

# Naga National Movement: It's impact on Naga society

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## ABSTRACT

*The study on Naga National movement: its impact in the Naga society tries to bring out how the movement impacted the people of Nagaland. The paper explore Nagas, how they lived before the arrival of the Britishers, about how the movement started and how this movement have impacted the whole society of the Nagas. The analysis is specifically about the Nagas of India (Nagaland). Since the olden days, Nagas had not let any neighbouring place to walk or rule over them starting from the time of Ahom, they (Nagas) haven't let anyone rule over them. Nagas have a special feeling of love for their homeland. This study analyse the Naga movememt and its impact on Naga Society.*

**Key words: Naga National Movement, Britishers, Nagaland, Nag National Council**

## INTRODUCTION

Nagaland is a small state situated in the North eastern part of India. The state is

located to the east of Assam, part of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh to the North, Burma to the East and Manipur to the South. The population of Nagaland as per details from 2011 census is 19.79 lakhs, The geographical area of Nagaland is about 16.579 sq.km, with the density 119/km<sup>2</sup>. If we count the previous before the British divided the actual area of the Nagaland then the area is over 1,20,000 sq.km. It is said that the Nagas were of the Mongolian race and that the lineage of the Mongolian has spread all over the world from China to as far as South America. The word Naga is still a puzzle to many and no one knows how the word 'Naga' came to being. Some scholars are of the view that the term 'Naga' is derived from the Burmese word 'Naka', meaning pierced ears. Nagas, both men and women had the tradition of piercing their ears during the remote past. This theory of the word 'Naka' is supported by the historical background that a group of people that have holes in their ears left Chiang mai area in Thailand in the time immemorial and

were said to have gone towards Burma (Myanmar). These people in Thai were known as ‘Nakari’ meaning ‘people with holes in their ears’. The people of Nagaland consist of many tribes in which they have their own distinctive names and sub-tribal names. These tribes are Ao, Sumi, Lotha, Angami, Phom, Chakesang, Rengma, Sangtam, Konyak, Pochury, Zeliang (combination of the three sub-tribes, Zemei, Liangmai and Rongmai) Kuki, Yimchunger, khimniungam, Chang, Tangkhul, Mao, Hemi, Marang. Each and every tribe have their own dialects and sub-dialects, they speak various distinct Tibeto-Burman languages. The Nagas, eventhough they share the same physics and face features their customs and traditional law differs from tribe to tribe. The same goes to difference in dialects so they develop Nagamese so as to communicate between different tribes. Nagaland is one of the three states in India where the the majority of the population is Christianity, many churches are located all in all parts of the state. This is the reason Nagaland is popularly known as the state with most Baptist in the world. Today, the official language of Nagaland is English and it is the medium of instruction in educational institutions.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

A literature review is a text of a scholarly paper, which includes the knowledge including substantive findings, as well as theoretical and methodological contributions to a particular topic. Literature reviews are secondary sources, and do not report new or original experimental work.

In an article ‘Naga peace parlays: sociological reflections and a plea for pragmatism’, (2011) NK Das states that “Nagaland was formed in their own and not in the territory of India’s occupied lawful land. Nagaland doesn’t consist only of one tribe, though there are many tribes in Nagaland, all of them share the same customs, traditions etc.” He also mentions that clan remained basic social political units and they unite occasionally for self-protection against common enemy.

‘A theological Reflection on Naga society’, (1996) the author, Rev. Dr. V.K. Nuh mentioned that “Before the advent of Christianity the Nagas were animistic and one of the most honourable games for the Naga people in the ancient days was head hunting.”

‘A Corner in India’, (1978) M.M. Clark have observed and mentioned that “Degradation of women was not there among the Nagas. Although the women were not given role in civil or military administration, yet in all of these they have an effect in a strong, subtle, influence and emulate the lover’s and husbands pride in war medals.”

In the journal ‘Outlook for peace in Northeast’, (2003) J. k. Dutt mentions that the insurgency was first started because the Indian government attitude towards the Nagas were not good at all, every single Indian leader who held the position of Prime Minister misjudged the problem of the Nagas. One of the main was Nehru’s harsh attitude towards the Naga leader A. Z phizo. All of these made it possible for starting of Naga nationalism.

‘The world of Naga’, (1988) Murkot Ramunny mentioned that the invasion launched Naga hills made the beginning of a period in the history of Nagas. Along with the war came the heavy mechanization. Due to the war, the Nagas united among themselves, all the different tribes came together to form as one and Naga National Council was formed after the war.

Udayon Misra ‘Naga National Council’ (1978) says that except for the rule of British, the Nagas had never been under any other country or kingdom, this made the Nagas united and this feeling of separateness different from the rest of the Indian state is so widely shared by the Nagas. Eventhough, the British ruled for a short period the society and tradition of Nagas was untouched that’s why the formation of Naga National Council (NNC) was decidedly a major step in the consolidation of the nationalistic forces as Nagas have always from the start fought for what they call theirs. He also mentions that Naga Nationalist Council (NNC) uniting the Nagas and remedying the damage done by the war were some of its stated objectives, and the British government viewed it with a benevolent eye as a truly representatives of Naga people.

On article ‘The Naga nation on net’ by Ramanathan and shiva roy choudhury mentions that the Naga nationalism started in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century when some of the Nagas were sent abroad, this inturn exposed them to the political situation and from there the idea of sovereignty came into being, and the Naga

club was started. In the year 1929, the Naga club sent a referendum to the Simon Commission stating to let Nagas be, like they were before when the British leave India. Just like India wants to be free from Britain, Nagas also wanted to be free from the Indians. The first clash was aroused in the Naga hills when Phizo and the NNC started their campaign by boycotting general election in 1952. And they also mention that in the later years the Nationalist Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) Isak Muivah (I-m) was at the forefront of demanding a Greater Nagaland based on the claim that the Nagas were prior to the ‘unwelcome annexation’ by India.

Gordon P. means and Ingunn N. means ‘Nagaland – the agony of ending a guerilla war’. Mentions about the passionate and zealous nationalists forming up the Naga Federal Government (NFG) which they (Nagas) claims that it is the legal and licensed government of Nagaland.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Researcher is used secondary data. Secondary source material would be books, journals and articles. The data collected will be associated and analysed with research

study. It will be interpreted to understand about how the Nagas were living before the arrival of the British, why and how the movement started, and also to understand the impact that it left in the Naga society’.

## DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The Nagas in the ancient times lived a very different life than what the Nagas of today are living. They lived in an organized separate village in the olden times, according to their clan wise and tribe wise, they live in different groups and each group have its own village i.e. as said above, they organized a separate village. The Nagas, since time immemorial lived in a close-knit group and a socialist, the components of socialism had been there in the ancient Naga society even though the Nagas were not aware of the word ‘socialism’. The atmosphere of socialism had been there since time immemorial, the culture and practice of the Nagas was to share happiness, sadness, hungriness and thirstiness together. They work together no matter young, old, man or woman and bask in the profit of their efforts together.



One of the customary practices of Nagas during the early days before the arrival of American missionaries was head-hunting. There was not even a single Naga tribe that did not participated in head-hunting, it was considered as one of the admirable and important games. The hunting of heads was in vogue during the early days. During the early days it was believed that the head had its own soul that brings luck, good health and better harvest that is why almost all the men were engaged in head-hunting. As there were no arms and even a single idea of it during those days, the battle was fought only with spears and machete. The battles were often concluded with the numbers of heads taken by the winning group. The enemy's head was brought and considered as a trophy and the person who collected most heads were considered as the most powerful person and they were given responsibility to guard their village from enemies.

The position of women in the Naga society was good eventhough they were not allowed to take part in decision-making process of their clan or village, hunting and fighting. The social institution or bachelor's dormitory during

the olden days was compulsory. This bachelor's dormitory was present in each and every Naga villages and all the bachelors were expected to be a part of it as it played an essential role in shaping the youth so it was made compulsory during those days. This bachelor dormitory existed for both boys and girls, but they do not share the same roof and the dormitory was different from each other. The boys were not allowed to enter the girls dormitory likewise; the girls were not allowed to enter the boys dormitory. However, they had its own head and councils who looked after the dormitory like the modern day school. As during the olden days there was no school or education, this dormitory act as social and political school.

The political system since time immemorial was quite different than that of today. The practiced was somewhat similar during the early days eventhough the political organization was completely different from tribe to tribe. Some tribe practiced monarchy while some democratic form that was during the ancient times so it was not taken from the west or east or anywhere rather it was like this since time immemorial. As mentioned above the



village chief was considered as the head or ruler of the village where all the authority is under him, but there was no trace of authoritarian and aristocratic practice and along with the chief there was a council who assisted the chief in administering as well as in war and in times of trouble. In this long activity of complete freedom, motivated by their passionate spirit of independence lie the foundation of the Naga movement through which they assert their own sovereignty over their lands which they believe rightfully & naturally belong to them. One of the many reasons of why an ethnic group bends is when they face a common enemy. This may be said to be true in case of the Nagas as the emergence of their national movement & simultaneously that of their nation have their moorings in their interaction & contact with the outside world. Nagas have been fighting to British and to the India & Burma for occupying their homeland illegally. The reason for Naga national movement has nothing to do with the Nagas discontent or hatred towards the Indians. Instead, it was because they were completely and totally different from that of the Indians historically, politically, culturally and racially. Even in terms of religion and language they were totally

different from each other. The Naga nationalism first emerged in when thousands of Nagas participated in the British War efforts and saw action as members of the British Labour Force in France. However, having been exposed to the outside world and inspired by the material advancement, exposure to other cultures, and the reshaping of the political world by major movements. This gave rise to political consciousness of Nagas and the Naga club was formed in 1918, which include representative from all the Naga tribes.

The Naga movement was further established firmly in 1929 when the club submitted a memorandum to the Simon Commission in which it stated that those from mainland India and the Nagas have nothing in common and the people of Nagaland be left to themselves and therefore under the Government of India Act 1935 the Naga Hills district was declared as “excluded areas”. The Naga Club was later changed into Naga National Council (NNC) formed in 1946 and elected Mr. T. Aliba as the 1<sup>st</sup> President. On May 1947, the Indian government sent delegation to Naga National Council (NNC) and made an offer to Nagaland to join the Indian Union. On

July 1947, Naga delegation went to Delhi and met with Mahatma Gandhi at his residence and told that Nagas are going to declare its independence on 14<sup>th</sup> August 1947 to which Gandhi supported by saying why not today. The Naga delegates however, said that the Indian government might attack Nagaland if they become independent which Gandhi promised to the Naga delegates by saying that he will sacrifice his life before a single Naga is shot. Later, on Aug 14<sup>th</sup> 1947, Nagas declared Nagaland as an independent state but Neither the British government nor the Indian government recognized the declaration. In the year 1949, the Nagas were betrayed saying that no agreement was made. This betrayal by Indian hurt the sentiments of Nagas badly. However, India complimented Nagas into believing that the 9 point agreement had been included in the sixth scheduled of the constitution and the Nagas should accept Indian Constitution just as they agreed to the 10-year agreement in June 1947. But, the Nagas have come to the point of realization that they won't be fooled anymore.

On January 9, 1950 some of the Naga delegates went to Delhi to meet the

Governor General again but the interview was refused by the External affair ministry. Also, the NNC did not declare the acceptance of Indian Constitution on 24<sup>th</sup> January but the Indian Constitution became law only on the 26<sup>th</sup> of January. The NNC also conducted the Naga Voluntary Plebiscite in 1951 where "99 per cent" supported for "independent state" but India rejected it by dismissing it as a plot or pretence. The Nagas in order to avoid war, tried to please India from 1947-1956. However, it was of no use. The right of Nagas was turned into wrong, and the then Indian Prime Minister sent an Armed Forces of India to Nagaland in 1954 and from there violence was widespread, the NNC was non-violent organization but when the fierce war continued between these two i.e. India and Nagaland, they held a meeting and were compelled to take up arms in order to defend themselves and on March 22, 1956, Angami Zaphu Phizo the 4<sup>th</sup> President of NNC, formed the underground Naga federal government (NFG) and the Naga federal Army (NFA) by raising Naga flag. The government of India sent in the Army to crush the insurgency and, in 1958, enacted the armed forces (Special Power) Act. Later, the Naga Hills, a district of Assam was



upgraded to a state in December 1, 1963 as the 16<sup>th</sup> State of the Indian Union. From 1956 till 1964 the Indian government and Naga freedom fighter were engaged in a fierce fighting where, around 150,000 Nagas mostly civilians were killed.

In the year 1964, Nagaland Baptist Churches Council (NBCC) in Feb 24, 1964 requested for peace talk between Naga leader and the Indian government where B.P. Chaliha, J.P. Narayan and Michael Scott were selected as the leader of this commission and through them Cease-fire was signed in August and it came into effect on 6<sup>th</sup> September 1964. However, it didn't last long as the Indian government on its own abolished the cease-fire agreement with the Federal Government of Nagaland in 1972 and with it declared Nagaland as 'disturbed area' and lay Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act and Special Military Power Act on September 1, 1972 which gave wide extension of power to Armed forces to fire Nagas even on doubt and the position between the two became from bad to worst. In 1975, an agreement known as the Shillong Accord was signed between the Indian Government and the NNC, where they were asked to give up their arms and

accept on their own the constitution of India without any condition but some of the patriot freedom fighters were against and disappointed with the pact and was condemned by many Nagas, leading to factionalism among the revolutionaries. The division of the erstwhile united NNC created bitter misunderstanding among the Nagas. This led to the formation of the Nationalist Socialist Council of Nagaland or the NSCN on January 31, 1980 by Isak Chishi Swu, Thuingaleng Muivah and S.S Khaplang. The year 1990 was the year when A.Z. Phizo the Charismatic Naga leader was laid to rest and the Naga National Council (NNC) was split.

Though, the Naga national movement strived for the sovereignty of their people they didn't make it, and to further add salt to the injury the Nagas, both the public and the cadres suffered a lot from their enemies (i.e Indian and Myanmar government's bullets) and from the movement itself. As we all know that the militants becomes thick-skinned and unresponsive to the ache and pain of the human beings, so does the workers of the movement became insensitive towards their own people. Even though, the movement was for their people and its land, the militants began to make use



their power in horrifying and using the public just to make them do anything according to their will. Often leaving the people to wonder and question what the movement was for. The movement and the effect it brought left a deep impact to the Naga people. Though the movement didn't succeed, the national workers played an important role in the life of the Naga people, the movement led to the split of two groups and each group had its own workers and ideologies but the aim was same for both these groups. The public were not able to talk back and they were expected not to raise their voice regarding the movement and also they were not allowed to state their views regarding the factions and their ideologies. If they do any of these above they were given a warning and the warning were often not good and even if the person continues to do so, that very person have to face dire consequences.

This shows the violation of the individual rights and freedom of the people dashing the little hope of the public. Also due to the movement clashes between different tribes also happened, blocking of certain individual, tribe and organization also gave way which made a huge dent in

bringing the people together. The movement instead of bringing the people together had another way by dividing the people which resulted in increasing the numbers of enemies between the people themselves from tribe to tribe. Also because the militants are often caught interfering in the village, tribe and internal affairs the movement has caused itself a bad name which proved that the movement was immature and irresponsible. Not only the public suffered in this way but they were deprived of their loved ones, many of the children were orphaned, women were widowed and the rest were physically unwell. Great leaders were killed due to this movement, many persons good and bad alike lost their lives, and some were faced with serious case of side effects physically due to bombings while the lucky ones who were safe from bullets and bombings suffered from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). The Indian armies didn't even spare the pregnant women, children, priest and elderly person. All in all, everyone be it young and old suffered from it. The society was not balance at all, everyone and everything were in chaos, Naga people suffered a great deal of loss in terms of lives, property and livelihood. The movement as mentioned



above affected the economy, political and ecosystem of the Naga people along with the physical health of the people. In the case of economy of the Naga people the effect was not a small thing as almost all the shops whether big or small, business and small scale industry etc were made to stop, which resulted in the downfall of the economy. And on top of that several taxes such as shop tax, vehicle tax, employment tax etc were made mandatory to give to the collectors i.e cadres so that with the amount of money collected they could help the national workers. But some of the cadres became insatiable for money that they forcefully took the money from the confused and worried public in the name of unnecessary tax by intimidating and even threatening them. And the naive Nagas helped by giving half of their earned income to the cadres for national cause without knowing their intention.

All of this had a deep impact in the economy of the Naga people, during the time before the Naga national movement the above mentioned were not even in the slightest thought possible as they were no reason for the businesses to be stopped and for the earned money be given away easily

to the people. All of these changes brought have indeed brought the change in the economy of the Naga people. And in the case of political life of the Naga people also, the movement didn't leave it easy for them, Nagas. Since the cadres and some of the national worker uses muscle and gun power over public, the candidate who contest in an election happens to have a support or happens to be a friend of the underground worker then the candidate is sure to get a seat and that is because the undergrounds are hard to crack, they destroys the peaceful campaign with a drop of a hat, which had a deep impact on the political life of the Naga people. Not only the peaceful campaigns were destroyed but they also had their hands in attacking the polling booth and the presiding officer's. Some candidates even hire them so that they can force and threaten the public to vote that very candidate, and sometimes the village leaders are also kidnapped during or on the day and time of election violating the freedom and rights of the people and also throwing their faith away on them. The impact which has left deeply in the Naga society however was the inhuman and immature behaviour of the Indian armies during that time when they killed innocent people, pregnant women,



raped women, burned down the houses, fields etc.,. All of them were forced to slavery violating the human rights and freedom. Because of this reason till this day Naga children's are afraid of Indian armies and some of the elders don't want to give respect to them. Eventhough, the Indian armies are solely for protecting people. The mistrust and fearing of them not out of their goodness are most commonly found to this day.

## CONCLUSION

From the above analysis we have come to know about the Nagas, how they lived before the arrival of the Britishers, about how the movement started and how this movement have impacted the whole society of the Nagas. The above analysis is specifically about the Nagas of India (Nagaland). Since the olden days, Nagas had not let any neighbouring place to walk or rule over them starting from the time of Ahom, they (Nagas) haven't let anyone rule over them. Nagas have a special feeling of love for their homeland. The proof for this is that there hasn't been any news till date of a single Naga during the time immemorial who roam from place to place. This shows the emotional attachment Nagas have for

their homeland. After the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War thousands of Nagas were sent to France as a labour corps by the British government, those Nagas became more aware and their fleeing towards their homeland became stronger. Some of the survivals who return back along with the educated Nagas who were conscious of their feeling of nationalism formed an organization called the 'Naga club' in the year 1918 and in the year 1929 they sent a memorandum asking the British to leave them be when they leave India. We can know from here that the Nagas idea for sovereign started way back even before India got Independence. The Nagas have gone through a lot and one cannot deny that nothing of importance happened out of this. The society and the environment of the Nagas was effected deeply out of this movement. One can say that the negative impact has too much to do in this. Firstly many insurgencies started out of this movement, and the Naga rebels became too violent even after everything and instead of working truly they started becoming rebellious upto the extent that they even started violating the right and freedom of the public. We can also say that due to Naga national movement the economy of the Nagas was badly shaken

forcing the small as well as big business to stop. The worst happened with the people, because of the violence that happened the lucky survivals were either effected physically, some went into depression and while some, post traumatic stress disorder. In short, we can conclude that Nagas, from the ancient times were completely different from the rest of the Indians. All these things lead to Naga national movement but, it was not out of hatred for the Indians instead it was because they wanted to live freely like they were before. The Naga problem which started 70 years back haven't solved as yet. Thus, making the Naga conflict as one of the world's oldest unresolved conflict.

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