving us time to repent, humble ourselves and seek His face.

Social

A social group is composed of one or more networks of people who identify with one another and adhere to defined norms, roles, and statuses. Even though Kuki Inpi is theoretically an administrative machinery of the chiefs, of late it has become more of a social network. The unwarranted wrangling among the so called “leaders” of our society by the turn of the century almost made the Inpi a redundant body. Even though the structure and function of the Inpi is being on the restructuring process, there is always a contradictory axiom or paradox associated with it. The one million dollar question is, whether Inpi is a traditional body of Kuki Chiefs or a civil society organisation or a combination of both? There are some who wants to give the Inpi a blend of the chiefs and some learned persons in the society. However, this structure is more problematic than a solution in the theoretical framework. All these skirmishes show that we are on the path of constant clash between tradition and modernity.

We have had language and nomenclature imbroglio of the commonly spoken language for the past several decades. Instead of continuous scuffle on this lingering issue and considering it as a baffling problem, it is time to come together to a negotiating table. However, in order that such negotiation takes place everyone needs to come with an open heart; with a heart to concede one’s dearly cherished entities for the greater cause.

With the good intention of lifting our society from squalor and disease to prosperity, many Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) have been formed. However, the Council for Advancement of People’s Action and Rural Technology (CAPART), an autonomous body functioning under rural development ministry of India, blacklisted a total of 833 NGOs and voluntary organisations on November 9, 2009 for their indulgence in irregularities including misappropriation of funds. Eighteen NGOs were from Manipur. Among the eighteen NGOs blacklisted from Manipur the majority of them were our NGOs. Such self-interested NGOs dent the overall image and demean them before the people whom they intend to work for. We need NGOs run by social workers with true conviction to work for the people.

Political

The subjugation of our people in the Kuki War of Independence, 1917-19 or the Kuki Rebellion in British parlance, seems to have subdued our will to political mobilisation for greater cause between the two world wars and even in the early days of India’s independence. In the late 1950s the Kuki National Assembly (KNA) was formed to cater the political interests of the Kuki people and demanded a separate state for the Kukis
within India. In this regard the KNA submitted several memoranda to the Central Government but yielded no response. In the 1970s they were intimately involved in the demand for the creation of Sadar Hills as a full-fledged district.

Looking into the surveys conducted by scholars about the voting behaviour and electoral politics in the Kuki dominated constituencies, clanist leaning is predominant. Irrespective of the candidate’s capability or the party’s manifestoes, ‘vote for the person of your own clan’ is the order. There are mobilisation and campaigns based on such social groups. Even in big cities among well educated people, a person’s actions and views are often misconstrued based on clan. However, this does not mean that there are no right-thinking persons. Shall we continue to say ‘the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak’ and continue to tread on the deviated path? Right thinking persons should not only practice what they adore alone; they also have the responsibility to initiate discourses and espouse what should be the basic foundation of such electoral process.

**Nationalist Movement**

The political demands of the KNA were followed as a militant one in the late 1980s with the formation of the Kuki National Front and Kuki National Army. The turn of the twenty-first century witnessed proliferation of insurgent groups, especially factions and in-fighting between such groups thereafter.

With the increasing blurring of line between our nationalist movement and extortionist groups many unprecedented occurrents usurped our nation. This sorry state of affairs had cost not only a lot of precious innocent lives but also the respect our so called ‘nationalists’ deserve.

It is pertinent to compare the ‘means’ and ‘ends’ of our nationalist movement during the founding years and at present. It is even questionable that, has our present insurgent groups lost sight of the visions of the founding fathers? Materialism and clanist politics has taken hold of the minds of many, benefiting a section of people but resulting in huge national loss.

Their involvement in the Indian election process with clanist politics and the self-acclaimed prerogative to chose a person of their choice, which usually depends on how much such candidate be under their whims, has eroded the entire process. This usually produces a section of disgruntled people leading to factionalism and the formation of new militant outfits.

It is a public secret about the causes of the mass gang rape of our women folks in Parbung or the landmine episode in Chandel where tens of people were dead or maimed. The deviated path of our nationalist movement and the resultant intolerable consequences led to agitations by our students in New Delhi leading to another episode in the Parliament Street and Tihar jail. The lynching of two Kuki Students’ Organisation, Shillong executive members by restive Nungbrang Meitei villagers in December 2009 is another tragic incidents perpetrated by them.
With the signing of SoO, there has been a steady process for political dialogue with the government. However, there have been various levels of demands publicised even before any political dialogue begin. It is an ardent need for the various groups to put forward a single and straightforward demand in order to have a stronger bargaining power and political mileage. It is also the need of the hour for them to stick to their political demands and territorial protection, and leave other social and religious issues to the public.

**Conclusion**

Our society is shrouded with a variety of paradox. In various fronts of our society the conscious mind of the right thinkers is losing ground. In the political domains there is stark absence of clear-cut objectives and sustained efforts to achieve it, if there exist any. Thus, there is an urgent need to chalk-out and streamline our national goals.

The emerging close linkage between clans, religious denominations, factional insurgent groups and electoral politics is a cause to worry. All these vicious linkages are also guided by vested interests. Many ills had been committed by our leaders at the cost of our nation. Therefore, it is pertinent to kill the self-interests within all of us. At the core we need to reform ourselves first to have a resurrected society for Christ and for the nation.

Our nation is filled with phrases such as: ‘I did’, ‘My clan/tribe’, ‘My denomination/association’, etc. It is my sincere belief that if the ‘Unholy Trinity’ i.e., I, Me and My (Mine), are cured and everyone imbibe the ‘We’ feeling, there can be progress in all fronts: social, religious, political and even our nationalist movement.