



Let Freedom Ring

Story of Naga Nationalism

A.S. Shimray

LET FREEDOM RING

Story of Naga Nationalism

*My country 'tis of thee,
Sweet land of liberty –
Of thee I sing.
Land where my fathers died,
Land of the pilgrims' pride –
From every mountain side,
Let freedom ring.*

— quoted by Martin Luther King Jr.
in his speech “I Have a Dream,”
August 1963

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A. S. ATAI SHIMRAY

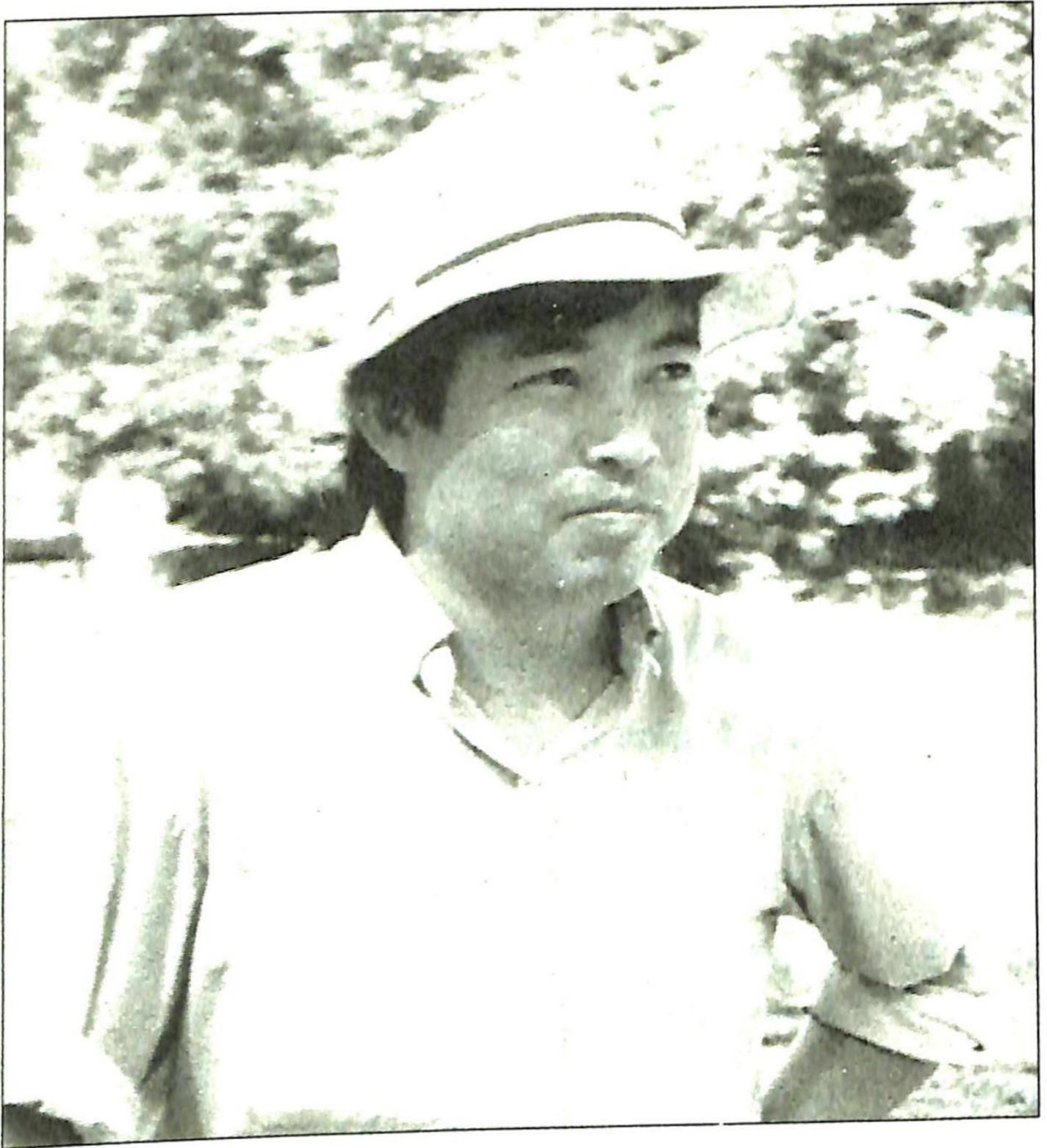
Foreword
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A. S. Shimray

A WIFE'S TRIBUTE

*A Tribute to late Dr. Atai Shimray
My Beloved Husband*

An inspiring symbol of resolution and independence, a man who loved his nation and his people, who had rare wisdom, vision and foresight is no more in our midst.

As I recollect those days, I taste nothing but love and sweetness, and realise that simplicity, integrity and honesty were the hall marks in whatever you did. And the thought uppermost in your mind all the time was how the Nagas should continue to rise against all odds and attain their freedom. I've learnt a lot from your work.

Ishamei, the only meaningful thing a person like me can do to bring you alive is to publish your book. I seek to get closer to your wish and this I do in your memory. Your enthusiasm, dedication to your cause shines in every line of your work. This is indeed an inspirational work that is going to be useful as it will help illuminate important aspects of Naga history. I strongly feel that in the larger interest of people at home and abroad, the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth prevails. However unpalatable it may be, you have told it without fear or malice. I am really proud of you!

Let Freedom surely ring!

Loving wife,
Ishachon (Tia)

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My special thanks to Ms. K. Goel for typing out the thesis within a limited time.

In my absence, Tiakhala Shimray (my wife) was managing alone the whole domestic work with proficiency. I am proud of her and my children. This work is dedicated to their honour.

A. S. Shimray

Grateful recognition ...

God has put into my life many choicest people who have been like forks on my road. Nandita Haksar and Sebastian Hongray are two such people. I want to acknowledge them for their much-needed support at every stage of publication of this book. It is indeed a great pleasure to acknowledge an intellectual debt to Nandita who set aside her other engagements to edit my husband's thesis and turn it into a book in addition to writing the Foreword. I know my husband valued their friendship.

My special thanks to Rona Wilson for his patient and painstaking proofreading and help in designing the book, Kaustabh Deka for help in proofreading, and R.S. Mayori for her energetic support. Tarun Beri has made it possible to bring out the book in record time. Last but not the least to my publisher, Ashok Butani, for making it all possible. It was indeed a pleasure working with him.

Tiakhala Jr. Shimray

FOREWORD

It was in Atai's home that I first met a member of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN). He was tall and handsome, wearing trousers and shirt on that hot day in June. A revolver peeped out from under his shirt. He was sitting in Atai's garden holding a bulb of an orchid in his hand. He patted some mud and cow dung in his palm and carefully grafted the orchid on to a leafy tree.

My NSCN friend was an officer in the Naga Army with experience of ambushing Indian army convoys. However, they never touched ordinary civilian population. That could not be said for the Indian armed forces that had been guilty of large scale human rights violations in Naga areas over several decades. I learnt that he had been awarded for bravery even as a child and taken down the Rajpath on an elephant on Republic Day Parade in Delhi. I could never find out what was the act that earned him that award.

Later, much later I learnt that the state that once awarded him for his bravery imprisoned him for six years and kept him shackled for most of the time. He was never given a chargesheet or given a trial. He was kept in a jail far from home without any visitors and access to books. What were the inner resources he drew upon to keep himself alive, to preserve his humanity?

I watched him graft the orchid. We chatted and he told me the story of his first raid of a bank in Shillong. He was ready, arms hidden under a large coat but minutes before he was to enter the bank a friend came across. He tried to avert his face but she saw

him, crossed the road and greeted him enthusiastically. He could not be rude to her and so he kept up a polite conversation till she left, disappointed by his lack of interest. Then he went into action. Once again I was not able to find out what "action" meant. It is virtually impossible to make Nagas speak about themselves because it would be considered showing off.

We were all sitting in Atai's garden with his family and the Nagas were discussing various aspects of gardening. I sat there watching them and wondered how these mild mannered and gentle people could have taken on the might of the Indian State. There was nothing in their demeanor that showed any aggression. I know they would rather grow flowers than fire guns.

They were proud of their history of armed resistance but they did not glorify violence. It was this unique combination of gentleness and courage, humility and self-confidence, humour in the midst of deadly serious business that has always attracted me to the Naga people in general and to the NSCN in particular.

Atai had all the qualities of a Naga nationalist. He had himself been brutally tortured in 1980s and had seen his younger brother tortured by the Indian security forces. It affected him deeply. And it made him even more committed to the cause of Naga nationalism, more determined to use his skills as a political scientist to write about the movement he so much loved.

It was in June 1999 that Atai shyly showed me his thesis. He wanted to publish it and asked me whether I would write an introduction. It was a measure of his trust in me. I have always felt humbled by the ability of the Nagas to be warm, kind and generous to anyone who seeks their friendship. There was no bitterness or anger against me for being an Indian. The trust they reposed in me has been the most precious possession I have.

I do not know what Atai would have wanted me to write in this introduction. We did not discuss the details that night and I did not know that it was the last time that I would be seeing him.

I can never forget his child like smile, the care with which he looked after me and the wonderful meals I shared with his family.

After all those years once again Atai's family and I got in touch and we decided that we should honour his memory by publishing his thesis and make his dream come true.

I know Atai had thought that his book could be a meaningful intervention in the Indo-Naga peace process. It could tell the Indians the story of Naga nationalism and explain the justness of the demands of the movement. He like all other Nagas hoped that the peace process would lead to a just and honourable resolution through political negotiations.

I believe Naga people genuinely value peace. I have seen them in the midst of bitter conflict grow beautiful flowers and vegetables in tiny gardens; take infinite pleasure in the laughter of children; enjoy a simple meal sitting by the fire exchanging stories. If anyone really wants to understand the Naga spirit she/he must read Asterix and Obelix, about the little Gaul village which defied the Roman Empire.

And like the Roman Empire, the Indian State has tried every dirty trick to divide the Nagas against each other, undermine their unity by psychological warfare and have tried to crush the Naga national movement by using its military might.

Atai's book documents the events leading to the signing of the Shillong Accord. It was an Accord engineered by the Indian intelligence agencies that took advantage of the emergency and forced the agreement on to the Naga National Council.

The Shillong Accord did not lead to a resolution of the Indo-Naga conflict. In fact it led to the emergence of an even stronger, centrally organised and far better armed Naga political organisation called the NSCN. Let Freedom Ring is the story about how the so-called peace accord led to the formation of an organisation that would seriously challenge the power and authority of the Indian

State. I believe the story it tells has valuable lessons for all those involved in the present Indo-Naga peace process.

The current Indo-Naga peace process is based on three points:

- (a) The talks shall be without conditions from both sides.
- (b) The talks would be at the highest level, that is at the Prime Ministerial level.
- (c) The venue of the talks would be anywhere outside India.

It was on June 12, 1995 that the NSCN Collective leadership met the then Indian Prime Minister P. V. Narasimha Rao in Paris. At the meeting the Indian Prime Minister stressed the need to solve the problem through political talks and dialogue. On February 3, 1997 the NSCN leaders met Deve Gowda who was then the Prime Minister of India. This time the meeting took place in Zurich. As a result of these talks the Indian Government and the NSCN announced a cease-fire in May 1997. And in December the same year the NSCN and the Government of India agreed upon ground rules for the cease-fire.

In January 2000, there was a major setback for the Indo-Naga peace process when Th. Muivah, General Secretary of the NSCN was arrested at the Bangkok airport. It was reported that the RAW was behind the arrest because of a turf war between the IB and the RAW. Th. Muivah had come to Bangkok for the peace talks. Three former Prime Ministers of India, Chandra Shekhar, V.P. Singh and H.D. Deve Gowda, appealed in July 2000 to both the Thai and Indian governments to release the NSCN leader so that the peace process was not put into jeopardy.

In the meanwhile Th. Muivah's nephew, Grinder Muivah was also arrested and charged with trying to hijack an airplane from Mizoram. The strange thing was that Grinder was the official go-between chosen by the Intelligence Bureau with an IB identity card. I went to Mizoram to get Grinder out on bail and was really

shocked to find out that the intelligence agencies were trying to instigate a Naga-Mizo conflict. It was the timely intervention of the North-East Students Organisation (NESO) that salvaged the situation.

Th. Muivah was released after almost a year in jail following the collective lobbying of Indian, Thai and Naga people for his acquittal. The Indo-Naga peace process was put back on the tracks with the Government of India recognising that the Nagas have a unique history and situation on July 11, 2002.

It is now over seven years since the current Indo-Naga peace process began. There have been more than 40 rounds of talks between the NSCN leaders and the Government of India but we are nowhere near a resolution to the Indo-Naga conflict. Nagas and Indians are feeling both disappointed and troubled that the peace process has not yielded results. However, there seems to be lack of clarity as to why the Naga and Indian leaders are unable to reach an agreement, and why the Nagas have for the first time in their history resorted to an economic blockade.

Any discerning mind can make out from *Let Freedom Ring* that the Nagas have always been united on one demand: unification of all Naga areas. Naga territory covers an area of 120,000 square kilometres with a population of four million. The majority of Nagas live outside the Indian state of Nagaland. In fact, to distinguish the idea of Naga homeland from Nagaland the NSCN has started calling the Naga homeland Nagalim.

The Naga homeland is divided by the international boundary between Myanmar and India. Within India the Naga territory consists of Nagaland state, four districts of Manipur (Chandel, Ukhrul, Senapati and Tamenglong) and two districts each of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. The majority of Nagas live outside the Nagaland state. Atai has devoted a chapter to analyse the NSCN factor in Nagaland state politics but has not followed it with a similar exercise of the NSCN factor in Manipur state. Manipur

has altogether eight districts of which five are hill districts inhabited by tribal peoples, mainly Nagas (in four districts) and Mizo-Kuki group in Churachandpur District adjacent to Mizoram. The peoples of the Hill districts are mainly Christian while those living in the three districts in the Manipur Valley are Vaishnavite Hindus.

It is true that the Meitieis have a very old civilisation and language rich in poetry and literature. It took several decades of struggle for the Indian State to recognise the Meiteilon language as an official language to be included in the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. While the peoples living in the Hill Districts recognise the rich cultural traditions of the Meiteis living in the Valley they resent the alien values being imposed on them. Funds meant for tribal development are siphoned off by the Valley. As a result the Hill Districts are economically backward. The Manipur State has tried to destroy the integrity of Naga traditional institutions and systematically deprived Naga children of their right to their own languages and history.

Nagas in Manipur have been demanding integration with Naga areas for decades. As far back as in 1950s the Nagas living in Chandel and Tamenglong took part in the Naga Plebiscite. They have been an integral part of the Naga national movement. In August 1972, the All India Congress Committee, the Manipur Pradesh Congress Committee and the United Naga Integration Council passed a joint resolution stating that the Congress party does not oppose Naga integration movement.

However, more recently the Central and State Government in a bid to undermine the Naga national movement have fanned communal feelings between Nagas and Meiteis. Manipur State recently declared June 18, 2005 as the Manipur Integrity Day and announced it as a State gazetted holiday. It was on this day in 2001 that the Indian Government announced that the cease-fire would extend to all Naga-inhabited areas and then the Manipur

State and some central political parties instigated the burning of the Manipur Legislative Assembly.

The All Naga Students' Association of Manipur (ANSAM) called for an economic blockade in protest against June 18 being declared a public holiday.

The Indian State and the Manipur State seem to be playing a very dangerous game by which they are blocking all possibilities of democratic dialogue between the Nagas and Meities. The media has also played a negative role by not explaining the background to the economic blockade.

The blockade has to be seen in the background of the Indo-Naga peace process that has come to a standstill. The NSCN leadership was in India on the invitation of the Indian Government for five months till June 2005. The main stumbling block has been the issue of the unification of Naga areas, at least within India.

There have been attempts by both Indians and Nagas to come together and try and understand each other's point of views. More and more Indians are seeing that the Naga demand for the integration of their lands is based on historical, legal and political rights. When the Collective leadership of the NSCN were in New Delhi they met a large cross section of the Indian society and had frank discussions.

The only way the Indo-Naga conflict can be resolved is if both the Indian people and the Naga people decide to ensure that the peace process is based on mutual respect and understanding. There is a need for far greater transparency in the process. The NSCN leaders have been holding consultations with their people and informing them of the peace talks. However, the Government of India has not taken the Indian people into confidence.

In addition to this lack of transparency is the fact that certain foreign funded NGOs have been promoting people to people talks in the name of civil society initiatives. These initiatives also lack transparency because in the name of "people to people" talks they

have defined “civil society” in such a way to exclude the Naga nationalists. Thus these civil society initiatives seem to be mediations between the Indian State and the Naga nationalist movement. It is indeed strange that an organisation or movement representing the aspirations of the people with which the Indian State is compelled to negotiate is excluded from the NGOs definition of civil society.

It is interesting that Atai quotes the Congress Party publication which recognises that the underground Nagas are an inalienable part of the Naga society. Thus we see that the people to people talks do not always come as a blessing because “people” includes even those who have no commitment to either Naga nationalism or to the Indian Constitution. These people, often in the shape of foreign funded NGOs have stepped into the arena only to depoliticise the issues and thus delegitimise the movement. Thus NGOs ostensibly dealing with indigenous peoples’ rights are in fact insidiously propagating non-territorial solution to the Indo-Naga problem. There are other NGOs who preach non-violent conflict resolution to Nagas while justifying State violence by Indian security forces. The Naga national movement began by being committed to principles of non-violence. It was only after all avenues for democratic protest were blocked that they took to arms.

Many young Nagas who have never been taught their own history and are alienated from their own society try to look for easy political solutions without taking any responsibility for the consequences of their actions. I hope other Naga scholars will be able to do further research on the impact of the civil society initiatives that are sometimes called “second track” in the parlance of peace studies.

The NSCN has to face many new challenges in the future. One of the immediate tasks is to fight corruption within the wider society and also among its ranks. The State has tried to corrupt

the NSCN leaders by bribing them with Gypsy vehicles and mobile phones. The Collective leadership has been fighting the corruption inside its own ranks with great tenacity. But years of cease-fire have taken their toll and the committed NSCN cadres are impatient with the peace process.

The Indian State has tried to crush the Naga national movement with brute military force, from using strafe bombing to burning down of villages and torturing men, women and children. It has tried to divide the Nagas on lines of tribes, regions and even ideologies. And there are attempts to corrupt the nationalists, bribe the villagers and even sell the idea of a peace without justice.

I believe that *Let Freedom Ring* shows us that till the time peace talks are treated as a part of counter-insurgency manoeuvres instead of a political process to right past injustices and wrongs the Indo-Naga conflict will continue. It is true Nagas prefer to grow flowers than to shoot, but if the Indian State thinks they can hoodwink them into forgetting their identity, their history and their right to live as one people they are mistaken. *Let Freedom Ring* testifies to this truth.

I believe that Indians need to realise that when people are tortured, killed, maimed and women raped and churches desecrated in the name of our nation, our freedom too is threatened. If we want to continue to live in a democratic and free India we must not allow crimes to be committed in our name.

Nandita Haksar
New Delhi: August 2005

NAGALIM

CHINA

Arunachal Pradesh

Assam

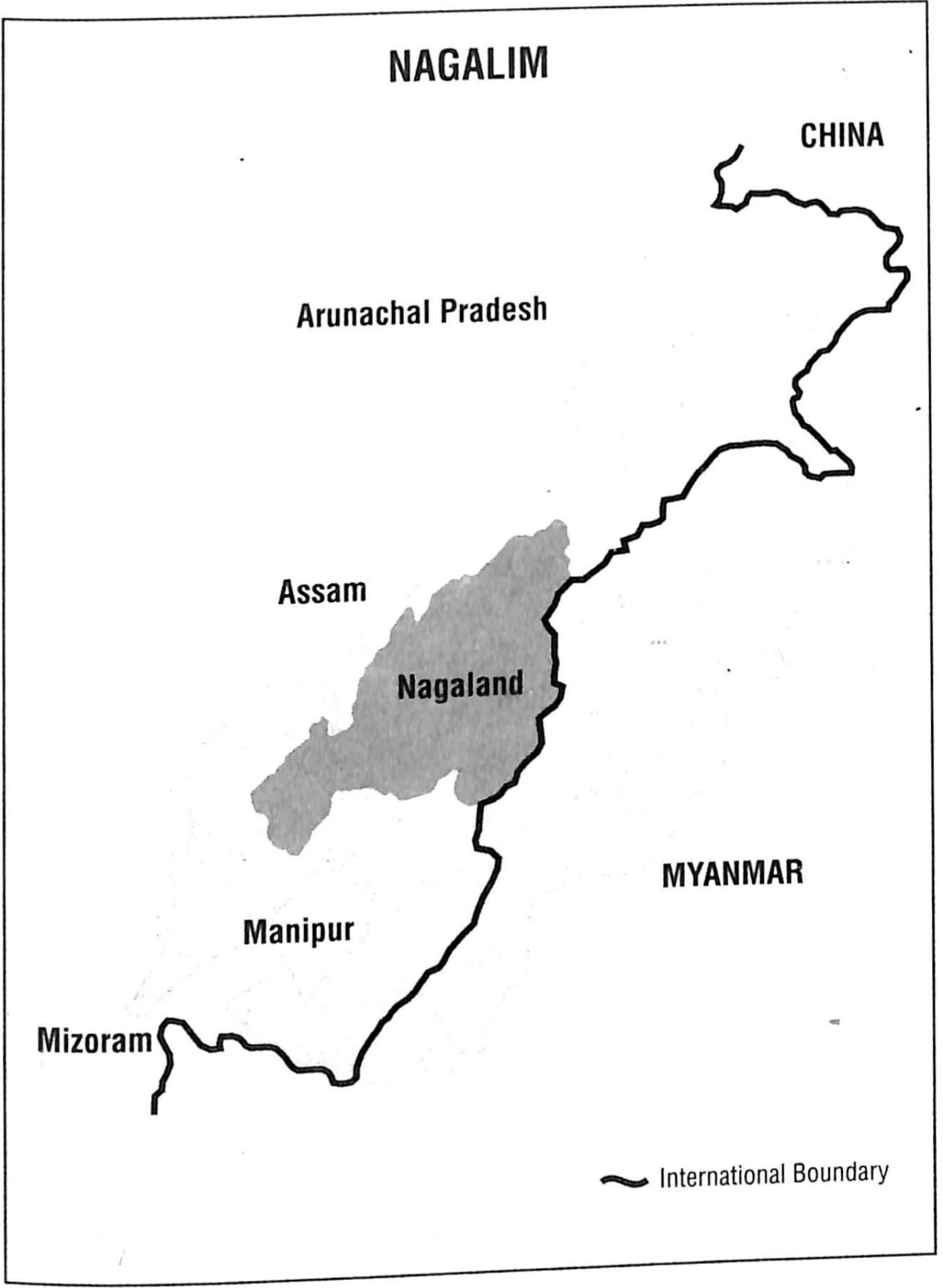
Nagaland

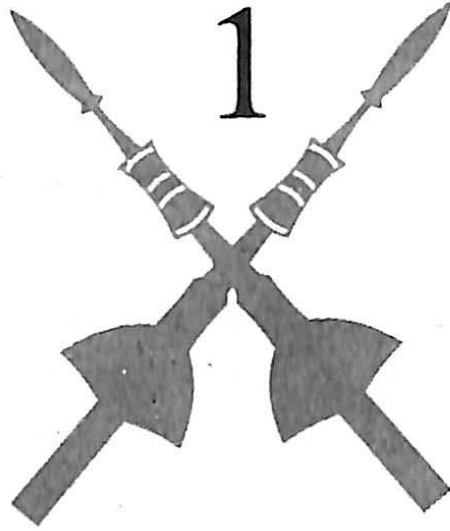
MYANMAR

Manipur

Mizoram

~ International Boundary





WHO ARE THE NAGAS?

The Nagas are a freedom-loving and warlike people, a powerful race, belonging to the Sino-Mongolian family making up the population tapestry of South-East Asian hill people. Linguistically, the Naga languages fall under the Tibeto-Burman group with each tribe speaking a distinct language.¹

History does not record as to how long the Naga hills have been in the possession of the Nagas. The references made by W.C. Smith in 1925 throw some light into the early history of Nagas:

According to the annals of the Ahoms, when the Ahoms invaded Assam in 1215 A.D. the different Naga tribes were settled in their different habitats, and from all that we can gather they were the same Nagas which the British found when they took possession of Assam several centuries later.²

The earliest reference to the Nagas was made by Claudius Ptolemaius in 150 A.D. in his geography (VII, 11, 18) where this area is referred to as "The Realm of the Naked".³

Huang Tsang, the Chinese Pilgrim who visited Assam during Bhaskar Varman's rule in 645 A.D. had this to say:

"... The east of this country is bounded by a line of hills, so that there is no great city to the kingdom. The frontiers are contiguous. The frontiers are contiguous to the barbarians of south-west China. These tribes are in fact akin to those of the Man people in their customs."⁴

Therefore, the earliest inhabitants among the Nagas are believed to have settled in the Naga hills for centuries.

The Nagas belong to the Mongoloid group. By analysing the Naga legends, stories and folksongs which were passed on from generation to generation, we can locate the Naga origins somewhere in South East Asia. The hypothesis that the Nagas must

have come from the sea coast is strengthened by the lifestyle of the Nagas and the ornaments being used till today in many Naga villages are made of seashells. The Naga scholar, H. Horam writes thus:

There can be little doubt that at one time the Nagas must have wandered about before they found their permanent abode; from their myths and legends one gathers that there is a dim relationship with the natives of Borneo in that the two have a common traditional way of head-hunting; with the Philippines and Formosa through the common system of terrace cultivation; and with the Indonesians, as both use loom for weaving cloth. The embroidery on the Naga cloths resembles the kind done on Indonesian cloths.⁵

According to the Burma Census Report of 1911, successive invasions of Tibeto-Burman came from the region of Western China, between the sources of the Yangtse-Kiang and Huang-Ho rivers.

Another Naga writer, R.R. Shimray gives a good account of Naga's affinity with the indigenous peoples of South East Asia. He writes that:

The Nagas being left undisturbed for such a long time, have retained the culture of the most ancient times till today. Their fondness of cowrie shells for beautifying the dress, and use of conch shells and ornaments and the fact that the Nagas have many customs and way of life very similar to that of living in the remote parts of Borneo, Sarawak, Indonesia, Malaysia etc. indicate that their ancient abode was near the sea, if not in some islands. The long war-drums hewn out of huge logs also feature very much like the canoes so common with the islanders.⁶

From all these observations it becomes amply clear that the Nagas came from the Mongoloid stock who migrated from China.⁷ The Nagas who are believed to have migrated to the present Naga Hills in two broad waves, originated from Mongolia. Both the waves passed through Upper Burma (Myanmar) and occupied the

Tirap district of present Arunachal. The second wave stayed in Burma and settled down there for a considerable length and in course of time moved towards west to the present central Nagaland, Manipur, North Cachar Hills and Assam.⁸

The Term 'Naga'

The origin of the word 'Naga' has been a source of much debate among different scholars. However, the largely accepted two viewpoints are taken from the etymology of the word Naga and its varying connotations in the Burmese and the Assamese languages. In Burma (Myanmar), the Naga tribes are called Na-Ka, which in Burmese means 'people or men or folk with pierced ear lobes'. Piercing of the ear lobes is a widespread practice among the Naga tribes. In fact, the piercing ceremony forms a very important initiation rite for young boys who are about to enter manhood.⁹ Moreover, it was the British who first came into contact with the Burmese since 1795 and with the Nagas in 1832. It is therefore, obvious that the British explorers heard about the NAKA group (pierced ears) of people from the Burmese. Hence, the Anglicised word NAGA came to stay in all the anthropological books and official records.¹⁰

Another prominent theory of the origin of the word Naga is ascribed to the Assamese people. In Assamese, the word Naga means 'naked'. Throughout Assamese literature and particularly historical records of Assam, called the *Buranji*, the word Naga is used for the primitive man living in his natural surroundings in an uncorrupted form. However, the author strongly believes that the Ahoms, who originally belong to Thai race, entered Assam from Burma in 1228 AD¹¹ and had picked the name Noga from the Burmese. The use of the word Noga by the Ahoms in *Buranjis* corroborates the idea that the word Noga was quite familiar to them even be-

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fore they crossed the Naga territory from upper Burma. The first ever encounter between Nagas and Ahom King Shukapha and his army as recorded in the *Buranji* states "... therefrom he (Shukapha) came to the boundary of the Naga county... . Here Shukapha ordered all his chiefs to fight with the Nagas."¹²

It is quite obvious that the Ahoms before entering Naga Hills on their way to Assam had pre-knowledge about the Nagas, whom they were to encounter. Hence, it can be unequivocally asserted (basing on the analysis of historical events) that the word Naga is of Burmese origin.

However, one fact stands clear, that until recently, the term Naga was foreign to the Nagas themselves. "They have no generic term for the whole race."¹³ Nagas themselves call each tribal community by its specific name such as Konyak, Tangkhul, Angami, Sema, Lotha, Ao, Pangmei, Ziliangrong, Mao, Khiumniungan, etc. It was only from the 1920s that the Nagas deemed it a matter of national pride to be referred to as Nagas.¹⁴

The Naga Homeland

The term "Naga" applies to all people living in the compact area between the Brahmaputra river and the Chindwin river (and beyond), i.e. in between the Longitude 93°–97° East and between the Latitude 23.5 (tropic of cancer) and 28 degrees North — between China, India and Burma (Myanmar).¹⁵

At present the Nagas live in the state of Nagaland, in the Naga Hills of Manipur, in North Cachar and Mikir Hills, Lakhimpur, Sibsagar, in Nowgong in Assam, in the northeast of Arunachal Pradesh, in the Somra tract and across the border in Burma (Myanmar).

The Nagas who live in Burma (Myanmar) occupy an area from the Patkai range in the North to the Thaungthut State in the south,

and from the Nagaland state border in the west to the Chindwin river (and beyond), in the east. Thus an international frontier arbitrarily divides the Nagas even though the nationalist Nagas recognise neither India nor Burma's (Myanmar) sovereignty over their land.¹⁶ The size of the Naga inhabited area is approximately 100,000 sq.km.¹⁷ It must be understood that the nationalist Nagas are fighting for liberation of all the compact area inhabited by the Nagas (See Map on p. 23).

In fact, 'Nagaland', the name of the state incorporated under the Union of India is a fallacy, in that the notion (as many writers assume) that Nagas originate from Nagaland (state) alone is incorrect.¹⁸ A majority of Nagas are to be found outside Nagaland state. For instance, out of the three million population of the Nagas spread over India and Burma, Nagaland state has little more than a million (12,09,546 according to 1991 census).¹⁹ Secondly, the present Nagaland state is spread over 16,579 sq.km.²⁰, whereas the total area inhabited and claimed by the Naga nationalists is put to 100,000 sq.km. This is the real Nagaland — a homeland of all the Nagas which exists in the mind of the people.*

It may be said here that previous western writers with no exception to their Indian (mainstream) counterparts commit the gross error of putting the total number of Naga tribes between twelve and sixteen. Naga sources put it to forty tribes and more. The Government of People's Republic of Nagaland (GPRN) mentioned 16 major tribes and twenty smaller tribes. However, investigation is still on to ascertain the exact number of Naga tribes.

* The term Nagaland as used in this work has therefore, two distinct connotations: (a) the present state of Nagaland, a political unit of India, and (b) the entire area inhabited by the Nagas. Hence the author will adhere to this approach : *Nagaland State* and *Nagaland*. The first referring to a unit within India and the latter Naga homeland.

The following is a list of Naga tribes:

Name of the tribe	Area inhabited
1. Anal	Manipur state & Burma
2. Angami	Nagaland state
3. Ao	Nagaland state & Assam
4. Chakhesang	Nagaland state
5. Chang	Nagaland state
6. Chirri	Nagaland state
7. Chiru	Manipur state
8. Chothe	Manipur state
9. Heimi	Burma
10. Kengu	Burma
11. Kharam	Manipur state
12. Khiumniungan (Formerly known as Kolyo-Kenyu)	Nagaland state & Burma
13. Koirang	Manipur state
14. Kom	Manipur state
15. Konya	Nagaland state, Arunachal Pradesh & Burma
16. Lainung	Burma
17. Lamkang	Manipur state
18. Lotha	Nagaland state

Name of the tribe	Area inhabited
19. Makori	Burma
20. Mao	Manipur state
21. Maram	Manipur state
22. Maring	Manipur state
23. Moyon	Manipur state
24. Mongsang	Manipur state
25. Namshik	Burma
26. Para	Burma
27. Phom	Nagaland state
28. Poamei	Manipur state
29. Pochuri	Nagaland state
30. Rangpan	Burma
31. Rengma	Nagaland state & Assam
32. Sangtam	Nagaland state
33. Sema	Nagaland state
34. Singpho	Arunachal Pradesh
35. Tangkhul	Manipur state & Burma
36. Tarao	Manipur state
37. Thangal	Manipur state
38. Tikhir	Nagaland state
39. Yimchungar	Nagaland state
40. Ziliangrong (combination of three sub-tribes)	Assam, Manipur & Nagaland state. ²¹

British Colonial Policy Against the Nagas

Before the advent of the British, the Nagas lived in permanently established village-states, much like the Greek city states, perched high above the valleys. Separated from each other by the rough terrain and psychologically by internecine warfare and feuds, they did not develop a conscious nationalism until much later.²²

The extension of British Empire to the Naga Hills had far-reaching effects that ushered in an era of change and transformation of the Naga people. Following the conclusion of the Anglo-Burmese War in 1824, and the signing of the Yandabo Treaty between the British and the Burmese, Assam was occupied by the British colonial power. 'The Hindu kingdoms in Assam and Imphal valley had by the 1820s placed themselves under the British'.²³ The opening of a direct route between Assam valley and Manipur necessitated the British contact with the independent Nagas for the first time.²⁴ In the words of Sir James Johnstone:

Our first acquaintance with the Nagas partially began in 1832, when Captain Jenkins, and Lieutenant Pemberton escorted by Raja Ghumbeer Singh's Manipur troops (700 soldiers and 800 coolies) forced a passage through the hills with a view to ascertaining if there were a practicable route into Assam.²⁵

Their combined forces were stiffly resisted by the Nagas. The Colonial policy towards the Nagas may be divided into three periods:

1. Control by means of punitive expedition, that is pacification through force rather than direct control (1832 to 1850);
2. A short period of non-interference (1851 to 1865);
3. Direct administrative control (1866 till 1947).

In the initial phase, British colonial power did not evolve any concrete policy as such against the indomitable Nagas. It was more

of a situational interaction with a survey party in 1832. The party met with strong opposition from the Nagas and the foreigners suffered some casualties at the hands of the independent Nagas.²⁶ Eventually it compelled the British power to adopt a low profile strategy — “military promenade”²⁷ (expedition with an armed escort) essentially to put an end to Naga raids. However, these raids went on as usual. It was also observed that often the British Government would employ Manipur troops to crush and occupy the Naga territory. For instance, “in 1835, at the call of the British Government, Manipur occupied Semkhor Naga village and ravaged the Naga villages. Its troops lived on the plunders.”²⁸ This policy proved a failure and between 1835 and 1851 no less than ten military expeditions were led against the Nagas. In Hokishe Sema’s analysis,

various efforts by the British to win over the Nagas through friendship offers, threats, blockades, and destruction failed to subjugate them. The fact that the Nagas constituted numerous tribes, did or not have a unified administration or a single language or a common land-mass, prevented them from being reduced to a state of vassalage.²⁹

This was followed by a policy of ‘non-interference’, so long as the Nagas confined to their own territory. This policy lasted for 15 years. Lord Dalhousie advocated this policy thus:

Our possession could bring no profit to us, and would be as costly to us as it would be unproductive ... advantage ... be obtained by refraining from all seizure of the territory of these Nagas, and by confining ourselves to the establishment of effective means of defence on the line of our own frontier.³⁰

With the withdrawal of British forces, the situation was back to square one as the war-like Nagas began conducting raids again. Punitive expeditions for outrages were discouraged unless the punishment could be inflicted with certainty.

In an attempt to protect the subjects of the British and put an end to the Naga raids, the British Government let loose 'armed group of Kuki tribes into the Naga country to destroy the Nagas and their village.'³¹ The British Government gave "legal rights" to the Kukis over the lands and forests they snatched from the Nagas. This policy was called "Colonel McCulloch's policy planting Kuki settlements on exposed frontiers." Colonel McCulloch was the British political agent in Manipur during 1840s.³² This controversial policy of Colonel McCulloch induced the Government of Bengal to try a similar experiment, and a large colony of Kukis were settled in 1855 in the neighbourhood of Langting to act as a barrier for North Cachar against the raids of the Angami Nagas.³³ This in the word of the Court of Directors was intended to act as *buffer zone* between the Nagas and the relatively peaceful subjects of the British.³⁴

This policy of non-interference proved to be a failure. According to Mackenzie this policy was too thoroughly English to be appreciated by the ignorant Nagas.³⁵ Undoubtedly, it resulted in serious in-fighting among the British Officers and criticism against this policy mounted. For instance, Lieutenant Gregory sounded an ultimatum (sort) to the Government and reported that "unless he was allowed to adopt more vigorous measures than were permitted to his predecessors, he could not guarantee the safety of his sub-division (North Cachar)."³⁶ Further M. Horam writes: "From 1854 to 1865, there were as many as 19 raids by the Nagas resulting in the loss of 232 British subjects including some officers."³⁷ But as the raids by the Nagas continued and became bolder and more destructive, 'finally in 1866 Britain turned its attention to the Nagas'.³⁸

The Lieutenant-Governor Sir George Campbell came to the conclusion that the only satisfactory way to deal with the Naga tribes was to gradually establish political control and influence

over them without any assertion of actual government.³⁹ This *forward Policy* as it was then known according to Lt. Governor of Bengal was aimed at asserting their authority over the Nagas.

In pursuance of the above decision, a Naga Hill District was formed with its headquarters at Samaguting⁴⁰ (now Chumukedima) in 1866, whose administrative jurisdiction covered the Angami villages. A school and a dispensary were opened at the place. A road leading to the plains was constructed. Trade was encouraged. In spite of these, the Nagas continued raiding British subjects and many lives were taken including of some important British officers.

With the arrival of Lord Lytton (1876-80) as Viceroy of India, the views of the Government of India underwent a radical change. In fact, the Viceroy carried out the mandates of Lord Salisbury, Secretary of State, of the new Cabinet under Disraeli, who favoured vigorous steps to prevent a repetition of outrages of the Nagas.⁴¹

During this third phase, a number of Government decisions and plans were carried out.

Boundary Demarcation

For the Nagas, the worst of all decisions taken by the British Government was the boundary demarcation of its territory. Boundary lines were drawn several times by the British to satisfy their allies and each time the lines inevitably moved further inside the Naga territory.⁴² Mackenzie's note corroborates to this fact that in 1833 Captain Jenkins and Pemberton "proposed to give to Manipur definitely all the hills between the Doyeng and Dhunsiri",⁴³ and in 1835 the forests between these rivers were declared to be the Manipur-Assam boundary. Still further, in 1851, Manipur was given the right to extend its territory over more Naga villages. As is evident from Johnstone's testimony:

In 1851, when utterly sick of Naga affairs, we determined on a policy of non-intervention, permission in writing was given to the Durbar (Manipur) to extend its authority over the Naga villages on our side of the border. ⁴⁴

Eventually by 1872, the British Government arbitrarily re-divided the land of the Nagas who were then ignorant of their homeland being bifurcated. Some parts went to Assam; some went to Manipur; some to the erstwhile NEFA (Arunachal); and the central part was formed as Naga Hill District. Finally, Eastern Nagas went to Burma (Myanmar) which was divided into three, with the north-east drawn into Kachin State and the south to Sagain Division, leaving the central portion as "Naga Hills". However, when General Ne Win came to power, his regime abolished the Naga Hills unit of administration and divided it between the Kachin State and Sagain Division without the consent of the Nagas. This policy of vivisection, old and new, victimised the Nagas beyond imagination. Such acts of gross injustice shall, without question, continue to be the bone of contention, for the Nagas are now sufficiently alive to what are rightfully theirs. ⁴⁵

Inner Line Regulation of 1873

During the period 1869-73 there was rapid cultivation along the frontier of the Naga Hills. Soon the tea trade started flourishing — indeed a great economic revolution had started with rich prospects for future commercial enterprise. However, when the plantation trespassed the borders of the Nagas⁴⁶ the latter resented and slaughtered the intruders, causing great alarm. Even the payment of the land revenue in some cases to the Naga chiefs did not solve the problem.⁴⁷ At last, due to this friction between tea planters and the Nagas, the British Government enacted a regulation

known as 'Inner Line Regulation of 1873'. In the words of the regulation:

In order to prevent the recurrence of these difficulties, power was given to the local authorities by the Inner Line Regulation of 1873 to prohibit British subjects generally or those of specified classes from going beyond a certain line, laid down for the purpose, without a pass or license, issued by the Deputy Commissioner and containing such conditions as might seem necessary.⁴⁸

Thus, it was greatly hoped would put an end to the earlier indefinite and slow advance. To this end, the Nagas were expected 'to manage their own affairs with only such interference politically on the part of British officers as may be considered calculated to establish a good personal influence among the chiefs and tribes'.⁴⁹

Excluded Areas

Almost of the same nature of Inner Line Regulation was the Regulation of 1880 which classified the Naga tribes "excluded" from coming under such laws as may be complex or in any way unsuitable to them.⁵⁰ The British Government realised that the tribal areas ... needed a special kind of administration and this was more so in case of hill area. The hill tribes were simple and unsophisticated and needed delicate handling. And the advantage was that the Nagas had traditional laws to guide their conduct and village courts to deal with crimes both civil and criminal. These were effective enough and the British Government did not seek to make a change. Undoubtedly this policy was enacted keeping in mind the protection of their areas from possible economic exploitation by the plain men.

It is certainly worth noting that the Regulation of 1880 was formerly instituted and specified in the Government of India Act 1935 and it is significant in that for purposes of administration, the Naga Hills were always separate from the rest of Assam. This

was the consistent policy of the British till they left the subcontinent.⁵¹

Annexation

In pursuance of its *forward policy* and in order to strengthen the annexation process, in 1877 the Secretary of State gave his consent that the headquarters should be moved into the interior of the Hills and Kohima was made the chief administrative centre.⁵²

The Nagas, fearing full invasion, put up stiff resistance fighting with all the weapons they had. Of all, Kohima defence was certainly the most fiery and significant.

For the first time several Naga villages united against the common enemy. Thirteen Angami Naga villages 'joined Khonoma in the uprising'. A full scale war was waged on Khonoma village and its surrounding areas. It is observed that as many as 2,358 soldiers attacked Khonoma and subsequently the surrounding villages. The message was clear that the British authorities were prepared that the Nagas be 'taught a lesson'. But the British forces suffered heavy casualties.⁵³

Indeed it was the fiercest battle the Naga Hills were to know for many long years. W. Robinson reported on Nagas' war strategy (*A Descriptive Account of Assam*, 1841, pp. 390–4) thus:

Even in their hottest and active wars, they proceed wholly by stratagem and ambuscade. They place not their glory in attacking their enemies with open force. To surprise and destroy is the greatest merit of a commander, and the highest pride for his followers... the military operations of the Nagas more resemble those of nations. They openly defy their enemies to the combat, engage in regular battles, and maintain the conflict with that desperate ferocity which is natural to men who having no idea of war but that of extermination, never give or take quarter.⁵⁴

However, by the end of the nineteenth century almost all the Naga tribes came under British rule excepts some tribes in Tuensang, Arunachal and Burma which remained out of British domain.⁵⁵ Naga nationalists referred to these areas as Free Naga Territory and even today they claim the Naga areas in Upper Burma as a part of Free Nagaland. The Government of the People's Republic of Nagaland (GPRN) writes:

The British could take over and control only the South Eastern part of Naga territory during the period 1832-1880 which came to be known as the British District. But the North and Eastern part which formed the larger part of the Naga territory, was left uncontrolled and unoccupied by the British. This uncontrolled part of Nagaland, the "Free Naga Territory" remained almost unvisited, entirely self governing and completely independent even when India obtained her independence from Great Britain in 1947.⁵⁶

Historically, the above statement bears truth that though all the Naga areas are administered (except Tuensaing area) in Indian side, that in Upper Burma remained unadministered till date except during periodic military operations carried out, against the Naga nationalists. Such is the state of affairs in Burma.

British Rule

In February 1881, Naga Hills came to be an area under political control of the British. It became a settled district under the Deputy Commissioner administered in accordance with defined rules.⁵⁷ The Nagas as well as the British slowly settled down. It is worth noting that throughout the British rule, the Nagas lived by and large on their own and continued their social and political activities. The British did not interfere with the traditions, customs and village administration of the Nagas. "The British", writes Luithui and Haksar, "did not extend more than a shadow of state apparatus to the Naga areas. There hardly was a time when more

than five officials were posted from outside the area. Even these officials had to work in close consultation with the Naga elders.”⁵⁸ Alemchiba, a Naga senior research officer argues:

One of the main reasons why the British could establish a stable administration in an area of hilly jungles populated by uncivilized head-hunters and why the new administration became popular day by day was their intimate knowledge and interest of the native people.⁵⁹

Thus the controlled Nagas found their world changed with the advent of the British. Village chiefs and elders were encouraged to look after the welfare and civic needs of the villages. Inter-village feuds came to an end and head-hunting became a thing of the past within Naga Hills district boundaries. As a result the Nagas accepted what life offered, lived their own life in their own mountain villages, happy and content, peaceful and romantic.⁶⁰

The Advent of Christianity

The conversion of the Nagas to Christianity was a revolution in Naga history — more significant than the British colonisation. Arnold Toynbee called the English conversion really the beginning of all things in English history. “Likewise the message of the Gospel was the beginning of all things in Naga history.”⁶¹ This reminds us of a passage in the Bible:

Therefore if any men be in Christ, he is a new creature : old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.⁶²

The GPRN account strongly emphasizes this fact:

The propagation of Christianity by the American Missionaries along with the imparting of education by opening missionary schools gave the greatest contribution to the rising of the Naga society. It was through them that the heathen Nagas learned of the existence of the Absolute Reality and the better way of living. Nagas could comprehend mean-

ing life has and they won't anymore part with it. They now felt blessed though endless hurdles remained. Nagas would be forever grateful to them.⁶³

It is observed that the first Christian work among the Nagas was done before the Nagas were brought under direct British administration. The first group of American Baptist Missionaries, Rev. & Mrs. Nathan and Rev. & Mrs. O.T. Cutter made their appearance in the Naga area in 1836.⁶⁴ But their mission was terminated when Khamti Nagas raided the place. A second attempt was made in 1840 to open mission field among Namsang Nagas (now in Tirap district). This too was abandoned.

The reopening of the Naga mission field was the work of two men — Godhula Brown (Assamese) and E.W. Clark who opened the first successful mission field in Ao Naga area in 1872. Henceforth, there was no turning back. Many other mission fields were opened at different important places like Kohima, Wokha, Ukhrul, Zunheboto, etc.

Initially, the attitude of the Nagas towards the missionaries was very hostile. Those who got converted to Christianity were persecuted or excommunicated by their Naga brethren from their clan or village.⁶⁵ Hokishe Sema another Naga writer remarked,

Many problems arose between those who still held the faith of their forefathers and the new converts. All new converts had been strictly forbidden to touch alcohol in any form... Christians were asked to drink only tea... The non-Christians insisted that everybody belonging to the village must observe the ceremony and nobody should violate the ceremony by leaving the village on that day. Again regarding village subscriptions, the Christians refused to subscribe for the sacrifices done for the propitiation of spirit.⁶⁶

Therefore, there emerged two opposing trends in the lifestyle and beliefs. Christians refused to participate in village festivals that involved drinking and sacrifices. Interestingly, the presence of cer-

tain British civil servants who did not get along with the missionaries impeded the process of conversion to some extent.

This led to another controversy with the allegation or assumption that Christian missionaries were the agents of the British imperialists and the British imperialist policy of 'divide and rule' kept the Nagas isolated from the mainstream of Hindu culture and religious traditions.⁶⁷ However, it is observed that, the assumption or allegation is totally wrong. The Christian missionaries went into Naga areas (all by themselves) not with the support or patronage of the British Government.⁶⁸ Their primary objective was to preach the gospel, 'the love of Christ and his saving knowledge' to the Naga tribes.

In fact, the British Government were quite strict in giving permission to missionaries to operate in these areas. For instance, until 1917, only one missionary family was permitted in Manipur and after that only two. The British Government possibly opposed the missionaries on the ground that they were destroying Naga traditional culture.⁶⁹

Hokishe Sema sums up the achievements of the Christian missionaries:

The Nagas indeed are indebted to the pioneering missionaries for their work in the field of education, medical services, humanitarian work and above all in providing enlightenment.⁷⁰

Christianity indeed has been the single most dynamic factor in modernising the Naga society. It has opened the door for the Nagas to think in a global context and brought them into the fold of a world family. The spirit of change invaded every aspect of Naga village life. The Christian missionaries and the British Indian administration proved themselves to be the vehicle of change in the Naga context.

Impact of British Administration and Christianity

The British administration and the advent of Christianity had a great deal of impact on the social, economic, cultural and political aspects of the Nagas. Above all, it had the positive impact of integrating the unorganised Naga tribes politically and emotionally. It was only under the aegis of the British administration that interaction of the Naga tribes and their assertion as an ethnic group of people began.

The emergence and formation of the Naga Club in 1918 and subsequently of the Naga National Council (NNC) in 1946 were a marked manifestation of their socio-political consciousness. Besides, the individual Naga tribes respectively developed their own Councils or *Hohos*. This consciousness clearly developed from their contact with the British administration and Christian missionaries and it naturally promoted Naga nationalism as a unifying force among the Nagas.

However, one cannot overlook the fact that the colonial policy of bifurcating the Naga homeland had the effect of undermining their cohesion. The signing of the 'Treaty of Yandabo' in 1826 without the knowledge of Nagas divided their homeland between the British India and Burma.

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