CHAPTER – 4

WOMEN AND THE NAGA POLITICAL MOVEMENT: A HISTORICAL OUTLINE
4.0 WOMEN AND THE NAGA POLITICAL MOVEMENT: A HISTORICAL OUTLINE

Though it is still difficult to arrive at a satisfactory explanation of the origin of the Nagas, the fact remains that the word ‘Naga’ denotes a particular group of people. It is only the political aspirations of the people denoted by this name which has helped in imbibing them with a sense of oneness. In spite of the different names and the resultant admixture of peoples there are many marked characteristics common to the various Naga tribes. Similarity of habits, manners and customs set them apart from the neighbouring non-tribes of the North East India.

Many years ago and until the time the Nagas were on the fringe of civilization, the Naga villages were self-sufficient and self-governing units and were ruled by hereditary or elected chiefs. Traffic and trade between villages was minimal as a result of the practice of headhunting and each village grew in isolation and the authority of the Chief was unquestioned. The Chief was a judge, administrator and commander rolled into one. Families of various clans lived in a village and it was the clan not the tribe which was the rallying point among the Nagas. Tribal solidarity came much later and even today advanced and supposedly progressive Naga tribes talk about ‘my’ and ‘your’ village. The solidarity and the honour of the early Naga village Chief was vested in the man who dispensed justice in conformity with recognized and accepted codes of conduct.
With the coming of the British the village chief, once the supreme ruler, suffered erosion of his authority. The British administration sent about subtly in eroding his authority. This was a gradual process and the new measures of the British Government were always conveyed through the Chief. Interested only in maintaining ‘law and Order’ and preventing ‘headhunting’, the British left the villages alone to their Chiefs and interfered not at all in the day-to-day administration. The erstwhile strong village administration, which still survives and the government administration gives way before the customs of the tribes. Since this method of administration is still effective and more acceptable to the villagers than anything else even after 1947 and till today, whenever possible the Government tries not to interfere with the village administration.

The traditional political system of the Nagas like several other tribal communities developed in the context of communities which consist of families, clans and tribes. They belong to the same kinship groups sharing a common culture, common descent and a common territory. Due to a constant state of hostility these communities tended to be isolated from each other and fostered strong local traditions. In the Naga society kinship has been and still to a considerable extent, is the bond of union. Age, among the Nagas, has both prestige and power because it is the older people who know and pass on the younger persons the ways of society to which they are expected to conform.

Political institutions that developed over the ages are based on the relationship of the members and their group consciousness. Political institutions
have their roots in the need for social order. Naga society provides for the maintenance of social order through their system of kinship. Kinship plays such an important role in the Naga society that it has withstood severe strains of social change. It has also posed a difficult problem in its political development for the new State of Nagaland. The Nagas are closely associated with kinship rather than with territory. As the Naga society is based on the patrilineal system and is rigidly exogamous, the Nagas consider large families very desirable. A woman who bears many children brings great prestige to her husband and her kinsmen.

A lineage is a political unit. Many such small political units constitute the larger community, which shares a common territory. The political organization in a village is the sum total of these political units as presented by the various lineages. As a lineage is a political unit, a Head is chosen by the unit to represent it in the village council and it is the lineage Heads of the village that look after the affairs of the village as a whole. Therefore, in the political system of the Naga society the primary loyalties are centred on lineage and tribe. A tribe inhabits a common territory, its members share a common tradition, and they have a common descent and a common culture. Whether it is food growing, herding cattle, building homes, the villagers share common interests and work for the general good. Therefore, from the cradle to the grave every individual activity is motivated to maintain the membership of one's lineage and tribe.

In matters of village polity, customs vary from tribe to tribe and there are instances of extreme difference the patterns of chieftainship. The hereditary
chiefs among the Konyaks and the Semas enjoy almost feudal position as Lord over every aspect of village life; the Ao and the Tangkhul villages have chiefs whose position and powers are below than those of the Sema and Konyak. Among the Ao and the Tangkhul Nagas the actual power is vested in the Village Council which is a body of village elders drawn from the clans residing in the village and who in turn represent the principal kindred in the village. Among the Southern Nagas, such as Angami and Chakhesang, tribal democracy continues to prevail at the village level.¹

4.1 RISE OF NAGA NATIONALISM AND THE NAGA NATIONAL MOVEMENT

The Naga nationalist sentiment is based on the understanding that the Nagas are different from Indians. The Nagas resent being called Indians. The insistence on not being Indian began when India was on the verge of throwing off British rule in India. Naga polity has in essence developed from village to ‘village confederation’ to ‘tribe’ and to ‘collective tribal association’. ‘Nagaism’ manifests the emergence of Naga nationalism in the modern sense of the term. In other words, Nagaism originated from the village after their prolonged tradition of respective sovereign village-states. The concept of large area than the village-states which is today called ‘tribe’ was also prevalent among the villages through kinship bond although it was not well organised.
Historically speaking, the emergence of nationalism among the Nagas was more by accident than it is by gradual and regular development. This does not, however, mean that the Nagas intense love and attachment for their homeland (also called ‘motherland’ by the Nagas), did not play a crucial role. The Nagas love for their homeland and their traditional attitude of self-reliance and freedom, the pride to preserve their unique identity, and not to be under the control and authority from outside in any circumstances, did prove to be the essential assets for Naga nationalism. Along with the age-old villageism and tribalism (which developed much later), the early part of the 20th century saw the rise of Nagaism or Naga nationalism. Thus, we find the formation of ‘Naga Club’ an apex socio-political body of the Nagas in 1918 at Kohima. This body is perhaps the first of its kind and the first in the history of the Nagas to have organized such a body represented by various Naga tribes. For the Nagas, it was a good foundation laid for the future course, including Naga unity, integration, and more so, for the political struggle for independence.

Under the aegis of the Naga Club, the general view of the Nagas was clearly seen through their historic memorandum to the Simon Commission in 1929 at Kohima when the Commission came to India to assess the working system of administration and any necessary recommendation thereof, with the view to improve upon the prevalent situation of the time. In the said Memorandum (also called the ‘Naga Memorandum’), the Naga Club, claimed to be representing the Nagas, mentioned among others:
"We the undersigned Nagas of the Naga Club at Kohima, who are the only persons at present who can voice for our people have heard with great regret that our Naga Hills is included within the Reformed Scheme of India without our knowledge, but as administration of our Hill is continued to be in the hands of the British officers and we did not consider it necessary to raise any protest in the past. Now we learnt that you have come to India as representative of the British Government to enquire into the working of the system of Government and the growth of education and beg to submit below our view with the prayer that our Hills may be withdrawn from the Reformed Scheme and placed outside the Reforms but directly under British Government. We never asked for any reforms and we do not wish for any reforms."  

The Memorandum further said that "The British Government will continue to safeguard our right against all encroachment from other people who are more advanced than us by withdrawing our country that we should not be thrust to the mercy of other people who could never be subjected; but to leave us alone to determine ourselves as in ancient times."  

It is not clear if the British had prompted the Nagas to form the ‘Naga Club’, and the subsequent submission of the Memorandum to the Simon Commission for excluding the Nagas in the proposed ‘Reformed Scheme’ and to ‘leave alone’ like in the past. Though this question is subject to debate, there is one thing for sure that the Nagas by then had begun to be conscious or more conscious than ever before about their socio-political position in relation to their
neighbours and the still larger society who could interfere or had interfered in their sovereign affairs. It is also to say, that, the Nagas were, somehow, contended with some kind of self-determination, though limited, affected till then, under the indirect administration of the British, who was also considered to have safeguarded the interests of the Nagas from any external interference. It appears that, the Nagas could not think of other better alternatives but wished to continue to live that way.

It is important here to go into some detail about the various phases of historical development in the Naga areas to further understand the issue under review. The earliest known Naga relation with outsiders is with that of the Dimasa Kacharis, the first settlers of the present day Assam. In the absence of a recorded history, the exact period and nature of the relationship between the two peoples cannot be properly ascertained. However their relationship of intermittent warfare and friendship continued up to the 13th century. That was, till the advent of Ahoms in Assam in the 13th century where the Ahoms over-ran the Kacharis. This eventually brought the Nagas into clash with the Ahoms, who came to Assam from Myanmar (Burma) through Naga country. After many skirmishes they agreed to live side by side peacefully upon well-demarcated boundaries between them.
4.2 ARRIVAL OF THE BRITISH

The British first came in contact with the Nagas when they intruded the Naga country in the year 1832. When the Britishers passed through the Naga areas fierce encounter took place. In this sense, Naga nationalism was seen for the first time in an incipient form when the Naga tribes resisted the entry of the more superior well equipped Britishers in the lands of the Nagas in 1832. Nevertheless, in the real sense of the term, the consciousness of the Nagas for the nationhood, their identity and rights could be traced during and after the World War I. All these years the Nagas valiantly and relentlessly defended their country. Thus the British sought for peace with the Nagas. Thereby, a verbal agreement was arrived at between the two peoples (Britishers and Nagas), where the Nagas allowed the British to stay in their land provided they do not interfere in the affairs of Naga political and cultural life.

Following this understanding the British could set up administrative units at Kohima and subsequently at Mokokchung placing them under Assam province. This they did as the British were interested in opening their communication line to Manipur and up to Burma. The un-administered territories of Nagaland were termed by the British as “Free Nagas” which consisted of the major portion of Naga territory. The Nagas preferred to be under the direct administration of the British Government so that their rights are protected and guarded against all encroachment from the non-Nagas. Despite the plea of the Nagas, Naga Hills district was merely clubbed as an ‘excluded area’ in 1937,
which was just at par with various other ‘excluded areas’ throughout the rest of India.

Although, the British did not stop interfering in the affairs of the Nagas, they left the Nagas to determine their own affairs with the minimum exercise of authority and administration. This trend continued till the British ceased to be the custodian of the erstwhile British India. In fact, it was during the British rule that the Nagas learned enormously about the outside world and made themselves more conscious of their existence and identity. Such a feeling of oneness among the Nagas manifested in the form of Nagaism or Naga nationalism. One can easily suggest here that the British tremendously influenced the worldview of the Nagas.

4.3 THE BRITISH STATUTORY COMMISSION FOR INDIA

About 2000 Naga labour corps personnel who had returned from war-torn France, had brought back a feeling of self-expectancy for their own political future. This culminated in the formation of the Naga Club. This Club submitted a Memorandum to the British Statutory Commission for India popularly called the Simon Commission in 1929 to keep the Naga Hills away from any reform. Among other things, the memorandum claimed that they were the only persons at present who could voice “for their people and have heard with great regret that our hills were included within the Reformed Schedule without our knowledge. We never asked for and we do not wish for reforms – therefore if it is continued
to be placed under Reformed Scheme- we shall have no share in the land of our birth." The text of the memorandum made abundantly clear how a group consciousness of Naga solidarity and of common ‘Naga’ identity had grown. The Naga club, formed to foster the welfare and social aspirations of the Nagas under official patronage was succeeded by the Naga nationalism. It clearly stated in no uncertain terms “our hills may be withdrawn from the reformed scheme and placed outside the reforms ... our language is quite different from those of the plains and we have no social affinities with Hindus and Musalmans ... But to leave us alone to determine for ourselves as in ancient times.”

4.4 NAGA NATIONAL COUNCIL:

The Naga National Council (NNC) was formed on February 2, 1946. Its origin is traced back to the Naga Club, which was founded in 1918. In order to unite the Nagas and for repairing the damage done during the Second World War, Mr. C. R. Pawsey, then Deputy commissioner of the Naga Hills launched an organization in April, 1945, called the ‘Naga Hills District Tribal Council.’ But in February 1946, in its Wokha session, the Council was rechristened as ‘Naga National Council’ (NNC) with Mr. Mayang Nokcha, as its president. The aim of the organization was to “foster the welfare and social aspiration of the Nagas and it received official patronage as a unifying and moderating influence. Its original political objective was to achieve local autonomy for the hills within the Province of Assam and to train the people for self-government. It encouraged the Tribal Councils already set up by individual tribes and started others to administer their
own local affairs and consider possible reforms”. At first, NNC did not speak of separation from British India as we shall find it in the following discussion; but later, things were not the same anymore, say from early 1947.

The Naga National Council was the only institution organized to safeguard and promote the interests of the Naga people and their land. In the aftermath of World War II when the Independence of India became imminent the security and independence of the Nagas became uncertain. Realizing this, the Naga leaders had a series of talks with the Indian leadership. The records show that the Naga National Council representatives and Indian leaders had number of bilateral talks since 1946. These talks were held at the highest level possible at that time. The purpose of talks was to establish friendly relationship and mutual respect for one another as good neighbours.

The plea of the Nagas for self-determination was not acceptable to the Simon Commission, or for that matter, the British Government. The Nagas were just given the status of ‘Excluded Area’, within the province of Assam, under the Government of India Act, 1935 (the Act was effective from April 1, 1937), which was in the real sense of the term, not a grant of self-determination. However, there was a provision, that, “no act of the Central or Provincial Legislatures could apply to the Naga Hills District unless the Governor so directed, and he was empowered to make regulations for its peace and good government”. Meanwhile, the very status of ‘Excluded Area’ was construed by the Nagas as the Naga Hills being excluded from British India. It may be added
that in the later years, the Nagas linked their issue of independence to the ‘Excluded Area’ category they were accorded by the British.

The aspiration of the Nagas for self-determination (in the modern sense of the term) was not the same at all times, especially, in the formative stage. The Naga Memorandum to the Simon Commission (1929) hints about the Nagas’ aspiration to determine their own way of life themselves or with minimum interference and/or protection from the British Government. Going by the contents of the Memorandum, one finds that, the Nagas did not like to be included in the ‘Reformed Scheme’. They were concerned above all, about the security and preservation of their lands. They were sceptical about the superior attitudes of the Hindus and Mussalmans of the plains neighbouring them. To quote one of the perceptions of the Nagas as mentioned in the same Memorandum, the Nagas expressed that, “We are looked down upon by the one for “beef” and the other for our “pork” and by both for our want in education, (which) is not due to any fault or ours.” With all these bitter experiences in the minds of the Nagas, the Nagas sought for some sort of external self-determination.

When we examine the Four Point Memorandum of the Naga National council to the visiting British Cabinet Mission (the Mission came to India to lay ground for granting independence to India) on June 19, 1946 we get some idea about the Naga understanding of their problem. The Naga National council was in favour of participating in free India with certain conditions such as the Nagas
of the administered and the un-administered areas should be under one administrative unit with ‘separate electorate’ with enough ‘autonomy’ and ‘safeguard’. This position of the Nagas could be understood as some sort of internal self-determination within free India. The four points were:

1. This Naga National Council stands for solidarity of Naga tribes including those in the unadministered areas;
2. This Council strongly protests against the grouping of Assam with Bengal;
3. The Naga Hills should be constitutionally included in autonomous Assam, in a free India, with local autonomy and due safeguard for the interest of the Nagas; and
4. The Naga tribes should have a separate electorate.

The situation of the Nagas in the early part of 1947 was still different from the earlier claims. In another Four Point Memorandum of the Naga National Council (NNC) to Lord Louis Mountbatten, then Viceroy of India on 20 February 1947, the NNC presented their view of setting up an ‘Interim Government’ for the Nagas for a period of ten years at the end of which the Naga people should be left to choose any form of government as to their wish. This was a great step in the Nagas demand for sovereignty. Accordingly after about four months of the submission of their Memorandum for ten years of ‘Interim Government’, the NNC and the Government of India agreed upon nine points (the agreement was also called ‘Hydari Agreement’ after the name of the representative of the
government of India, Sir Akbar Hydari, then Governor of Assam, which was signed at Kohima during their meetings held from June 27 to 29, 1947; see Appendix), recognizing "The right of the Nagas to develop themselves according to their freely expressed wishes". Point nine was said to be the most controversial one.

Point nine of the 'Hydari agreement' mentioned that the Government of India takes responsibility as guardian power for ten years, at the end of which, the NNC would be asked to decide whether to extend 'for a further period, or a new agreement regarding the future of the Naga people arrived at. 'This point when meticulously examined has connections with the Four Point Memorandum of the NNC to the viceroy of India on February 20, 1947 for constituting an 'Interim Government' for the Nagas for a period of ten years. No wonder, the NNC understood this point nine as the provision for independence of the Nagas after ten years of the 'Interim Government' which was what they had wished for. There were, however, some differences even among the NNC leaders on this agreement. To A.Z. Phizo, a prominent revolutionary leader, who is generally considered as the father of the Naga National Movement, this Agreement was just an acceptable start to a majority of the Naga National Council and it was not a clear promise of self-determination. According to the NNC, the Indian Government did not respect the Agreement reached between them, and so, they (the NNC) declared Independence a day before India declared Independence. The Nagas under the aegis of the NNC also reaffirmed their Independence.
(sovereignty) through a very successful plebiscite held in 1951 about which we shall talk later.

On August 1, 1946, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru as a President of the Indian National Congress in a letter to Mr. T. Shakrie, Secretary of the Naga National Council communicated about the future of the Naga Hills, which read as follow:

“
It is obvious that the Naga territory in Eastern Assam is much too small to stand by itself politically or economically. It lies between two huge countries, India and China, and part of it consists of rather backward people who require considerable help. When India is independent, as it is bound to be soon, it will not be possible for the British Government to hold on the Naga territory or any part of it. They would be isolated there between India and China. Inevitably, therefore, this Naga territory must form part of India and of Assam with which it has developed such close associations.

“At the same time, it is our policy that tribal areas should have as much freedom and autonomy as possible so that they can live their own lives according to their own customs and desires. Thus the solution would be that the Naga territory should be an integral part of Assam province and yet should have a certain measure of autonomy for its own purposes. How this should be worked out is a matter of further consideration between the people’s concerned. So far as I can see, there is no reason why there should be any excluded area a part from the rest. The whole Naga territory should go together and should be controlled in
a large measure by an elected Naga National Council. At the same time, the Nagas should have representatives in the Assam Provincial Assembly and should participate in the life of the Province.

"I am glad that the Naga National Council stands for the solidarity of all the Naga tribes including those who live in the so-called unadministered territory. I agree entirely with your decision that the Naga Hills should constitutionally be included in an autonomous Assam in a free India with local autonomy and due safeguard for the interests of the Nagas.

"As for separate electorates for the Nagas, I am not clear in my mind as to how this will work. Generally speaking, we are against separate electorates as this will limit and injure the small group by keeping it separated from the rest of the nation. But if the Naga territory is given a measure of autonomy, some arrangement will have to be made for their proper representation.

"As you know, the Congress is opposed to any forcible grouping of Assam with Bengal. We are of the opinion that this is a matter for each province to decide. Assam has already expressed its opinion on the subject. What the future will be, I cannot say, but I cannot conceive of Assam being compelled against its will to form a group with Bengal.

"An advisory Committee will be elected by the Constituent Assembly. It should have representatives of the tribal areas and I hope the tribal territories of Assam will be directly represented on it. The findings and decisions of the
Advisory Committee will probably not be finally binding upon the Constituent Assembly but they are bound to carry great weight. I imagine the findings will be accepted almost in their entirety unless they go against some direct provision in the Constitution.

“As I have said above, the Excluded Areas should be incorporated with other areas. It may be that certain provisions for their protection and development will be made. I should like them to be treated as part of the entire Naga territory.

“I see no reason whatever, why an extraneous judicial system should be enforced upon the Naga Hills. They should have perfect freedom to continue their village panchayats, tribal courts, etc., according to their wishes. Indeed, it is our wish that the judicial system of India should be revised, giving a great deal of power to village panchayats.

“About the unadministered territory which still contains, according to you, a number of head-hunters, I cannot definitely say how soon and in what manner it should be brought into the province. This is to be devised in consultation with the people concerned. Naturally, some special provisions will have to be made to develop these people.

“The question of common language must also be finally decided by the Nagas themselves. The only two possible languages, which would be helpful to them, are Assamese already. I think it would be desirable to encourage
Hindustani and this will bring them in touch with the various changes and developments taking place in India.

“Assam is still largely undeveloped and there is plenty of room for agricultural, horticultural and industrial development. This development should be organized as to benefit the people of the soil. Certainly, the people of the Naga Hills should not be exploited by them. We should be entirely against the development of large estates owned by outsiders there. What form land ownership should take, whether it should be communal, co-operative or a kind of peasant proprietorship should be determined in consultation with the people concerned?

“I might add that I am especially interested in these tribal areas not only in the north-east of India but in the North-west as well as the centre. They represent different problems. I hope that in an independent India there will be different departments, both at the centre and in the provinces concerned, for the protection and advancement of tribal areas. I do not want them to be swamped by people from other parts of the country who might go there to exploit them to their own advantage.”

But the view of Jawaharlal Nehru on the future of the Naga Hills was not acceptable to the NNC. Accordingly, on February 20, 1947, the NNC sent a Memorandum to Lord Mountbatten, then the Viceroy of India for setting up an ‘Interim Government’ for the Nagas for a period of ten years, at the end of which
the Naga people will be left to choose any form of government according to their wish. The terms of the Memorandum were as follows:

1. The Interim Government of the Naga people will rule over all the people of Nagaland, having full powers in respect of Legislation, Executive and Judiciary.
2. Nagaland belongs to the Naga people and will be inalienable.
3. The interim Government of the Naga people will have full powers in the matter of raising revenue and expenditure, an annual subvention to cover the deficit being given by the guardian power.
4. For defence and aiding civil power in case of emergency, a forum considered necessary by the Naga National Council will be maintained in Nagaland by the guardian power.

The NNC’s meeting with the members of the Sub-Committee of the Advisory Committee on the Aboriginal Tribes of the Constituent Assembly on May 20, 1947, when the latter visited Kohima to assess the desires of the Naga people as to the status of the future governance, resulted in a dead-lock. The NNC apprised the Committee of the terms of the Interim Government for the Nagas as they (Nagas) desired so; but the Committee would not accommodate the proposed terms of the Nagas and it failed to recommend it to the Constituent Assembly.
This event was immediately followed by the agreement, also called ‘Hydari agreement’ reached between the Government of India (represented by Sir Akbar Hydari, then Governor of Assam) and the Nagas (represented by the Naga National Council) in their meeting held at Kohima from June 27 to 29, 1974. The preamble of the agreement reads that “The right of the Nagas to develop themselves according to their freely expressed wishes is recognized.” But the agreement became one of the main points of contention for the future relationships between the Government of India and the NNC. Of all the nine points of the agreement, point nine bearing the sub-title ‘period of agreement’ was the most controversial one. It says that “The Governor of Assam as the agent of the Government of Indian Union will have a special responsibility for a period of ten years to ensure the due observance of this agreement; at the end of this period the Naga National Council will be asked whether they require the above agreement to be extended for a further period, or a new agreement regarding the future of the Naga people arrived at. (See Appendix-V)”

The N.N.C. understood this point nine as “The Governor of Assam as the agent of the Government of the Indian Union will have a special responsibility for a period of ten years to ensure the due observance of this agreement, at the end of this period the Nagas will be free to decide their own future”. (as quoted in Ramunny 1993:26). Whereas the Government of India, spelled out by the Governor of Assam, interpreted the point nine as “At the end of this period the NNC will be free to decide what arrangement should be made for the future administration of the Naga country. It being clearly understood that such
arrangement would not contemplate union with Pakistan or Burma but would maintain union with India".14

However, in his writing, Phizo admitted that point nine of the Hydari agreement “was not a clear promise of self-determination. But it was an acceptable start to a majority of the Naga National Council, and both sides formally agreed to the document.” (Quoted in Nibedon 1983:31). Phizo also recorded that, “that same very evening Sir Akbar Hydari warned several Naga delegates that India would use force against them.”15

Meanwhile, at least two groups in the NNC did crop up, the moderates constituting the majority and the radicals led by Mr. A. Z. Phizo who did not accept the Hydari agreement as they thought that the terms of the agreement were short of self-determination of the Nagas. Therefore, a delegation consisting of six members of the minority group including Phizo went to Delhi in July 1947 to propose their view that the Nagas be left outside the Indian Union when the British withdrew from British India.

In an interview with Mahatma Gandhi at the Bhangi Colony, in New Delhi on 19 July, 1947, the Naga delegation is said to have told the Mahatma that they were resolved to declare their own independence a day before India did so, on August 14, 1947, and asked him for his help. At this, according to Phizo, Mahatma Gandhi told the Naga delegation: “Nagas have every right to be independent. We did not want to live under the British and they are now leaving
us. I want you to feel that India is yours. I feel that the Naga Hills are mine just as much as they are yours. But if you say that they are mine, the matter must stop there. I believe in the brotherhood of man, but I do not believe in force or forced unions. If you do not wish to join the Union of India, nobody will force you to do that. When the Naga delegates pointed out that Sir Akbar Hydari was threatening to do exactly that, Gandhi exclaimed; ‘Sir Akbar is wrong! I will ask them to shoot me first before one Naga is shot.” 16

The Naga National Council, in fact, was not unanimous on the issue of Naga independence—before, during, and even after the declaration of Naga Independence. The situation was then, as Elwin quoted a Naga leader as saying, “while one group of Nagas favoured immediate independence, some moderates favoured the continuance of governmental relations with India in some modified form until they were sufficiently schooled in the art of running a modern State. There was a third minority which wanted to bring Nagaland into the position of a Mandatory State under the British Government for a specified period of time.” 17

However, after assassination of Mahatma Gandhi, the father of Indian Nation, attempts to talk with the Indian Prime Minister, Mr. Jawaharlal Nehru became quite difficult. And thereby, this led to the entry of the Indian Army in Nagaland 1954.
4.5 NAGA VOLUNTARY PLEBISCITE

The Naga National Council conducted a voluntary plebiscite on May 16, 1951. During the plebiscite, some Nagas pierced their thumb with pin and some sliced their thumb with knife and impressed their thumb with their own blood. The result of this plebiscite showed that 99 per cent of the Naga people voted to remain independent. The result of the plebiscite was compiled into three sets of which the Nagas themselves handed over one to the Government of India, one was posted to the United Nations and the other was kept for the record of the NNC.

On seeing the overwhelming result of the Naga voluntary plebiscite, the Government of India started using military to suppress the Nagas in an attempt to make the Nagas submit to the Union of India. Then in July 1952, the Government gave an order to arrest Mr. A. Z. Phizo then President of the NNC. Thereafter, on October 18, 1952 Mr. Zasibito of Zothuma village, a Naga leader was killed in broad day light by an Indian Officer in the main road of Kohima. He was the first Naga martyr. Thus, a new era had begun. Then in April 1953 the Indian Government resorted to political persecution of mass arrest, torture, and other acts against the Nagas. Under the aegis of the Naga National Council, a federation was formed between the Nagas of Southwest and the so-called "Free Nagas" in the North-East. Thus, the Naga National Government known as Federal Government of Nagaland (FGN) was formed on March 22, 1956.
In fact from 1954 to 1964, Nagaland passed through ten years of continuous trouble. During this period, there were operations by the Indian Army on the one hand and guerrilla activities on the other. Against this background a public convention at Wokha held early in 1964 formed the Peace Mission, which succeeded in bringing about a cease-fire (suspension of operation) between the Naga and the Government of India in September 1964. Thus, the Nagaland Baptist Church Council (NBCC) took the initiative to intervene in the Indo-Naga Conflict. The NBCC sponsored Nagaland Peace Mission was given the task of an international peace broker. The members were: Reverend Michael Scott, a British, Mr. Jayaprakash Narayan, a Sarvodaya leader and Mr. Bimala Prasad Chaliha, the then Chief Minister of Assam. They successfully negotiated with the Federal Government of Nagaland and Government of India to reach a Cease-Fire agreement in May 1964 which came into effect on September 6, 1964. On 20 December 1964, it brought out a set of proposals which stated among other things, that while the Peace Mission fully agrees and endorses the principle that all subject people have the right to self-determination and that no group of people is competent to rule over another, it also has to invite the attention of the Naga Federal Government to certain historical processes that had taken place to give birth to the Union of India. The Peace Mission urged the N.F.G. if they could on their own volition, decide to be a participant in the Union of India, and mutually settle the terms and conditions for that purpose. On the other hand, the Government of India could consider to what extent the pattern and structure of
the relationship between Nagaland and the Government of India should be adapted and recast, so as satisfying the political aspirations of all sections of Naga. Certain Naga areas of Manipur were also included under the purview of the Peace Agreement. Following the cease-fire marathon talks were held between the Federal Government of Nagaland and Government of India from 1964 to 1967. These talks were held at various levels and finally at the Prime Ministerial level. Altogether six rounds of talks were held with the Prime Minister of India in New Delhi from 1966 to 1967.

However, unilateral abrogation of the cease-fire by the Indian Government in 1972 brought immediate and escalated Indian Army operation again in Nagaland. A fresh dialogue was arranged between the representatives of Nagaland and India at Shillong in November 1975. From the on-set of the talk it was visible that no permanent and honourable solution to the conflict could be arrived at. Rather, the Government of India wanted to thrust its will upon the Nagas. As a result, political game and manoeuvre set in. The outcome was an accord, popularly known as “Shillong Accord”, signed between the two parties in November 1975. Consequently, the so-called “Accord” was neither approved nor ratified by both the Federal Government of Nagaland and Government of Nagaland and Government of India. Thereby, the accord faced its instant death.

After this, the then NNC President Mr. A. Z. Phizo and Morarji Desai, then Prime Minister of India met in India House, London on June 14, 1977. But the meeting turned out to be unfruitful because the Prime Minister of India
deliberately refused to acknowledge and insisted that there was nothing to discuss on the long-standing conflict between Nagaland and India. However, Mr. A. Z. Phizo knowing the seriousness of the situation and in the spirit of true statesmanship continued to communicate with the Indian leadership by writing letters to the Indian Prime Ministers who came after Mr. Desai. And one of which was written to Mr. Rajiv Gandhi on May 10, 1986. Also in the same vein a letter to Mr. P.V. Narasimha Rao was written on November 9, 1993 by the then General Secretary of the Naga National Council.

Gradually a consciousness of composite Naga ethnic identity and solidarity amongst the different Naga tribes has emerged. The educated Naga youth were to play an important role in the Naga National Council, though when India inherited responsibility for Naga territory in 1947, there were still less than a dozen Naga graduates.\(^1\) At the same time the systematic spread of Christianity among the Naga tribes filled up the intellectual and spiritual vacuum caused by the growing scepticism, among the tribal population, about their traditional faith and world view.\(^2\) However, it may also be noted that preliterate cosmology was based on the notion of unilineal transition from birth to after life, not unlike the Christian doctrine. Moreover, the Nagas were given an avenue wherein they found a common symbolic ground to meet the white man, through Christianity.\(^3\)

The educated Naga formed the backbone of political moderation as a section of emerging leaders, some of whom, like Phizo, had first hand experience of visiting some South-East Asian countries. On the eve of impending withdrawal of the British Colonial Rule, two dominant ideological trends were observed among the
Naga elite, one section looking towards Southeast Asia and another section looking towards the emerging South Asian situation. The thought processes of the Naga elite were influenced by their basic social structures, which are generally an extension of the highland Southeast Asian social formations.

It is interesting to point out here that another movement emerged during this period. A movement began in Mokokchung town for convening a Naga public meeting on 13th May 1956. This brought about a series of consultation “among the over ground Nagas” who formed the Naga People’s Convention (N.P.C). The representatives who assembled at Kohima during August 1957 voiced their views on the tense political situation in the country. There were 1756 delegates representing different tribes, excluding those visitors from the neighbouring villages of Kohima town, numbering more than 2000 persons who daily attended the convention. There were sixty Nagas among the delegates who were in Government Service under Assam, North Eastern Frontier Agency (N.E.F.A) and the Government of India.  

The first session of the Naga People’s Convention was held at Kohima from 22nd to 26th August 1957 with late Dr Imkongliba Ao, as the President and Shri Jasoki Angami as the Secretary. Among other things, the convention resolved that the only answer to the Naga question was a political settlement, that the present Naga Hills District of Assam and Tuensang Frontier Division of N.E.F.A. along with the reserved forests of Naga Hills District, after reforms of 1921, should be constituted into a single administrative unit under the External
Affairs Ministry, that the Army and Police be withdrawn and the villages regrouped. They also appealed for an end to the cult of violence, pledged to actively work together to end hostilities and bring about peace.22

In the second session held from the 21st to 23rd May 1958, in Ungma village of the Mokokchung district, they reaffirmed the above, at the third meeting held during October 1959, the Naga People's Convention prepared a sixteen Point Memorandum for the constitution of a separate state within the Indian Union, to be known as NAGALAND, directly under the Ministry of External Affairs, with the Governor, an administrative secretariat, a Council of Ministers and a Legislative Assembly (Gundevia 1975:71). One of the points in the 'agreement' that was reached on 27th July 1960, which was to remain crucial in the mind of the Nagas in future, was that the other Nagas inhabiting contiguous areas should be enabled to join the new state. It was pointed out to them on behalf of the Government of India that Articles 3 and 4 of the Constitution provided for increasing the area of any state, but that it was not possible for the Government of India to make any commitment in this regard at this stage.23

The changes introduced by the Nagaland (Transitional Provision) Regulation 1961, continued till 1st December 1963, when it culminated in the Constitution of the full fledged state of Nagaland under the State of Nagaland Act 1962. With the formation of the state of Nagaland, the areas comprising it have been eliminated from the Sixth Schedule of the constitution and the Governor of Assam has been divested of his personal responsibility and discretion in regard to the administration of the area, as the agent of the President of India and he has
since then been functioning as a Constitutional Governor of the new state like the
Governor of other states except that he has special responsibility in respect to the
law and order of the State, vide the constitution (Thirteenth Amendment)Act
1962. This Act provides that, notwithstanding anything in the constitution,

(a) No act of Parliament in respect of religious or special practices of the Nagas,
Naga customary law and procedure, administration of civil and Criminal
justice involving decisions according to Naga customary law, ownership and
transfer of land and its resources shall apply to the state to Nagaland unless
the Legislative Assembly of Nagaland by a resolution so decides.

(b) The Governor of Nagaland shall have special responsibility in respect of law
and order in the state of Nagaland so long as, in his opinion, internal
disturbances occurring in Naga Hills and Tuensang Area immediately before
the formation of that State continued therein or in any part thereof and in the
discharge of his functions in relation thereto the Governor shall after
consulting the Council of Ministers, exercise his individual judgement
regarding the action that needs to be taken.

Besides the above provisions the other peculiar features of Nagaland are
indicated by the fact that the Assam Land and Revenue Regulation had not in
general been extended to erstwhile Naga Hills District, though certain sections of
the same are in force. The only revenue procedure existing in the state consists of
the annual assessment by the Deputy Commissioner and the collection of house-
tax through the village headmen conducted by the district officer under the executive orders and control of the state government Section 47 of the Assam Land and Revenue Regulation lays down that in lieu of the revenue assessable on any land there shall be an annual tax collection on the each male person who has attained eighteen years of age, and who participates in the cultivation of land at any time during the year of assessment or on each family or house or persons as the state government thinks proper. The other is the retention of the rules embodied in the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation of 1873 providing an inner-line, which restricts the indiscriminate entry of non-Nagas in Nagaland.

The formation of Naga People’s Convention in 1957, by the overground Naga moderates, by and large, that resulted in the creation of Nagaland State., was a direct opposition to the move of the Naga National Council (NNC), then only underground organization of the Nagas till the formation of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) in 1980, whose main objective was to achieve independence in the Naga homeland.

With the signing of the Shillong accord in 1975 by some leaders of the NNC, there was a great split in the underground (NNC) set up which deeply affected the movement of the Nagas for independence. Thereafter, the colour of the NNC waned irreparably, while the NSCN, the newly formed organization after condemning the Shillong Accord and the NNC, emerged as a great force to reckon with, which was determined to achieve sovereignty of the Nagas. This division of the NNC was a great divide among the Nagas as the loyalists dragged
along the leaders of the respective underground groups taking to tribal and regional affiliations not giving much importance to the ideological soundness of the groups. The split of the NNC after the Shillong Accord brought great confusion to the Nagas. It was in fact, “a fight within the Nagas, and not a fight for the self-determination of the Nagas” as one of the Nagas put it.

The split of the NSCN in 1988 (NSCN –Khaplang parted away from the parent body of the NSCN) and also the further split of the NNC into two factions, namely, the NNC (Adino group) and the NNC (Khadao group) in 1990 after leadership crisis among other reasons, further weakened the Naga movement. With all these bitter groups, and of course, there were many Nagas who remained neutral in one way or the other. Many Nagas who were once loyal to the Naga national movement, gradually distanced away from the struggle, with much confusion. Even today, it will not be so strange to know that, most of the Nagas are confused, thrilled, frustrated, annoyed, and reluctant and so on, with the way things are happening in the Naga Hills, with factional killings, tribalism, levying of Naga taxes by the underground factions, and the highhandedness of the underground cadres.

4.7 NAGA WOMEN SOCIETY

The Naga Women Society was established in the year 1952, with the initiative of Mrs Takotola, wife of late Imkongmeren, former President of N.N.C.
The first meeting of the Women Society was held in the year 1954 at Kilengmen village in the Ao area and selected the following office bearers:

President : Martha Ao  
Vice- President : Tenlamongla Ao  
General Secretary : Mrs. Nungsangmongla  
Asst. General Secretary : Tiakala

The women volunteers were selected in every Naga village in order to collect household contribution and send rations, carry messages about dead and providing assistance to the Naga nationalist workers at the time of accidents. Their functions in the villages were more stable and therefore, the NNC officials felt necessary to appoint some women members also as volunteers. A group of women were thus selected in different villages as Women Society members. These women members were appointed with the approval of the villagers as the representatives of their clan and khel.

By maintaining women society offices in all the regions with the joint efforts of youth wing of the NNC the women society members and volunteers facilitated all the underground activities in the villages. Particularly when the situation became tense, it was not possible for men to move around as it created tension with the Indian armies. It was women who actively exercised all the functions concerning the transmission of information and maintaining communications with the underground activists. The communication and transportation was
mainly done under the administrative control of the *Rali Wali Kilonser* (public information system) which was controlled by the *Runa Peyu* (Village Chairman). As they were purely working under the NNC undertakings the Tribal Council also controlled them. These selected members were very important and the general public never betrayed them. They were undeclared overground NNC workers for the sake of security. Some of the women society members went underground also and later some of them were designated as military personnel under the organisation. Some of them became so important that they were given military status even posthumously. For example, Mrs Takotola who took ample initiative in the women organization, on her death, was given Honorary Captainship.

Naga women’s contribution and participation in the Naga political movement right from the very beginning cannot be ignored. Although women are not so visible in the Naga traditional system but their role in the political movement cannot be ignored. The Naga National Movement has affected almost every Naga women’s life and they have never been silent spectators in the Naga political movement. Among the many who joined the movement, Limayangla was the first Ao women graduate to become an active member of the underground movement. Women’s groups have always shared a common platform with the student bodies, churches, human rights, organizations and the Naga Village or Tribal Council in showing political, social and economic solidarity.
While addressing issues on gender specifically on women political participation, involvement in the nationalist movement, it is important for women to come to the terms with the fact that the essential nature of the problem faced by them is political. At the same time it is important to keep in view the historical processes that have led to the marginalization of Naga women. Hence greater participation of women is something they can strive for. For the Naga women this realization is coupled with the process of participation in processes hitherto considered to be domain of men.

The Naga customary law discriminates women in the public spheres. The concept of legitimizing and giving a legal status to customary law was initiated by the colonial British Administration. Later, the Indian State followed suit by making it more institutionalized under the Indian constitutional legal system. Both of them failed to see that the conducts of life in the Naga society were basically founded on the ethical philosophy that served to guide the Naga people on a day-to-day basis. The concepts of egalitarian, restorative justice and collective interdependence and survival were the foundations of the ethical framework that provided the reference for our general conduct in effect “Customary Law”.

For instance, when men had to wage wars, women held the post at home giving provisions and supplies for the fighting men, running the household and bringing up the children. Sema women sometimes accompanied men in tribal feuds, when need arose. In Chakhesang society women were believed to own the
spirit associated with wealth and riches. Moreover, during inter-village feuds, it was very rare that a particular village would volunteer to act as a mediator between the warring villages. In such a situation, women played the commendable role of mediators (*Demis*). They mediated and called for peace between the warring villagers. Apart from that Demis were the only ones to carry the head of the slain one to the bereaved family. Their role was so important that it was taboo to kill a *Demi*. However, after having said that, the Zaliangrong (*Zemie Liangmai Rongmei*) women were prohibited from taking an active part in the social and public affairs. It was believed that the presence of women in such affairs was a bad omen for the whole society.

Ironically women’s role has been that of a “victim”. One has been made to believe that they have little or no role in the history making process of their people. In the present time this notion has been almost ‘legitimized’ because her worth is associated with the Naga inheritance laws, where a woman has no share, according to the tribal customary law. Thus a woman is seen to have no power to take a stand. This issue has made Naga women view ‘Customary Law’ with a sense of uneasiness. Women feel increasingly worried and insecure about the biased interpretations of ‘customary law’. The existing institutions of customary law today promote hierarchy and disempowerment and thereby compound oppression of women along with other practices that are discriminatory in nature.
Meanwhile, electoral politics has taken a firm root in Nagaland as reflected in several general elections, declared party manifestos and programmes. However, when the first general elections were held all over India in 1952, the Naga people had refrained from exercising their franchise mainly on account of the strong pressure exerted by the 'rebellious' political elements against participation (Thakar 1972). In 1957 general elections however, three Nagas filed their nominations and they were returned unopposed to the Legislative Assembly. The Naga People's Convention (N.P.C), which was formed by Government officials, Dobhashis, businessmen and a section of breakaway N.N.C reformists, transformed itself into a political party called Nationalist Party (N.P) in 1964. Initially the Convention had two divergent views on the Naga problem; one group led by the Ao Nagas had the opinion that NPC was to act as a bridge between the Government and the underground Nagas, while the other groups considered N.P.C. as a sufficient representatives body symbolizing Naga aspirations and which was to conclude an agreement with the Union Government.

In 1964 Assembly Election, two parties contested. They were the Nationalist Party and the Democratic Party. A notable feature of this election was the declaration by the Democratic Party that the party is to be regarded as ad-hoc party, set up to unite the people of Nagaland in those trouble times and it would be open to the party to dissolve itself if and when the task is considered accomplished (Thakar 1972). One of its statements cited that the party would
strive to set up a pattern of administration best suited to the tribes so as to pave the way for (a) permanent internal peace and (b) a lasting good relationship with the Government of India (Thakar 1972). The Nationalist Party later transformed itself into the Nagaland Nationalist Organization (N.N.O.) and the Democratic Party came to be called United Front of Nagaland (U.F.N.). During the 1977 election, the N.N.O. merged itself into the Congress Party. A breakaway fraction had formed the National Council of Nagaland with a few members of the U.F.N. It may be mentioned that during 1986 some Naga individual had formed a Naga Integration Council, which sought amalgamation of several contiguous Naga areas.

Meanwhile the N.N.O. Parliamentary Party resolved that the talks would be resumed with the underground Nagas in association with the leaders of public confidence (Sema 1986: 151). One breakaway N.N.O group polarized with the U.F.N. and they formed the United Democratic Front (U.D.F). There developed a condition of political instability calling for the President’s Rule. The N.N.C. had already been banned under the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act with effect from 1 September 1972. During the intervening period, the Shillong Peace Accord was signed.

In 1978, Shri Hokishe Sema and Mr Jasokie resigned from the Congress Party and by asserting the relevance of regional political party formed the Naga National Party. A significant development took place in 1980 when Mr S C Jamir of U.D.F. formed the United Legislature Party with Congress members and
formed a new government. Meanwhile the NNP led by Mr Vizol and T. Kikon of N.N.C. merged to form N.N.D.P. A large section of ULP had soon joined the Congress-I.

At this juncture, a process of fission took place within the N.N.C. camp. New political phenomena in the form of National Socialist Council of Nagaland (N.S.C.N) advocating “a new policy of tribal socialism” had developed. Against this backdrop, the Assembly Election of 1982 was held in which the N.N.D.P. secured 140112 votes, the Indian National Congress-I got 140420 votes and the Independents got 157,173 votes. The Congress-I formed the Government. Their main election plank was the presentation of the party “with a regional face” geared to bring about an honourable political settlement. In the 1989 Assembly Election, a remnant segment of erstwhile U.D.F. secured 43733 votes. With the split in the regional votes, the N.N.D.P secured 147078 votes as compared to 193406 secured by the Congress-I. The Independent candidate had gathered 99937 votes. The Congress-I formed the government with Shri Hokishe Sema as Chief Minister. However, a number of ruling party legislative members broke away and formed a new party called Naga Peoples Council (N.P.C.) along with the N.N.D.P. Consequently, Nagaland came under yet another spell of President’s rule. The Congress-I again swept back to power through the 1989 election.

The consistent references made to the Naga political problem by the regional or national political parties concerned was not merely to re-enforce their positions, but to impress upon the Union Government that the Naga issue was
still in a process towards final settlement. Thus, in a statement issued during February 1989, the Union Minister of State (Home) stated, “we are not opposed to the negotiations with the N.S.C.N. Let it come up with concrete proposals for peace” (Sentinel February 13, 1989). In the same view the Nagaland Chief Minister spelled out that an honourable solution to the Naga problem had to be found within the parameters of the national policy and the constitution of India (Sentinel February 5, 1989).

In 1994 general election, no regional party candidate filed their nomination due to the boycott call by the Nagas. Thus the same Congress government continued to run the government without election under the leadership of Shri S C Jamir. And in the last general election held in February 2003, a multi-party coalition government known as Democratic Alliance of Nagaland came to power.
References:


3. Ibid.


9. Ibid, p. 39


11. Ibid

12. Ibid, p. 71

13. Ibid.

14. Ibid, p. 72


16. Ibid., p. 33


19. Ibid.

20. Ibid.


22. Ibid., p. 2