CHAPTER - IV

SOCIO POLITICAL SET UP OF NAGAS
Socio-Political Set up of Nagas

Nagaland presents unity in diversity in matters of race and language. The social and cultural heritage of the Naga people might have been the same had they had one common language. But the Naga people do not belong to one tribe but to more than twenty. There are thirteen major tribes and not less than seven minor tribes. While Ao, Angami, Sema, Chang, Konyak, Lotha, Chakhesang, Phom, Rengma, Sangtam, Yimchunger, Kuki and Zeliangmangrang may be grouped into major tribes. Chankru, Chiru, Kheza, Pehury, Shamnyayang, Tikhir, Wancho etc. may be classified as minor tribes. This multiplicity of tribes in Nagaland is due to the fact that the Naga people migrated to this part in different groups and they remained confined to their ridges and mountainous terrain. This also resulted in the multiplicity of language in Nagaland. The various tribes used to speak their own dialects which were essentially different from one another. But recently the Naga people have developed a language which is known as Nagamese.

2. Based on personal survey of Nagaland and its people.
But as soon as Nagaland became a constituent state of the Indian union, English became the state language. This departure from the main trend is due to two factors. Firstly, the Naga people did not have a common script of their own. Nagamese has been developed very recently when the Assamese came into contact with the Nagas. Secondly, the British Missionaries influenced the Nagas and tried to change the social and cultural outlook of the Nagas. The British in fact made a deep impact on the social and cultural life of the Nagas. The Nagas were dazzled by the English culture and way of life and English thus became very popular among the Naga elite. It was regarded as the language of the socially, economically and politically advanced Nagas who were of the notion that the key to advancement lay in learning


English. Years after independence when Nagaland was given statehood, English was accepted as the state language by the people of Nagaland.

The Naga people are simple, friendly, hard-working and self respecting. They could be called egoists, because the moment they felt, they are being let down, they became ferocious and dangerous. The most praiseworthy thing about the Naga is their belief in casteless society. They do not harbour any prejudices related to caste and creed. There are no social outcaste in Nagaland. All are equal there and they do not make any distinction among themselves on the bases of caste, creed and colour. Mostly the Nagas are Christians. They are deeply religious and every village has a Baptist Church.

It will be important to add a few words as to why the people living in this part of the hills

7. Based on personal survey of the Naga people.
8. Based on personal contact and conversations with the Naga people.
are called Nagas. The origin of the Naga people is also shrouded in mystery. Different scholars hold different views. Some believe that the Nagas belong to the Indo-Mongolid race. There is yet another version, suggested, that the Nagas were no other than the Kiratas of India. The chief exponent of this view was Dr. S.K. Chattarjee. No doubt there are some references of Kiratas, whose original home was in Himalayan slopes and in the mountains of east Assam. But

9. John Buttlar believes that the people in plains used to call the persons living in the hills Nagas. Some other writers however, believe that the word Naga has been derived from the Sanskrit word Nag which means a snake. But the Nagas did not themselves know that they were the descendents of the snake spirit. Hence it is not convincing that the Nagas are the descendents of snakes. L.W. Shakespeare and Robert Reid think that the word Naga is deformed Hindi word of Nenga, meaning naked. A Greek scholar of second century A.D. Ptolemy holds the same view. He has referred to the Nagas as Nanglong, which means naked people. According to Holcombe and Peal the term Naga has its origin in the word Nok which means folk and as the Naga people used to live in groups, they came to be known as Naga later on. This view of Holcomb and Peal appears to be logical and nearest the truth.


most of the scholars do not subscribe to the view that the Kistanas were none else than the Nagas.

The Nagas have some legends and stories of their origin. The Chakhasang, Sema, Rengma and Lotha believe that the first Naga came out of stone in a place known as Khezkenoma. Thus as the Christians believe that Adam and Eve were the first to come on the earth and that later their sons and daughters spread all over the world. The Nagas think that the first Naga, who came out of the stone gave birth to several sons, who left their original places of birth and went away to different places to settle. There is still another legend in Nagaland which suggest that the first Naga emerged from a lake. These stories and the legends do not, however, seem to be very convincing because they are based on superstition and religious belief.

It thus appears that there is a lot of controversy regarding the origin of the Nagas. But the view which states that the Nagas belong to the Indo-Mongolid race appears to be very near to the truth.

SPATIAL DISTRIBUTION OF NAGA TRIBES

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MAP NO 11
This is simply because the Naga people did not come to this part of India from very far off land. Some of the people living in the plains from other side of the Himalaya might have come to this part and mixture produced the Nagas. Hence it will be more appropriate to say that the Nagas belong to Indo-mongoloid race.

The history of how the Naga tribes came precisely to occupy their present position has of course passed into the dim obscurity. However, it does not appear that the Nagas have been living in this area with the allied tribes of Nagas like Karen Shan, Chin, Singpho and others, who have come from the western China settled in Burma. S.K. Chatterjee believed that these Indo-mongoloid group of people came to India in tenth century B.C. and confined themselves only to the North-eastern part of India.

According to J.H. Hutton, the legends of the Aos and Semas give those tribes a more or less autochthonous origin. Though these legends of the race

16. Ibid.
which have been given local values, the other Naga tribes too have their own legends of their emergence. The reasons are not far to seek that there tribes were not inhabiting this land time immemorial. Because the terrain is so rugged and unproductive, that the people cannot think of settling there in normal circumstances. Most of the scholars believe that originally the Naga came from central Asia. These people of central Asia were known as now Chinese, Chinang tribes. They first came to north-west border of China many centuries before the Christian era and later on these tribes spread over to China, Indonesia, Philippines, Bhutan, Burma and Nagaland. This is evident from the fact that the Nagas bear similarity with some tribal groups such as Dyaks, and Konyaks, the tribal people of Indonesia and Philippines. Smith is of the view that the Naga belong to the same blood which is found in the people of Burma, Sikkim, Bhutan and other hilly areas of North-east India.

Different Naga tribes came to Nagaland after crossing the Irrawaddy and the Chindwin rivers of Burma.

NAGA MIGRATION

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- ANGAMI
- AQ
- SEMA
- RENGMA
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- CHANG
- KONYAK
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- YIMCHUNGER
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- ZELIANGRANG
- KHIENMUNGAN

MAP NO 10
Some of them came through the Mao gap and spread south where the other Naga tribes spread north wards. The Lotha traditions say that once occupied the country, which is now of Angami. The Ao broke off from Lotha stock and went north, and as the Angamis pressed in their rear the Lotha followed suit, going first west then crossing the Dyang at Ligthimukh and spreading up to the Ao country and going north east towards Sema country. Even now they point to Lotha Cenna stones erected on long deserted and tree grown hills to the south of the Dayang as making the sites of their former homes. They also remembered stories of the great Lotha Chief Pemvo who led them against the Angamis. And it is possible that the migration of part of the Rengmas to the Rengma hills in Golaghat was partly the result of the north-eastward pressure of Lotha migration.

After great struggle these tribes occupied different pockets of Nagaland. At present Angami occupy the northern and western parts of Kohima, with Kohima town as their centre. While the north western part of Kohima is inhabited by the Rengmas. The south west is patronised by the Zeliangs and Kukis who extend into Manipur in the south. Chakesang and Pochury occupied
Phek district of Nagaland. Ao are concentrated in Mokokchung district, Lothas in Wokha district and Sema in the Zunheboto. Tuensang the most under developed district, has its northern portion occupied by the Konyaks. Now this tribe is divided into two groups, one has gone to Mon district that is known as lower Konyak and in Tuensang district group known as Upper Konyak. The remaining portion of the Tuensang district is occupied by the Phoms Changas, Khamyungans, Yimchungas, Sangtars, Mon district is inhabited by the lower Konyak and some other small Naga tribes (see Map No.10).

Thus the Naga have a chequered history. The primitive Nagas must be appreciated for their local self government, which was based on customary laws, though fights head hunting wars, rivalries and petty tribal feuds very much prevailed among them. Now a days the Nagas believe the such virtues as unity at the time of outside invasion, obedience to elders or chieftains, peaceful settlement of their quarrels and faith in customs and tradition.

Society:

The structure of the Naga society is basically rural in character. Although the tribes are different
in many way, they share things in common. They (almost) all live in villages, which vary in sizes as some contains as many as thousand houses while other not more than fifteen. The village are often built on the top of isolated hills, this is because in old days the people were constantly at war with one another and wanted to watch their enemy approaching. Hence the Nagas prefered to live on the spur of the Hills and many villages are still so situated. Many villages have a dormitory for the young unmarried men and called "Morung". It is the house where strict discipline is maintained and is also a recreation centre. Morung is considered to be an important educational political and social institution. Here the youths of the tribes are taught lesson in discipline and what is expected of them in working for the common good.

The family is the fundamental unit of society in which the father is the head of the family. A son sets up a separate family after getting married. Whereas daughter goes to another clan leaving her original clan on marriage. The clan comprises a group of consanguineous

families descended from a common ancestor by whose home
the clan is known on the patrilineal and exogamic line.
Then a number of clans (combined together compose a well
defined village) occupying a definite permanent area with
sovereignty and finally a tribe by a number of villages
of the same descendants. 22

A peculiar form of slavery exists among the
Nagas, which is different from its conventional sense
and value. In that the slaves mostly from the poor family
are purchased are well treated and also considered almost
as members of the family. However, the Nagas admit that
men are not equal in congenial endowment as such the
ruling of rational superior to less rational superior is a
natural law. 23

Naga life in practice is not committed to
non-violence as an absolute way of life. Fighting or
war against outsiders is supposed by Nagas like Greeks
to be a matrix of civilization and survival of mankind.
It is a natural quality and necessity of human existence
and advancement. It, holds the society together even

22. Ibid. p.11.
non-violence and peace to be a matter of ethos. As a result, the institution of head hunting has been entrenched in the Nagas, with as much as professional case, if not the objective of worship and depository of sanctity. The reasons, however, mingled with superstition and social position are that it ensure good harvest if the blood of enemy head could be sprinkled over their fields. Secondly, the man who takes an enemy head is entitled either for marriage or a seat in the village Council and thus is affirmed an honourable position in the society and finally, the removing and perserving the head of the mankind in the war as a proof of success over the enemies.

It must be remembered however, that it was predominantly this head hunting war that had divided Nagas into a number of small disunited sovereign independent village states. Those people involuntarily recognize that they were the same descendent embedded in basic common culture. Yet these fratricidal head hunting wars had become so invariably devastating, that they brought their civilization to grief and disaster. Realizing the aftermath animism or shamanism has shifted from sanctification of head hunting to out right tabooing of head
hunting. The foregoing are the main characteristics feature of the life and culture of the Nagas.

**Political System:**

Traditionally, there are immense diversities so far as indigenous political institutions in Nagaland are concerned. The political organizations differ from tribe to tribe. However, the permanent political institution have been the sovereign village states which have different forms of government.

The political institutions among the Lemas Konyaks, Maoos and Tangkhils are hereditary chieftainship. All political and administrative organizations are under the control of the chiefs. The office of the chieftainship passes to the eldest son on the death of his father. If the chief dies without a male issue, the chieftainship goes to the nearest descendent. In the village states, the chief and his family members form and aristocracy in the literal sense of the word, owing (possible owing to better nourishment and the habit of command) physically, morally and intellectually the best of the community.

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Among the Semas each village has a council (Chochomi) to assist the chief in administration. But in some villages, Chochomi can be regarded as runners for the office of the chieftainship. They are nominated by the chief from different clans. Generally in some villages Chochomi has only a secondary place in the polity of the village. The chief has to direct the village in war and decide either by himself or in consultation with his council members. All questions of relations between his own and neighbouring villages. Theoretically, the chief is the master of all lands within his jurisdiction, but the individual right over land are also recognized. No transaction of land can be done without the knowledge of the chief. The chief exercises power in all social and political organization and acts as judge together with his councillors, in the settling of all kinds of disputes. Among the Sema Nagas, the disputes are settled by oath. The swearer bites the tiger's tooth in the case of old disputes. In the case of land, the swearer bites soil at oath, the swearer bites with the declaration. If I don't remain faithful to my promise, I and my clan are as good as dead; (while) alive it is taboo to be equal to him, like unto a rotten gourd vine unto decayed ayesha, unto decayed chulieaf.
So must we perish, and before that I can eat of this years' rice let me die. In the oaths given by the chief, it is essential that the swearing should take place with the face towards the sun set which signifies that if he took a false oath his life will perish like the setting sun. The chief received free labour from all the villagers for twelve days in a year and harm of every animal killed by his villagers.

The Angami and Rengmas have similar type of political institution. Although the village is regarded as the unit of political and social life, the real unit of social organisation is based on age group which controls the village affairs. Among the age group people choose one or two persons, who are skilful in diplomacy, have shown bravery in war, or possess wealth in the form of land, cattle etc. and have the capacity to control the village affairs to act as the chief of the village called Pehuma or pichua. Among the Rengmas the persons chosen to act as the chief and settle cases in the villages with the help of the elders is called Peshukedagu or Kekhanwa. Among the Lothas, the chief is called Ekhung, who is normally chosen from the age group and act as the political head of the village. But Ekhung exercises

his authority through the council members, elected from among the people of different social status called Ephyoesan. Among the Angamis, deciding disputes relating to customs would be and still is referred naturally to the old man of the clan, and the decision of the old men in regard to the matter is more or less final. Questions of fact are usually decided by oath concluding with the formula. If, I lie in what, I now say then between heaven and earth, let me not grow like other men, but let become as ruin, as burnt out fire, as rotted twins. A person accused of any crime against the social code is fined. The disputes are settled by oath even among the Lothas. They bite tigers' tooth in the case of old or long standing disputes whereas in land disputes, they bite soil fixed with some of his hairs with the following declaration. If my promise is not true, I will get countless diseases like my hairs and I will die before eating of this year's crop. In some case, they accept the majority decisions of the council members.

27 (Ephyo-Can).

The Aoos have a democratic form of village government in which a sizeable number of council members called "Tatar" elected from the different clans forms

the council of ministers called ('Putu-Menden'). The council of ministers controls the social and political administration of the village states. The main task is to lay down laws and regulations for social and political administration of the village states. This council includes elected men (Tatars) belonging to the eldest age group representing all the clans living in the village. Putu-Menden has four sub-offices, they are Tazungpur, Unger or ungbo, Chindengodeny or Senyim and Mapangaur. The members of the Putu-Menden are responsible for the administration and also the preservation of customary laws which are handed down from one generation to another. The members of Putu-Menden vacate their offices periodically, yielding place to new groups from time to time. Like other Naga tribes, the Aos also settle the disputes by oath.

Thangkul village chief exercises a great deal of authority called "Awunga" a title equivalent to the English king. He is elected from the dominant clans in the village. The village has a council called 'Hangva' and is responsible for village administration. The members

of the council are usually elected from the clans to represent the particular clan. The chief and the council¬lors decide the disputes in the village, but "almost all disputes and differences between families belonging to the same clan are as far as possible decided by the clan elders.

In the Naga society, the chief directly deals with foreigners whenever they come to visit the Naga village. Traditionally, he must first meet the chief at his residence. The chief then enquires about the main object of his visit and after full deliberation, the strangers are permitted to stay in the village. The chief usually summons the council members to discuss the matter and gave his final decision. The same process is followed in allowing the foreigners to go back to their native villages. They (Naga) live with nature, without elaborate standing policemen, Judges and prisons under a village government with little authority. This form of government we may describe as a sort of Naga anarchism in absence of a measure of permanent existence of a Government with force. It is a political system which governs least and in which

30. Ibid. p.80
every man follows his conscience and respects the rights of others so as to have peaceful relationship in the community.

It shows that due to isolation they have adopted their own way of life which was quite apart from the main stream of society in the country. Partly because of isolation and partly because of their limited world outlook characterised by overall traditions orientation, they are integrated in terms of certain age old practices rooted in the past. These integrative themes and a special cultural forces as it has been observed by distinguished anthropologists have given them a separate cultural identity, and they often possess latent or manifest value attitude and motivational system, which are remarkably different for them a series of tangled problem of social economic and cultural adjustment and finally political consciousness to identity.

Although the Nagas are the most politicized tribes of the North-east India since the early twentieth century, because of their politicization they attained statehood from the Naga Hills district of Assam. With the advancement of education and reform the Nagas
became politically more conscious. Broadly speaking the Nagaland political transition may be divided into the following phases:

(i) 1918-46 i.e. right from the formative phase of the first Naga society called Naga club in 1918 till February 1946. The year of the formation of the Naga National council which was an outcome of the Naga club and Tribal councils. This phase is characterised by the beginning of new political aspirants.

(ii) 1947-63, This phase may be regarded as the most critical period on the eve of Indian Independence Day on 15th August 1947, the Naga had also declared themselves to be sovereign state on 14th August 1947. This period can be noted as the period of blood shed, which at least partially stopped and on December 1st 1963, Nagaland was granted statehood.

(iii) The third phase started from 1964-75 which is characterised by two principal events viz. the signing of cease fire between underground Nagas and Government of India on September 6, 1964. Which ended in September 1975 by signing of Shillong Accord. It was the beginning of an era of peace in Nagaland. Which is characterised by peace and division of political ideologies i.e. the emergence of National socialist council
of Nagaland led by Muivah and Issak. It may be noted that this phase is one of the worst phases, which hampered the socio-economic development in Nagaland due to the political problems.

It also shows that the Naga politicization have resulted into a gap between the poor and an emerging rich class. Though the enlightened few in urban areas are benefitted out of the new development but the face of the countryside has not changed. The rural areas development is much more important, as 90% of the population of Nagaland lives in 800 villages (census of India 1971) than any other aspects of development in Nagaland. This is the most challenging task necessitating immediate attention right from the grass root level.

It can be concluded here that in the early stages of insurgency the whole Naga tribes were supporting the insurgent movement (It was because they were loyal to their social organisation which decide to participate in any particular activity or not). After

1975, (Shillong Accord) we find that some of the tribes started disengaging themselves from the movement, for example Ao Nagas, who were the main participants in the beginning, but slowly and gradually started leaving and assimilated themselves in the development process of the state. Same can be attributed to the other tribes also. Yet some elements of tribal support to the insurgents movement cannot be ruled out, though it cannot be pinpointed.