CHAPTER VII

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In the past, the Nagas have lived in villages which were geographically isolated from one another. There was very little interaction between the villages. The Naga people lived a more or less primitive life. Their socio-economic activities were mostly confined to their villages. At this period, it was blood relationship which remained the sole determinant of allegiance to any social group. Family, clan and kinship ties formed the bases on which social relationship revolved. As such, as we have seen in Chapter II, the Nagas might claim to have common origin and similarities in language, culture and tradition, but in their pristine days they had no socio-economic or political unity.

It was with the coming of the British that the Nagas emerged from their cocoons of isolated village life. They not only began to interact with one another, but also came under a common modern administrative set-up. The change in the socio-economic and political environment led to the emergence of a Naga consciousness among them. In Chapter III, the process leading to a change in this direction, have been shown to have marked the origin of various tribal identities within the Naga society.
The division of Nagas into various tribes on the basis of socio-political factors, and the subsequent development of tribe consciousness, vis-a-vis the transformation of the political system, has brought about a societal phenomenon, emanating from the inter-tribal relations. Such a development is characterised by the proliferation of tribes, the emergence of a tribe-based socio-economic and political system, as well as the occurrence of inter-tribal conflicts. Therefore, we may say that the nature of politics in the Naga society needs to be understood in the light of its inter-tribal relations. For this reason, the main focus of this thesis has been the emergence of tribes, the nature of inter-tribal politics and its consequences on the Naga society.

The fact that Nagas have been compartmentalised into different tribes, denotes that the Naga society is tribal in character. This means that one can arrive at a deductive meaning of tribe by analysing the Naga society. Such a definition is larger than the real meaning of tribe, because it cannot be isolated from the socio-economic and political milieu within which it exists. In a multi-tribal system, it is under the same environment that inter-tribal relations are moulded. Therefore, our study of the Naga society, which is characterised by inter-tribal politics requires that the concept of tribe be understood in this larger perspective.
Our search for an analytical framework for the purpose of this study is based on such a perspective. In Chapter I, we found that early use of the term 'tribe' by anthropologists and sociologists started in their christening of backward, primitive and traditional societies, in the wake of imperialist expansion, to those part of the world outside the Western universe of the organised state. At this point the literal connotation of the term was perhaps derogatory. Prior to this there could not have been any society with an awareness of its tribal identity. We know that in usage the term 'tribe' is mostly ascriptive. We can see that tribal societies were so called by non-tribals from well-organised societies, which placed these societies on a comparative plane with their own, using the development level as a yardstick. By such perceptions, a tribe is considered to be a singular ethnic group, living within a single contiguous area, permanent or temporary, in a more or less primitive condition, having common culture, traditions and ancestry.

We find that the rights and the status associated with such a stage of a tribal society is not recognised by modern states. Its independence is not equated with sovereignty. Most of these societies after coming into contact with modern states are found to be absorbed by them. It is at such a stage that tribal identities as political identities crystallise. Their induction into the new system and their association with
it, place them in an environment where’ they acquire new socio-economic and political meaning. Their separate identity comes to light in their juxtaposition with the non-tribal societies with whom they now share a common system. Such a system may also have structures, functions and provisions which distinguish between the two. From then on, the term ‘tribe’ can no longer be accepted as merely ascriptive or taxonomic. Its politicisation leads to its development as an ideological instrument. When we conceptualise the term ‘tribe’ in this manner, we will find that a major portion of socio-economic and political phenomena revolves around it.

At such a stage, the original characteristics of a tribe becomes less relevant, because its traditional primitive culture, and its socio-economic and political life have been broken down. The tribe then would no longer be a tribe if we continue to use the original criteria with which it was first identified. In the new system, tribals might have adopted non-tribal values and education; changed religions, taken to new socio-economic and political roles which are features of modern non-tribal societies. Logically, they have become part and parcel of the modern system which have absorbed them. In such a case, where both tribals and non-tribals may be living within the same system, it becomes difficult to make a distinction between the two. But we know that tribal identities
once formed are not easily erased. We find that in some systems, constitutional provisions which differentiate between tribals and non-tribals exist. Hence, the degree to which a society is more or less tribal does not exist because the development criterion is no longer relevant. Tribal identity has found a niche in the present day order of society and the tribe as a political unit has come to stay.

This is why we need to understand tribe as a political category which finds its identity in the light of its socio-economic and political character, relative to a modern recognised system, organised as a state. Since the tribe becomes a socio-economic and political entity within the state system, it becomes a key determinant in the distribution of state resources. As can be seen in Chapter V, this is why tribe consciousness which, like in the case of the concept of a nation, is often constituted of the will of the people, becomes representative of the ideology of the dominant section or the elite of the society. Under these circumstances tribes become part of a plural system, vying for maximum access to common resources. Not only do tribes assert themselves, but also demand for recognition as tribes by new groups may ensue. The invocation of tribal sentiments and its mobilisation by interest groups come into play. The cumulative
impact of all these bring out the character of inter-tribal relations.

There is every likelihood that the nature of the Naga society in the pre-British era formed the basis of its classification into tribes. But when we actually look into the original structure of the Naga society, we find that it is difficult to identify any group which correlates with our conceptualisation of tribe. There is a strong believe among scholars that the Nagas did not come to their present home as a singular group. This does not mean that they came as separate tribes. We can explain this by looking into the migration pattern of the Nagas.

In Chapter II, we found that Naga migration within the Naga inhibited hills was a continuous process. Such migratory practice involves the linking and delinking of various Naga groups. It causes the inter-mingling of Nagas in different places. This makes it extremely difficult to classify Nagas into different ethnic groups. At the same time, we do not have enough historical evidence that the Nagas are one people. As we have seen, the main reason for this could be the absence of a script, for which there is no written records of their early life.
However, it can be seen that there is an overall unity in the different Naga customs, traditions, philosophy, beliefs, cultural and lingual phenomena. We find a concentric pattern of expanding differences among villages depending on the distances between them, which indicate their level of contact or isolation from one another. We do not claim that Nagas did not come under outside influences. We may very reasonably say that those Nagas having common borders with other peoples could have had lingual, cultural and even blood relations with their neighbours. This could be the cause of a break in the concentric pattern of differences, resulting in greater differences between villages. In this regard, one may make mention of the Ahom-Naga relations. As we have seen in Chapter III, some Naga villages were even found to have been subjugated by the Ahoms.

Therefore, it is believed that the Nagas have come from a common origin and ancestry. It must have been due to their migrations that variations in their language and customs occurred. Most of the Naga tribes that claim separate identity today can be traced back to a common origin, where they once shared the same village. There is every reason to believe that at this stage their language and cultural practices were the same. Due to the isolated nature of Naga villages, migrants may lose all contact with their parent village and adapt themselves to their new environment. As we have seen in Chapter II, the
Angami village of Kohima was originally formed by the descendants of settlers from at least three different tribes, of which only one was Angami and the other two were from Zeliang and Mao.

In Chapter II, we also found that in the pre-British period, the highest form of Naga social organisation was only the village. The villages were independent from one another and inter-village relations depended much on proximity and accessibility. Clan and party relations may exist outside the purview of inter-village relations. This happens due to the breaking up of clans in different villages because of migration. In most cases, the village is a non-governing one, as clans and other social groups may act independently of it.

It can be found that it is difficult to identify any tribal group in the pre-British Naga society. In nomenclature, there exist groups such as Tenyimia and Mezhamia. These terms are descriptive and merely used to distinguish between types. They are not politically relevant. Thus, we may say that there were no Naga tribes as they exist today in the pre-British period and that the idea of a tribe and the emergence of tribe consciousness are post-British phenomena.

The origin of formal Naga tribes, as seen in Chapter III, can be traced back to the era of British rule. With the
coming of the British, the independent village organisational pattern was broken. British administration along with Western education and Christianity brought about major changes in the Naga way of life. The very roots of Naga traditional beliefs, attitudes and philosophy underwent tremendous change. The Nagas were brought out from their isolated villages to a new order of pan-Naga socio-economic and political life. It was the early writers and administrators who first grouped the Nagas into different tribes. In doing so, the criteria they adopted were mostly based on physical features, language, cultural practices and geography.

With the establishment of British administration inter-village feuds and rivalry were brought under control. Head hunting was no longer the order of war. The independent and isolated nature of the Naga villages no longer existed, as they were brought under a unified administrative system. This made it easier for them to come together under common tribal identities. In doing so they were not interrupted by the people from the plains as the British did not encourage the Nagas to inter-mingle with them. In the newly developed pan-Naga political order of tribal divisions, individual villages were caught in the trend of tribal affiliations. Tribal identities also became functional in the administrative system.
Western education and Christianity which worked side by side are two important factors in the development of formal tribes. Their relationship cannot be ignored. It was Christian missionaries who first brought education to the Nagas and these missionaries were Westerners. Early Naga Christians received their education from missionary schools. For the educated Nagas it was not difficult to get indoctrinated with the works of Western writers. This is because the acceptance of Christian principles cannot be separated from the culture it represents. The Nagas were educated on a tribal foundation and they learned to be tribes. The tribal dialects which the missionaries translated into scripts and the subsequent translations of the Bible, as well as the use of these tribal dialects in textbooks, also played a vital role in the emergence of tribal separate tribal identities.

We may say that the British administration itself fostered the idea of separate Naga tribal identities. It not only recognised the grouping of Nagas into various tribes, but also set the trend of incorporating it into the administrative system. It formally recognised the tribes, their boundaries and considered them as both traditional and governmental units. With this, the institution of tribes in the Naga society not only found its roots but also became an indelible presence.
In the newly acquired political and administrative unity an arena where different Naga tribes come into interaction surfaced. At this stage the Nagas were exposed to the outside world. Christianity and Western education brought about a change in the world view of a certain section of the people. The introduction of market economy and the beginning of white-collar jobs did away with the traditional egalitarian society. And as we have shown in Chapter IV, this led to the emergence of a new social group in the Naga society, which we may call the Naga elite.

The rapid growth of Christianity and the proliferation of Western values facilitated the strengthening of the position of the elite in the society. Initially, the Naga elite did not have a platform from where they could exercise their influence. Thus within the existing system they were faced with an identity crisis. This resulted in the formation of the Naga Club in 1918. The Naga National Council was to follow in 1946. Through these organisations the Naga elite took over the political leadership of the people.

It was the Naga Club which first brought out the idea of Naga independence. The Naga national movement, however, took off only with the arrival of the Naga National Council (NNC). It was under the NNC that all the Nagas were brought together under
one political banner. There emerged a strong link of unity among the Nagas which took shape in the form of Naga national consciousness. The Naga national movement and the resulting armed conflicts with India, further strengthened the bonds of Naga unity. At this time a break-away group of Naga leaders accepted Statehood within India and Nagaland became a state in 1963.

It can be seen that in all these processes of political development, tribe was used as a fundamental political unit of society. This is understandable because the Naga political leaders had in them the notion of a tribe, as instituted by the British, and they incorporated it into political organisations such as the Naga Club and the NNC. In the same way the Nagas began to organise themselves on the basis of tribes. This tribe-based Naga society found new strength in the formation of the state of Nagaland because it provided a government within which the tribe could ascertain its role as a political entity.

Now we can no longer look at the tribe as a mere social category. Its politicisation has brought it into inter-play with government and politics. And as we have shown in Chapter V, this led to the emergence of inter-tribal politics in the Naga society. As a result, the tribe began to play a major role at the organisational level. It affected all aspects of socio-economic, political and even the cultural activities of the
people. It brought about tribe consciousness, which resulted in the formation of different tribal identities in all spheres of social organisations.

To a certain extent, it may be said that the state is organised on the basis of tribes. From the time of the creation of the state of Nagaland, it was thought that the Naga society was essentially tribal and that each tribe should have its own rule-making and administrative body. The administrative set-up in the state seem to follow the same pattern, as administrative units such as the districts and its sub-division are carved out according to tribal boundaries. Assembly constituencies are also mostly tribal accept for one or two urban ones. Tribes are not only formally recognised by the government but they are also classified and backward tribes are given special opportunities in areas such as employment through a reservation policy. All these indicate that the distribution system in the state is tribe-based. Also, the importance of tribal organisations in policy making cannot be underestimated. It can be seen that the government itself often consults tribal groups for decision making and policy formulation. Apart from this, tribal organisations themselves remain a strong force as pressure groups.
In such a situation, all major organisations are found to be structured on the basis of tribes. The earliest pan-Naga organisation, the Naga Club was started with its members claiming to represent the whole of their respective tribes. Later, when the NNC was formed, they developed the idea of a Naga nation as a federation of tribes. In the same way, they formulated a Naga 'Federal Government' with the various tribes as its federal units.

Even the church is organised in the same manner. The Nagaland Baptist Church Council is the central body of all the Nagaland Baptist Churches, which are affiliated to it as member of their respective tribal bodies. The next organisation which befits mentioning here, is the Naga Students' Federation, which also is organised as a federation of Naga tribal student bodies.

Other than these major organisations, tribe-based organisations are found to be existing even at micro-social levels. In Chapter VI, we have shown how tribes in a single college may have separate unions. There are also cases in which even a single residential colony may have its meetings with representatives from different tribes. All these show the extent to which tribe consciousness has developed in the minds of the people. Not only has tribal allegiance become a common feature, but also as we have found in Chapter V, tribes are getting more
and more differentiated, as each tribe began to claim symbolic, cultural and even behavioural attributes as exclusive to its identity.

As the divisions among tribes in the Naga society is so strong, it is bound to be reflected in the workings of the state, which has become a common arena within which various tribal units come into inter-play. Since the state is a store house of common resources, which is limited, and has a distribution system in which the tribe is recognised as a participant and recipient, it may be said that the aim of each tribe will be to optimise its share. For this tribes will compete for control of state's power apparatus, as it is a major determinant of access to its resources. In doing so, these tribes are represented by their dominant section, which we have identified earlier, in Chapter V, as the elite. We have also seen that the elite may have their own vested interests in pursuit of which they may invoke tribal sentiments. It is under such circumstances that inter-tribal politics take its form, which is why it tends to be conflictual.

So we see that inter-tribal politics has given rise to tribal conflicts. This has brought about the polarisation of tribes. We can see that there is a widening gap between the tribes as the individual identity of tribes becomes more pronounced. Tribes have become more assertive and there is a
psychological barrier cropping up among the tribes. Tribal antagonism has become such that any kind of conflict arising at the family level or individual level, not to speak of official matters, tends to flare up into inter-tribal issues.

As we have seen in Chapter VI, since the system of distribution of resources is tribe-based, many social groups are demanding for tribal status. This has brought about divisions in many major tribes and has created a tendency for the proliferation of tribal entities. At the same time, we find that some tribes feel there is uneven development and that the distribution of resources is inequitable. These tribes are coming together to press for separation and demand for a new administrative unit within which they can have sole control over its resources. Therefore, we can say that inter-tribal conflict has the tendency to develop into both separatism and irredentism.

It also has been seen that the tribal factor plays a major role in party politics and elections. The voting behaviour of an individual may be marked by his tribal affiliations. Political leaders may seek berths both in party leadership and ministries by relying on their tribal support. Very often politicians and voters may be found to have acted across party lines in favour of their own tribes. There are also occasions when tribal organisations may demand support for its own
candidate from members of its tribe. This is why sometimes political parties may get sidetracked and even result in a split. It may be correct then, to say that inter-tribal politics and tribalism are near synonyms in a multi-tribal state.

We find even the underground movement is not free from tribal afflictions. Nationalism was a cohesive force for the Naga tribes. As we saw in Chapter IV, it brought the Nagas under a single organisation and it instilled in the Nagas, the common desire to share the same state. But the organisational structure of the underground government which was founded on the basis of tribes could not withstand the waves of tribal conflicts among the Nagas. We have seen in Chapter VI that the 'Federal Government' which was thought to be ideally constituted on the basis of tribe-wise representation was imbued with inter-tribal conflicts. The singular underground political party, the NNC, had to pay the price with a split in the emergence of a new group call the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN). This was to be followed by further split in both the NNC and NSCN.

There may exist a certain level of positive competition in cases where different tribes try to surpass one another in different fields of development. But it is extremely difficult to be assertive here, because the processes through which these goals are sought cannot be easily separated from its tribal
infrastructure. However, tribal bodies do play a positive role in settling cases of disputes among tribes as shown in Chapter VI. They are also found to be successful in controlling social evils, most effectively within their own groups, to a certain extent.

In conclusion, we may say that the nature of the Naga society in the pre-British period did not generate inter-tribal conflicts as we see it today. If we say that Nagas are tribals because of their primitive ways of life, the coming of British administration and the introduction of Nagas to modern system of society would have put an end to it. Also, the Naga communities cannot be attributed as tribals because of their traditional culture, because a majority of them have adopted Christianity, which we know is the very embodiment of Western culture. Added to this, a number of Nagas have already received Western education. Thus, we can only attribute the beginning of tribalism to the British groupings of the Nagas into different 'tribes'.

This was followed by the development of tribe consciousness, based on different tribal identities which paved the way for the emergence of various interest groups of which the Naga elite was the most conspicuous. The formation of the state of Nagaland opened up new avenues for the politicisation of tribes. The state began to adopt itself to the demands of
existing tribal structural-functional phenomenon and brought about its crystallisation.

The evolved system of tribe wise distribution gave rise to the demand for new tribal identities. Some dissatisfied tribes clustered together for separation from the state. Smaller groups started demanding full-fledged tribe status. The government's attempt to appease smaller tribes by formulating a policy of reservation for them further deteriorated the situation. Tribal identities became more prominent and there developed a tendency to interpret issues as tribalistic regardless of the nature of its origin.

Inter-tribal conflicts and Naga politics are near synonyms. It is found that voting behaviour is subservient to tribal attachments. This becomes most effective because constituencies are distributed on the basis of tribes. Often which party comes to power can be predicted by analysing the leadership or membership pattern in terms of tribal dominance. Hence, it is quite possible that tribal bias exist in the distribution system as alleged by certain tribes.

Naga nationalism was a process of change towards Naga unification. It was a search for a singular political identity for the Nagas. The wave of Naga nationalism preceded inter-tribal
conflicts. We know that there cannot exist inter-tribal relations unless the tribes are first identified and brought under a single political framework. The state of Nagaland has become an arena where inter-tribal politics found expression. The result was the emergence of strong tribal identities which in turn effected the decline of Naga nationalism.

It is evident that tribal separatist forces are caused by dissatisfaction with the state's allocation of resources. And since tribal identities become politically affective only when they are recognised by the government as a tribe, tribal boundaries existing outside such recognition remain ineffective. Therefore, culture, customs, traditions, language and common ancestry, on the basis of which a tribe is supposed to have been founded becomes secondary to the real motivational force which is access to resources.

Hence, we refused to accept any definition of 'tribe' which is solely based on socio-cultural and economic development criteria alone, without taking into consideration the politico-historical processes under which it evolved. This is because what have been attributed as tribal features -- such as common language, culture, descent and contiguous territory -- are in many cases also true of Western developed societies. The development criterion is also irrelevant because a tribe is not
temporary. It does not vanish as development comes. It is a fact that tribes are capable of coping with modernization, otherwise they would have been all gone by now.

All societies called tribes today, have only one thing in common, a colonial past. Otherwise, as we have seen in Chapter I, tribes around the world differ in many aspects from one another. The notion of being a tribe was brought by their Western rulers. It was used on all societies which were found to be in a politically unorganised state. Its use was ideological because it distinguishes between native societies and the ruling imperial states in terms of their levels of development. Therefore, it can be said that the idea of a tribe came only as a hegemonic imposition on native societies, which not only adopted it, but also capitalised on it in building their own socio-economic and political systems.

We find that tribalism, in our sense of the term, is a destructive element which has etched into the Naga society and has become part and parcel of its socio-economic and political order. It is not only a disruptive force, but it also hampers economic growth and overall development by rendering equitable distribution unrealisable. This is more so because there is active competition among the tribes for access to a common source of limited resources. There is no immediate
remedy to the problem and any effective measure to combat inter-tribal conflict must start at the very roots, involving changes in organisational patterns and structural changes in the governmental machinery. In the long run, social linkages emanating from steadily increasing inter-tribal marriage, inter-tribal migration, urbanisation, etc., may broaden the vision of the tribes. Also, socio-economic and political developments bringing with them modernisation and new cultural values may render tribalism irrelevant. The strengthening of Naga national consciousness may further weaken the negative impact of tribalism. But a reverse trend is also possible, particularly if parochial social forces are allowed to become a commanding factor in the areas inhabited by the Nagas. However, these possibilities need to be examined in a further study, and as for now, the idea of rooting out inter-tribal conflict from the Naga society under the present conditions remains a distant dream.