CHAPTER - II

SOME ESSENTIAL BACKGROUND
SOME ESSENTIAL BACKGROUND

Since independence (or even prior to it) the Naga problem (due to its strategic location) had become important for the Indian Government (more so than 38 years ago when a tide of world war flowed and receded over the same mountains). In the early phase of the movement it was objectives and territory that mattered as well as the human components that was involved. Whether the villagers or the soldiers, Indian, British and Japanese who fought and died in the Naga Hills for Kohima ridge, (the eastern gateway to India), were mere pawns in a vast drama of world power. But even then glaring tributes were paid to the Naga people both by General Slim, commanding the allied 14th Army, and by some Indian National Army officer operating in the same hills. Prominent among the virtues extolled were courage and loyalty in adversity to whom so ever they pledged their word. Afterwards, the frontier became as forgotten as of old until the Second World War broke out.

In fact, it can be argued that among other factors World War II ushered an era of rapid politicisation (of the frontier inhabitants) which affected the Nagas more than the Indian subcontinent. It can be said that the Nagas to an extent were also influenced by the Indian freedom movement. Indeed the period between 1942 and 1945 would be a great watershed in the history of south and south-east Asia as well as the ethnic belts that stretched across international frontier. The entire region with Bangkok standing at the geopolitical centre was caught in an ethnic revival and nationalism. Consequently, as in Malaysia, a grim conflict commenced. This was a frontless, faceless war between armed communist bands of Chinpeng and British security forces.

Interestingly, Naga underground movement was having some impact of these movements, (and also as author believes) of the tribal invasion (backed by Pakistan) in Jammu and Kashmir and the communist uprising in Srikakulam district of Andhra Pradesh. Naga insurgency then, was first of the large scale movement (after independence) which attempted to force a political decision through armed struggle
against the established Central government. It was further enhanced by the feeling of a distinct identity, enabled the Naga tribal groups to launch (or prompt) a defensive guerilla warfare. This move was further galvanised by the spread of Christianity to a large extent. However, the geographical inertia was largely responsible for such a situation to develop.

They had developed (Naga) a myopic vision due to their isolation aided to some extent by British support and sympathy. The propagators of Naga movement started to view the geopolitical forces, strategic considerations and modern tools of warfare with a distorted perspective. All along, there has been an inherent fierce pride of race among the Nagas to protect their own land, their forests and their way of life from external influences. This was also one of the factors which led to the later demand for political independence. No useful purpose was, however, served in making the past influence of British officers or foreign missionaries a scapegoat for the insurgent movement or for an urge which was fundamentally much deeper. It is indeed noteworthy that at
the time of transfer of power, there was no significant move among the Nagas to assert their claim through armed struggle. There were rumour prevalent at that time in the north-eastern part of India regarding the creation of a British crown colony for the eastern hills. Yet, one cannot ignore the activities of Phizo both in Burma as well as in Nagaland.

What, then, was the history of the present deterioration in the situation? The early intention of British administrators (from the middle of the last century) was not only to prevent tribal raids against the developing commercial economy, (especially the tea industry of Assam Valley) but also to avoid as far as possible the British involvement in tribal affairs. However, this policy did not work, as in the settlement of tribal and intervillage disputes, protection had often to be extended to those threatened by head hunting raids. So the administration was extended progressively over the whole area which was known as Naga Hills district.

of Assam. It contained almost half of the total Naga population and territory. British administration was further consolidated after a last desperate attempt by the Nagas to fight for their independence in 1879. The area settled down in the early decade of this century. The Kohima and Mokokchung areas became centres of education from which ideas spread to the adjacent Nagas.

Tuensang area, which lay deeper in the hills remained unadministered and undisturbed except for the despatch of occasional punitive expeditions in cases where head hunting raids assumed alarming proportions. Even here, however, administrative control or influence was gradually extended. By 15th August, 1947, a part of this area came under regular administrative control of the Naga hill district, while the rest (although not regular administrative control) was subjected to partial influence and control (somewhat similar to the North-west Frontier of British India). Infact, during the World War II a wireless detachment in aid of the Allied forces was actually set up in the remote village of Pangsa on the Indo-Burma border. There is a theory
(though un-founded in the eyes of those who have lived through the past in the area) that the present lawlessness is the result of some attempt to resist administration and invasion of previously unadministered territory. On the contrary, the entire impetus and leadership of the extremists comes from the long administered Naga Hill district of Assam or from persons who have long been under close administrative control and influence.

In the early stages after independence, when former administration was being extended a political deadlock developed in the Naga Hills of Assam. The people started thinking that their land was to be occupied by the others. This pronounced feeling for their lands highlighted their common sentiments. On the other hand, the Nagas are very much loyal to their clans (without which no family can survive in the Nagaland). Even the people who were not in favour of the movement kept quiet and worked for the common cause inadvertently. They had the feeling that they were not Indians in any sense of the word, neither in origin nor in habits or in outlook; and it is only a historical accident that they have been tagged on to
an Indian province. That "historical accident", which the Nagas are determined to undo began in 1820's when the British added Assam to their empire. The Ahoms, previous rulers of the Assam had long known the Nagas as turbulent and dangerous neighbours whose raids on the plains had to be contained by forts and ramparts. The policy of the Ahom rulers towards these tribes varied from time to time according to the situation. The Ahoms compelled these Naga tribes to pay tribute in the form of mithuns and other commodities as token of their allegiance to the Ahom King. They also recruited Naga youths in their Army and administration. Thus it is evident that some sort of understanding existed between the Assamese rulers and Nagas concerning matters of mutual interests.

By the end of the seventeenth century the Ahoms of Assam had established their authority over some of the Nagas i.e. the Konyak, Lotha and Ao; who were living on the borders of Ahom kingdom (upto river Kapil). Once again they started raids on the plains

3. S. Barkataki (1968), Tribes of Assam, Shillong, pp.1-5.
of Assam, in the nineteenth century, when Ahom rulers succumbed to the internal divisive forces as well to the Burmese and the British (ultimately) invasions.

Initially it was not a part of the British policy to absorb the Naga hill tracts. The intention to leave them beyond the pace of civilization was confirmed by the first British penetration into the Naga country in 1832, when the British officers were harrassed by sustained, strong and effective attacks. The Nagas are a fighting people. Their villages, located on hill tops and crest line, were easily defensible and presented problems to the British. The Naga warrior, whose intuitive sense for guerilla in the nineteenth century, have proved to be a thorn in the flesh of Indian security forces in the present century. But to leave the Nagas alone was not a sufficient answer for the imperial power. Because the Nagas soon showed that they were not prepared to leave the British alone. Naga raids, especially those of the Angami tribe were so constant, that between 1835 and 1851 no less than ten punitive expeditions were sent into the Naga areas. The raids continued with

pillaging and the taking of heads. The result was inevitable extension of British Administration into the Naga areas. A post was established at Kohima in 1866 as a first step towards taking over of the Angami country. The British continued the expansion of territory inspite of great resistance from the Nagas (especially the Angamis). As a result British administrators realised, "once the central Angami area was pacified expansion was bound to follow". The Angamis were considered as administered tribes paying taxes and supplying labour when required. It was only a matter of time before Semas could be administered. So it went on as a matter of administrative expediency only. Sir Charles Pawsay stated that "there was no question of imperialism. The British however stopped well short of extending their administration throughout the Naga area, which is normally administered and the administration was often limited to an annual tour." Although it was a matter of cost benefit and of convinience, yet there is no doubt that the British considered the


entire Naga area a launching pad for extension of administration in that entire region (if they so wished).

After an initial reaction of antipathy, the British soon established a secure and even friendly rapport with the Nagas. The British officers who came into contact with them responded warmly to the qualities they found in the Nagas. Their courage and cheerfulness, their magnificent physique, truthfulness soon endeared them to the British. In a community with such characteristics they saw a common bond against the plainsmen, for whom both the hillmen and the administration of the hill region bore a dislike. Adapting their own administrative practices to the sensibilities of the administered, the British made it an unwritten rule that no plains officer would be posted in this area. By regulation they made sure that traders and speculators from the plains would not be allowed to infiltrate and exploit the Nagas. British officers laboured for a century to ensure that Nagas should retain their racial characteristics and should not be reduced to the status of tribals.

---

as in the plains who were regarded only as untouchables to be exploited by money lenders and the higher castes. They recognized a cultural gulf with a great apathy and potential for destruction of hill cultures. They saw to it that this gap was not bridged at the cost of the hillmen. But as more presence as rulers they did create a situation in which the attention of Nagas and other hill people from the plainsmen (especially Hindus) found a political expression whereas it was largely the presence of the British that had given (to most of the separate national identities of the subcontinent) a sense of common identity. It was on the prospect of the departure of the British that created the separatist tendencies in (or among) the Nagas. The first missionaries (American Baptist) had arrived on the very heels of the British, and the Nagas responded to them too. This exposure to a common cultural force may have had awakened the dormant sense of unity among the often warring tribes.

It found early expression in 1929 when the Simon Commission on constitutional reforms visited Kohima. A Naga delegation (no doubt speaking with
the approval of British administration) expressed unwillingness to being made a part of Assam in any new constitutional arrangement the British 10 established. They also urged that when or if the British actually left, the Nagas would revert to the independence they had enjoyed before the British advent. Except for a few tribes (Angamia, Ao's, Konyak's) which were under the ruler of Assam, other tribes enjoyed village statehood. "You are the only people who conquered us, when you go we should be as we were" - one delegate was quoted as saying. The Naga and the other tribal areas were duly excluded from Assam under the reforms in allowing a larger degree of Indian self-rule which came into effect in 1937. The British, sharing the Nagas disinclination to see the hill people coming under the sway of those of the plains, maintained these areas under direct administration.

With the approach of independence in the 1940's the question of Naga future was raised. The British

10. Elvin.n.4,p.51

and especially those who had spent most of their time among the Nagas, hoped to find means to perpetuate the protective insulation as they saw it (and the Nagas too), from the domination of the plains. They (British) mooted various alternatives which would have enabled the Nagas to achieve self-rule after their departure. One idea was that the tribal areas of the north-east should be cut off from India and set up as a British crown colony. Another was a tripartite guarantee of the integrity and autonomy of the Naga areas by Britain, India and Burma. From the Naga side, the discussion of their future centered around the Naga National Council (NHC), the organisation which expressed and modulated the Naga sense of Nationhood. There too various ideas were put forward. But the dominant view was that the separate identity of the Nagas could be preserved and protected only by political independence i.e. political independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereign independence and sovereignty
state instead of autonomy within the Union of India.

These concepts certainly exceeded what most of the British, even those most sympathetic to the Nagas, had been expecting as an answer to the problem the Nagas would face after their departure. The British commitment to the Nagas had been further strengthened in the Second World War, when the Nagas held back the Japanese thrust into Kohima and helped the British cause in every way. But even then, the records show no British support for the idea of Naga sovereignty.

From the Naga point of view however, anything less than sovereignty was too little. They were faced with the prospect of rule by people, whom they considered, were far more alien than the British.

If the Nagas were increasingly engrossed in the years preceding independence with the future of minorities, no less were the other subjects of the waning Raj. Indeed it could be said that the question of minority rights of provincial autonomy and central authority were the essential counterpoints to the

15. See Slim, n.1, p.98.
demand for independence. Even before the end of
Second World War the Congress leadership was seized
with the question. Seemingly adamant then in their resi-
stance to the Muslim league's demand for partition,
the Congress leaders were still prepared to consider
that the successors might not be permanently mololithic.

While in jail in 1944, Jawaharlal Nehru, in
his letter to the Congress High Command had stated,

"the right of any well constituted area to
secede from the Indian Union has often been
put forward, and the argument of the U.S.S.R.
advanced in support of it before any such
right of succession is exercised there must
be a properly constituted free India. It may
be possible then, when external influences
have been removed and real problems face the
country, to consider such questions objecti-
vely and in a spirit of relative detachment,
far removed from the emotionalism of today.
Thus, it may be desirable to fix a period
say, ten years after the establishment of the
free Indian state, at the end of which the
right to secede may be exercised though pro-
per constitutional process and in accordance
with the clearly expressed will of the inha-
itants of the area concerned." 17

Nehru's colleagues in the Congress working
Committee were in the same jail. He made his opinion
known to them, so thus, it can be taken as a statement

Meghalaya, New Delhi.

17. See Neville Maxwell, India and the Navas, Report
of Congress thinking at that time. The gap that lay between the theorising and (Congress) practice became apparent, when in 1947 a Naga delegation went to Delhi to assert the Naga intention to opt out of the prospective Indian Union, rather than be headed by it. This was quite in keeping with the apparent political climate.

The delegation was led by A.Z. Phizo, already identified as the leader of the Naga in their demand for sovereignty. They met Jinnah and told him that they did not mean to be included in India either and in fact intended to make a unilateral declaration of Independence on August 14 (which was also to be Pakistan's independence day). On August 14, a determined faction of the Naga National Council extremists including the recently broken moderate, declared the independence of Nagaland under the leadership of Phizo at Khonoma.

18. Ibid.
19. Ibid.
To further their cause the extremists despatched a six member delegation to New Delhi and during the meeting with Gandhi on July 13, 1947, some philosophical remarks of his were interpreted as an approval for the independence of the Nagas. Three week's later the delegation met Nehru and from him heard what Congress policy was in fact and would remain.

"We can give you complete autonomy but not independence. You can never hope to independent. No state big or small in India will be allowed to remain independent. We will use all our influences and power to suppress such tendencies".

For the Nagas, it can be seen in retrospect, this was the moment of truth. What they had feared all along, first expressed in 1929, was not coming to pass. The claims and interests of other were going to override.

22. Phizo reported that Gandhi said, "Nagas have every right to be independent. We don't want to live under the domination of the British and they are leaving us. I want you to feel that India is yours. But if you say they are not 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".

See Maxwell n.2.p.


24. Ibid.
There had been clear understanding that their demands could not be satisfied in full. "The representatives of the people will not accept anything less than independence," which was not fulfilled. The numbers of the Naga National Council had to decide the further of the Naga people in a way that suited them best. While the position of nothing more than autonomy stated to the Naga by Nehru in August 1947, was to remain the consistent stand of Indian government. The British appointed the Governor of Assam, Sir Akbar Hydari, to hold talks with the Naga leaders. After listening to the views of the Naga National Council Akbar Hydari held talks with the Naga leaders and in June 1947 signed a nine point agreement which came to be known as the Hydari Agreement.

Unanimity over these articles was almost reached but when the question of interpretation of the ninth point came up, the trouble started. Sir Akbar Hydari and Pandit Nehru, who had accepted the Agreement, obviously

---

25. Ibid.
27. Assam Tribune(Gauhati) 27 June,1947.
29. Text of Nine Point Hydari Agreement, Appendix II, Ibid.
intended that at the end of ten years the Nagas would be free to suggest, if they desired, change in the administrative pattern to suit their special character and to ensure a greater measure of autonomy within the Indian constitution which was still to be framed. The constitution was to formalise the Naga demands in the Agreement and they would, therefore, themselves decide whether they would join the plain district of Assam or other adjoining areas such as Manipur or have a separate state within the Indian union. Some of the Nagas (extremists) led by A.Z. Phizo, however, interpreted the ninth article in their own way. According to them, this article meant that they would have the liberty to demand complete separation from India after the expiry of ten years. Thus, a controversy arose over the interpretation of the ninth article of the Hydari Agreement.

The extremists, however, were adamant and wanted assurance of the Indian government for complete independence after the expiry of ten years. The provisions

30. Ibid p.40
of the Agreement, therefore, were put to vote in the Naga National Council and the majority accepted them. The extremists who were in a minority were outvoted and consequently remained dissatisfied. This dissatisfaction prevented the Nagas from coming to a definite understanding with the Interim government of India. Thus, due to lack of mutual understanding, between the two parties, the Hydari Agreement remained unimplemented. The British government on the other hand was in a haste to grant independence to India. India being a successor state inherited all such territories which formed a part of British India earlier, except those which were earmarked for Pakistan. The Naga Hills area therefore, became an integral part of Independent India.

Here a question arises, as to why, the Nagas wanted a separate state of their own after the British departure. From the above discussion one can conclude that there was some impact of British administration on the Nagas. Firstly, the prolonged isolation and separation from people of plains had enabled the Nagas to develop a separatist tendency. The British policy...

had aimed at keeping the hill people far from the freedom movement of India, which was in full swing in the early thirties of this century.

The British deliberately managed to prevent the spread of Indian nationalism to the Naga hills districts, which united people of different caste, creed, religion and culture into a nation. A state of mind in which the supreme loyalty of the individual is felt for the nation. The Indian freedom fighters were not allowed to visit the Naga hills, with the result that the impact of nationalism was not felt here. Hence the Naga people could not identify themselves with the hopes and aspirations of the people of the nation nor could they develop a common national outlook. This contributed vastly to the growth of a separationist tendency among the Nagas.

Secondly, false propaganda and rumours about Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam had created a misunderstanding among the Nagas against plain’s men. Rumours prevailed

34. Chandrika Singh: n.16.p.25
37. Ibid.
that both Hindus and Muslims of the plains bore a hatred towards them. So, the Nagas gradually came to understand that they would not be comfortable and well received in Independent India. The Assamese and the other plains men would occupy all the key posts in the administration of the Naga Hills district. The majority of the Nagas being illiterate would not be able to complete. Hence they felt that solution lay in staying aloof from Independent India.

The Christian missionaries who were active in the Naga Hills also influenced the Naga outlook and mentality to retain their individual identity. They circulated wild stories about the rigidity of orthodox caste Hindus, who were to dominate the political scene of India.

This created a sense of insecurity in the minds of the Nagas. Some of the British officials serving in the Naga Hills district also induced the Nagas to maintain their separate political identity.

38. Current Events. (Delhi, May, 1958) p. 33.
39. Ibid.
Adams, the Deputy Commissioner of Naga Hills district in one of his talks with the Nagas on November 27, 1946, stressed the importance of the unity. He said that if they remained united they would make a nation.

Lastly, the separatist tendency among the Nagas also grew because they had little contact with plainsmen due to habitation in isolated areas. When the British administration gradually extended across the Naga Hills, the only Indian who went with the British officers was the sepoy in uniform or the camp follower. Both of them were looked down upon by the Naga as the legitimate target of attack on whom vengeance could be wreaked. The British officer never cared to correct this misunderstanding. They were only interested in the maintenance of peace and order in the Hills.

These were the facts which contributed greatly to the growth of a separatist tendency among the Nagas which invoked them to start a vigorous

40. S. Yonuo: *The Rising of Nagas*, p.162
campaign to secure an independent status for the Naga Hills district. But while on one hand the Nagas were demanding separation from India, the Indian leaders and British government, on the other hand were trying to impress upon them the futility of such a demand.