CHAPTER VI

Conclusion:

British rule in Naga Hills 1881-1947 is a legacy of British imperial designs towards achieving their political & economic goal. Prior to the arrival of the British in the Naga Hills, Naga’s were living independently as indigenous people. The Nagas have their own distinct social life, manners of living, laws, customs, and there method of governance of the people. Most of the tribes retain their ancient laws and customs and village organisations formed an integral part of their life. ‘Democracy’ was the purest form of governance among the Nagas. Unlike her neighbours, the Nagas have remained unconquered and independent from any external aggressions. For centuries, they stayed secluded in a small community, yet were powerful enough to fight and repel the conquering powers. Though there was no common national feelings, several tribes and communities held their independence and were republics in their own right. The village was the main political and social structure that made them strong and united to fight against the outside forces. This study aims to investigate the areas, which were politically transformed in the transitional period 1881-1947. The study also reflects the political and administrative interaction between the Naga People and the British Indian government.

The present study examines the nature and causes of Naga-Nationalism. Colonial cultural policy in the Naga Hill Districts, tried to bring about law and order and its subsequent intervention towards suppression of Headhunting, slave trade, and
the impact of Christian missionaries, and western education, brought about a complete change in Nagaland.

The primary sources of Naga history created by the colonial administrators offer credible records of Naga cultural practices. The actual point of contact with the British in the Naga Hills though was in 1832. However, it was only in 1881, the Naga Hills became a British District and with this, the Naga Hills came under the consideration of the British Crown. From 1866-1874 the Naga Hills was under the jurisdiction of Bengal. Nevertheless, after 1874 it came under the jurisdiction of Assam or the Chief Commissioner of Assam assisted by a Deputy Commissioner.

The British after the treaty of Yandaboo 1826 began to take interest and precaution primarily to safeguard the administered Province of Assam against the raiding Nagas. In this situation, the Nagas had opened the gateway of her land to a race, which had left no stone unturned to those, which lay along its path of imperialism. Never the less the British policy towards the Naga Hills was slow and gradual. From their point of control until 1881, the British were somewhat reluctant to extend their administration in the Naga Hills. The reason was absence of economic gain in the Hills unlike the plains or mainland India. After the establishment of British rule in India, there was an enormous drain of wealth from India to Britain. This adversely affected the economy of India and the country became poorer and poorer day by day. This drain began in the decades following the battle of Plassey in 1757. There was a constant flow of India's wealth out of the country with no returns at all. The British officials carried home immense fortunes extracted from the Indian people. This kind of economic exploitation and the drain of Indian wealth formed the integral part of British policies. The
exploitative character of British rule and its harmful impact on the lives of the Indians led to the rise of resentment and anti-British feelings in the minds of people. They tried to resist the imperialist and colonialist forces, which had brought so much misery and hardship in their lives. To the world, Great Britain was extorting the barren resource of the land over which she had established her control. This was not a hidden fact in the history of the Nagas, infact the roots of Naga Nationalism and political discontent as is manifested today can be traced back to the highhanded approach of the British administration that denied any agency to the Nagas as they followed utterly ad-hoc methods for bringing the Naga people under their administration and control. The British occupied the Naga Hills only to protect the people of the plains living under ordered administration against the frequent raids. As a result, whatever territories were conquered, were transferred to Assam and thus brought under normal administration. Similarly, the British Government of India told the raja of Manipur at one point of time to subjugate the Naga Hills provided they had means to administer them properly. The Southern part of Naga Hills now forming the Mao Sub-division and Tamenlong Sub-division thus went to Manipur state. All these had been done by the Britishers on their own will, and particularly for administrative advantage point of view without any consultation with the Nagas, who were then ignorant of what has been happening. Because of this fact, the present Nagas are claiming for greater Nagaland from the Government of India, which is still discussed with both parties, and yet not coming to a comprehensive conclusion.

Apparently, the British in the Naga Hills did not venture to see the financial constraint of administering the Naga Hills. However, no great nation under whom
she has her domain could neglect her political set-up in administering her domain with a governmental structure. This was a manifestation to keep her economic progress a smooth flow. In this context, the British Government in India was afraid that in administering the Naga Hills would involve great financial assistance instead they getting nothing out of its result. It is seen that only Rs. 2 per house from villages was levied during the late period in return for British protection. The British have noticed that there was no great rival to challenge her might, so they were least concern in establishing a strong political setup. Thus speaking of the British jurisdiction in the Naga Hills, B.C. Allen, the writer of the Gazetteer of Assam, wrote ‘it should be premised that for the annexation of their territory the Naga are themselves responsible. The cause of the administration of the district is out of all proportion to the revenue that is obtained, we only occupied the hills after a bitter experience extending over many years, which clearly showed that annexation was the only way of preventing raids upon our village’. With the introduction of British administrative policies in the neighbouring territory, the British began to consider the Naga areas to be part of their colonial interest. Thus, the year 1832 marked the beginning of direct Anglo-Naga contact that lasted until August 14th 1947. These 115 years relations may be divided into three periods: The first period from 1832 to 1850 in which the British undertook ‘military promenades’ into the Naga Hills. The 2nd period was from 1851-1865, in which they followed a policy of non-Intervention with regard to the Naga tribes. This was later abandoned and in the 3rd period, which began from 1866, the British steadily extended and established their control and authority over the Naga Hills. It should be noted that most of the Eastern portion of the Naga Hills remained untouched until the British left India. The area they
controlled was hardly 30% of the whole territory because when they left in 1947, there were still many un-administered and excluded areas that never came under British suzerainty.

The British occupation of Kohima after Nagas defeat in 1881 was a landmark in the history of the British colonisation of Naga Hills. On the other side, whether it is accepted or not, many writers opine that the British Government took interest in understanding the Naga culture and helped them towards integration and preservation of the traditional culture, though at colonial interest to certain criterion, the primary reason for this interest was political, to continue this ongoing occupation without harrowing the Nagas who were sensitive about their customs and traditions. However, it did not end the Naga’s resistance against the British because even as late as 1913, the battle of Chinglong cost 120 Konyak Nagas’ lives and even as late as 1939, Pangsha village was still fighting the British troops. Infact, unlike India, Nagaland was never fully conquered by the British at any time in history though they were able to administer.

From 1881-1947, there was a tremendous change on the lives of the Nagas, their tradition, custom and culture everything was affected. The introduction of new policies such as law and order, the justice system, tax and revenue gradually transformed and affected the whole territory of the Nagas, including the un-administered areas. The British thought that a just and enlightened administration of native affairs could not be established and pursued without an intimate knowledge of and sympathetic interest in the natives, their customs and their point of view. Religious ideology along with modern education was un-doubtly responsible in bringing to an end the superfluous traditional belief of the Nagas.
The colonial rule was responsible for a simultaneous process of preservation and upheaval/destruction of the Naga way of life. The Nagas were not permitted to have a roman haircut, bobbed hair for girls, use of short pants and petticoats at school, and the use of dhotis. The Nagas were also required to wear only traditional dressed at school. It is also an accepted fact that, the British rule did bring an end to the age old head-hunting practice, slavery, infanticide though slavery and infanticide not being that common or prevalent only in exception to some few Naga tribes. Thus, one of the main reasons why the British could establish a stable administration in the Naga country and why the new administration became popular was their knowledge and interest of the native people. Officers posted in the Naga Hills tried to understand the people through minute study of their way of life, their culture, customs and manners. The Deputy Commissioners and Sub Divisional officers were also assigned to take frequent tours on different villages mainly for this reason.

However, the British rule did help in preserving the culture of the Nagas, which they thought was very different from that of the plains. The administration was determined not only to maintain the internal cultural status quo but was also determined to keep the Nagas from any outside cultural influence. However, in the Naga Hills, the British Government was left with two options to justify its control. The first option was the Naga villages, which were now under the administration of the Chief Commissioner. The second option was the Trans-frontier Nagas (Eastern Nagas) which were left un-administered with the earlier policy of non-intervention. These un-administered areas with the passage of time came to be known as ‘Naga Tribal area or Tuensang Frontier Division in 1951’ under the North East Frontier Agency (NEFA). Prior to this, Naga Hills was
termed as ‘Backward Tribe’ by the Act of 1919 which later on was termed as ‘Excluded and partially Excluded’ area by the promulgation of Government of India Act 1935.

During the British rule in the Naga Hills, many excellent British officers and those in her service lost their lives, in what they maintained as a cause for maintaining and bringing about peace and order in the Naga Hills. Numerous conflicts and battles were fought in the frontiers. The Naga too have suffered beyond consideration. Many Naga villages were burned down and property as well as lives was lost in safeguarding their village or land from an alien ruler. It is not sure whether the Naga in that time have the concept of ‘mother land’ or their own alike as brothers and sisters. However, it is an undeniable fact that, the Nagas considered their village as well as their inhabitant areas as god-like and characterised their nearby surroundings as life giving.

Knowing the stringency of the time, the British officers specially the Political Agent, Deputy Commissioner and in some case even the Chief Commissioner were compelled to make tours in the administered and also the un-administered areas. In this regard, they have brought about a detailed description of the time whether political, social, economic or cultural aspects of the Naga people. The primary sources of Naga history created by the colonial administrators offer credible records of Naga cultural practices. It can be said that, though Nagas have no written record of their history and that too only being supported by their myth, legend, folksongs and dance, it is entirely this tour diaries maintained by the British officers which have now thrown light about the Nagas taking it as the only written source of our history. Inspite of this fact, the Nagas until date are maintaining their rich tradition and culture inherited from their ancestors, which
in other way can be said that, the Nagas during those days might have felt that, they need not have a written source as a burden when they have a well-defined tradition and culture. The Nagas were not ignorant about this, it was just that, they came to know the art of writing only with the impact of British rule and feeling the necessity of this, they might have maintained a well-defined tradition and culture orally being passed from generation to generation.

Thus during the 7 decades of Colonial rule in the Naga Hills, there was tremendous changes in the political, social, economic and cultural platform. This modification and adaptation brought about by a different cultural race un-doubtly is a legacy for a generation until the very word itself is lost. The rise of Nationalism among the Naga people was a process that ran parallel to the exposure of the Nagas to the western cultures. Whatever maybe the criticism, the British rule in the Naga Hills was a revelation for the Nagas and this legacy is but a fruit for generation and generation to come.