

One of the Most Dominant Tribes of the North East India

M. Shantirani Devi* Ksh. Rajesh Singh*

South East Manipur Research Scholar, College, Komlathabi. Manipur University.

Abstract: *This study indicates the distribution, settlement, dialect languages, culture traditions and agricultural views of the most dominant tribes of North East India. Nagas are inhabiting in the northeastern part of India and north western part of Myanmar. The British sent many punitive action against the Nagas. The pottery was known to the early Nagas and was done mostly by the womenfolk. Oral traditions is one of the most important source for the reconstruction of the historical event of the Nagas. Every Naga Tribes has its own festivals. Participation in the First and Second World Wars led to the emergence of Patriotism.*

Keywords: *Christianity, Indo – Myanmar, Festival, Pottery Places, Nurtured, Modern Nation State.*

I. Introduction

The name Naga is generic term that refers to a group of over thirty tribes inhabiting not only in Nagaland but also some hilly regions of the states viz Manipur, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. Some Naga tribes are also found in the north western part of Myanmar bordering India as well. In Myanmar these Naga tribes are mostly inhabited Sagaing division and Kachin states. In Manipur Nagas are mostly inhabited in the districts of Chandel, Ukhrul, Senapati, and Tamenglong. Ukhrul district of Manipur is dominated by the Tangkhuls, Tamenglong district is by the Zelianrongs. Tamenglong district is also the home of Kharam Nagas. The Senapati District is dominated by the Maos, Thangals, Marams and Poumais. In Chandel and Senapati District eight Naga tribes are found. They were Anal, Chote, Chiru, Maring, Moyon, Tarao, Monsang and Lamkang. In the three District of Manipur, Bishnupur, Chandel and Senapati District, the three Naga tribes Koirengs, Chirus and Chotes are sparsely distributed in these Districts of Manipur. In Nagaland there are eight districts the Naga inhabited districts are Tuensang, Mokokchung, Kohima, Dimapur, Mon, Wokha, Zunheboto and Phek. In Arunachal Pradesh Naga inhabited districts are Changlang and Tirap.

The state of Nagaland is dominated by the Naga tribes, viz Ao, Sema, Angami, Chakhesang, Konyak, Khiamnungan, Lotha, Rengma, Pochuri, Sangtam, Yimchunger, Phom, and Zelianrong [Zeme, Liangmei and Rongmei].

Apart from these, some Naga tribes settled in Nagaland state namely Tangkhul, Mao etc. In Assam, two Naga tribes are found, namely Zelianrong [Zeme, Rongmei] and Rengma. In Arunachal Pradesh, three Naga tribes have been found. They have been identified as Tangsha, Wangcho and Nocte. The Naga tribe inhabited in Myanmar are Konyak, Phome, Moyon, Tangkhul, Pangsha, Hemi, Hkalak, Htangan, Yimchunger, Rangpan, Pangaw, Shangpuri, Lainung and Pyangoo.

The word 'Naga' has been used for many centuries. As early as 150 A.D. Claudius Ptolemy the Greek scholar in his Geographia referred to Nagaland as "Nagas Logai" which means "The realm of the naked". There are many theories about the origin of the word Nagas (Nuh:2002:3).

Many scholar give different view about the origin of the Naga. The origin of the word Naga has been a source of debate by different scholars of both Naga and Non Naga. "The term 'Naga' was given to these people even before they migrated from Burma" (Sema:1986:2). The origin of the word Naga is unknown, but it has been supposed by some to have been derived from the sanskrit word... and applied in derision to the people, from the paucity of their clothing, but there seems little foundation for this etymological derivation as the term has never been known to be applied by the Bangalees to either Khasis or Garos, with whom they were far better acquainted the Naga, and beside, the Garos specially are habitually accustomed to a greater degree of nudity then any of the Naga tribe with whom we are acquainted (Horam :1988:4).

Most of the Naga tribe migrated to India from Burma, therefore the name Naka or Naga was given to them even before they reached India. Moreover, it was from the Burmese that the British first came to know about the Nagas soon after their war with Burma during (1759-1826). (Sema:1986:3).

A.Z. Phizo, the most popular Naga leader, maintained that Burmese word 'Naka' was the origin of the word Naga. In Burmese 'Na' means ear and 'Ka' means pierced- one whose ears are pierced or those who bears earring. The Naga people in olden days used to pierce their ears for putting flowers and creepers, as they were lovers of natural beauty. Hence the term Naga is closely related to the Burmese word 'Naka' (Singh :2004 :4).

Their migration, permanent settlement and nomenclature of their name as Naga is given to this tribe by the outsider. Thus Naga society is one of the oldest societies in the world. The origin of the Naga tribe is still

obscure and poorly documented. The Ahom were the first foreign friends known to them. The Naga first started interacting with them prior to the advent of the British, who landed in the Naga territory at a later stage. The relationship between the Naga and the Ahoms of the plain areas of Assam was sometime war like and friendly relationship (Ao:2002:37,38).

Naga tribes are, as Hutton and Mills rightly observed, spread across what today are the borders of Nagaland itself and into the fringes of Manipur, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and Northern Burma. There are probably between three and a half and four millions Nagas, although no one is quite sure as records in Burma have been poor and because official Indian censuses are still a bit confused on the other issue of who exactly is a Naga and who are isn't (Glancey:2011:71).

Mr. P.D. Stracey found that "The biggest mystery is the origin of various tribes of the Nagas because different tribes have their own version of their origins" (Nuh:2002:2).

The Nagas are speaking different dialects and different cultures and traditions but they were more similar to one another than the rest of the Indian people. Alastair Lamb writes in his book, *Asian Frontiers*: "The people of the Assam Himalayas (like the Abors, Mishmis, and the Apa Tanis), the people of the hills along the southern edge of the Brahmaputra valley (like the Khasis), and the Burmese frontier tracts (like the Naga and the Mizos (Lushais))-- none of these could be defined on the basis of the culture" (Horam: 1988:34).

Each Naga has its own language and traditional social and political institutions until the arrival of the British. Most of these communities depend on food gathering, shifting cultivation and hunting for their livelihood. Except among a few of comparatively advanced Naga tribe such as Angami, Sema and Tangkhul who practice wet rice cultivation, the institution of private property had not developed among the Nagas. Every Naga ethnic group has its specific land or territory. Each Naga tribe was a group and numbers of small groups make a number of small villages and each village occupied a well area of land of territory. The village was the highest form of organization. These people differ from group to group and from place to place. Every Naga community has their own respective culture, traditional and social practices. Though these Naga tribes speak different dialects but the way of living are almost the same. The traditional political institutions were decentralized and egalitarian, inter-tribal, and inter-village conflicts were very common practice among them. The Naga felt a potential threat to their existence along the foothills and encroached into the areas, which the Naga considered as their natural traditional territories. Clashes between the two became frequent and the British unsuccessfully tried to use the rulers of Manipur and Cachar to check the Naga raids and pitted the Kukis against the Nagas, and the British sent many punitive actions against the Nagas until 1880 to suppress the Naga rebellion. The colonial authorities introduced Inner line policy regulations in 1872-1873, seeking to stop further encroachment of tribal lands by tea planters and monitor the entry of traders and other plainsmen into the wild areas inhabited by wild tribes. The Nagas have no written records so the folklore and oral traditions have been one of the important source for the reconstruction of the historical events of the Nagas. The Pre-British period (before 1832) of the Nagas history is not available.

Most of the Naga tribes used their different names for themselves and common names were given to them by the Non – Nagas. "It is interesting, however, to note that Tavernier in the latter half of the seventeenth century refer to people in Assam, evidently Nagas, who wore pigs tusk on their caps, and very few clothes, and had great holes for earring through the lobes of their ears, fashions that survive to the present day" (Allen, Gait, Allen, Howard:2010: 469). The Naga are skillful iron- workers and turn out very handsome spear. Their women weave substantial and pretty coloured clothes, and everyman knows enough of rough carpentering to enable him to build his house, and make pestles and mortars of husking rice. They make rough pottery, but without the potter's wheel (Johnstone:2002:49).

The kind of relationship that was shared by the Nagas with the Ahom has no written record whatever evidences are there are all just oral memories which are passed on from another one generation to another. However, the oral source can play an important role in understanding further the Naga- Ahom relationship, which can be further ascertained with the input from the Buranjis (North East India History Association:2011:204).

Naga Literature Culture And Tradition:

Naga Literature, Arts and Music consist of Folktale, Folkdance, and Folk music. Every Naga is expected to participate in the celebration of life. Folk literature and songs are sung by all Tribal philosophy means a sense of ethical living. The folk-tales of the Nagas fall into different categories. There are some with a historical touch about them, some in the nature of legends, and some, like the Panchtantra or Aesop's Fables, are stories with human and animal characters interwoven in them.

The Naga culture was a group of related cultures. "Whether memory change or not, culture is reproduced by remembrance put into words and deeds. The mind through memory carries culture from generations to generations. How it is possible for mind to and out of nothing to spin complex ideas, messages, and instructions for living which manifest continuity over time is one of the greatest wonders one can say,

comparable only to human intelligence and thought itself. Oral traditional should be central to students of culture, ideology, of society, of psychology, of art and finally, of history” (Nuh:2002: 14).

The Nagas produce a variety of food crops but their modes of agriculture differ from the evenly grade and irrigated terraces of the Angami tribe to the primitive, laborious and destructive ‘slash and burn’ operations of the Sema, Konyak and Sangtam tribe. They grow paddy, job’s tears, maize, millet, chillies, oilseeds, pulses and a number of bean. Among the vegetables, cucumber, gourd, and pumpkin are common. The Nagas being basically agricultural people, the Chief had also initiated all activities relating to agriculture. It was the duty of the chief to fix date for cleaning the forest, sowing of seeds, transplanting of seeding and harvesting of paddy by villagers. As the chief leader of the village, he took a leading part in all their activities.

Making using of simple rudimentary tools and implements such as the local dao, hand drill and chisel, skilled craftsmen produce great work of art that local adorn village gates and house posts as well as objects of utility like the common wood dish. One of the finest specimen that epitomize the skill of the Naga craftsman is to be found at Shangnyu village in Mon District. The work of art at Shangnyu consists of a massive wooden panel that has carving depicting objects of art as well as those of ritual and utility. Wood craft has now been commercialized and craftsmen have been able to use their traditional skill to generate income for themselves. The Diezephe craft village in Dimapur District is a good example of a craft concentrated village where the major source of income is from woodcraft.

Weapon in used among the Hill Tribes:- The weapons used indifferently by all the tribes are the spear and dao; these vary much in shape, length, and differences which will hereafter be noted, when the tribes are considered separately (Brown:2001:20).

The ornaments are simple but pretty. A necklace of beads is generally worn round the neck. The beads may be made of some kind of stone or shells. The ears are decorated with a tuft of cotton wool or red paper or anything else depending upon the individual fancy. The armllets are of ivory or brass. On the legs rings of cane are worn by the Angamis and Konyaks; these leggings are not merely ornamental and it is said that they are an aid to climbing as well. All Nagas tribes use hair for decoration. In earlier days human hair was very much sought after and women with flowing locks were the worst sufferers, but now goat’s hair is generally used. The dress and ornaments worn on ceremonial occasions are gorgeously colourful (Singh:1995: 58).

The Nagas are not a composite people. They speak many language. They differ widely in dress and other cultural traits, as well as in physical feature. They belong to Mongoloid stock but yet there are great difference in the detail between one tribe and other, as well as between different people of the same tribe. Some are tall, some are short. Some are yellow in complexion and some are even brown. The cultural tradition of the Naga include features which are common to all the tribes like head hunting, common sleeping house for unmarried men which are taboo to women, disposal of dead on rised platforms, the simple loom for weaving cloth etc.

The Naga women are excellent weavers and the colorful shawls, bags and jackets woven by them are extremely popular. The ‘backstrap’ or the lion loom is commonly used for weaving, although, in recent years the fly shuttle loom has become popular with the weaver. Each tribes uses distinguishing colors and motifs that are often based on tribe folklore. Earlier, natural dyes extracted from bark, root and plants were used for dyeing cotton yarn and woven fabrics. In addition, woven cloth was embellished with beads, cowrie shells and goats hair to denote the wealth and status of the weaver. Body cloth symbolizing Feast- giving and Head- taking added to the variety of clothes woven on the back strap loom. They are of weaving is still popular amongst the Naga women.

The pottery was known to the early Nagas and was mostly done by the womenfolk. The pot made were generally very simple and important and given to it functional value rather than aesthetics. Tseminyu and Ungma village were well known for pottery by aluminum and steel vassels have long replaced the simple clay pots.

The Nagas storage and carry baskets women from fine strips of cane and bamboo are well known and sought after for their utility as well as aesthetic value. The cane baskets of Khonoma village are particularly well known for their intricate weavers. The cane basket and containers woven by the Khiamngan weavers in the Tuensang District are also known for their fineness and delicacy of work that gives it a lace- like appearance. Head gears and mats are also woven from fine bamboo and cane strips.

Apart from baskets, the Nagas also make mats and shield with bamboo. The change make attractive Chungas or drinking cups. Necklets, armetts and leggings are made of cane (Singh:1995:63).

Every Naga tribe has its own festivals and most of these festivals are connected with agricultural activities such as reaping sowing and harvesting. Maostu festival, is performed by Ao Nagas in the month of May, after the sowing. The Ao Nagas celebrate many other festivals, most of which are celebrated to mark the beginning and end of a particular agricultural activities. The other prominent festivals are Sekrenyi and Aoling. The Aoling festival of the Konyak tribe in Mon district heralds spring. Tuluni is an important festival of the Sema tribe. The Hornbill Festival is celebrated every year at kohima from the 1st to 5th of December. During

these festival folk songs and traditional dance from an intrinsic part. Most dances recount the tale of the brave ancestors.

Nearly all the clothes worn by the Nagas were made by the women. The clothes are strong and warm, and generally of a distinctly picturesque and pleasing pattern. Village blacksmith make daos, spear-heads, hoes and knives from imported iron. The spear and the handles of the daos are sometime decorated with goats' hair, dyed dark- blue, white and red (Allen:2009:49).

The Nagas in history are by nature environment; they are a war like race, feared by the people neighbouring them. The Nagas flourished somewhere in South- East of Asia from time immemorial and believed to have come to the present hill in North -East India prior to the coming of Christianity . The most of the Nagas were animistically religious and their manly game was head-hunting. The historic change in the Nagas was the missionaries. They brought the Nagas to the light of hope civilization and education.

The British, however, encouraged the Christian missionaries to work with the Nagas tribes to educate and civilize them. They also constituted the Naga Hills District and gradually brought different Naga areas under their control but administered the Naga inhabited areas with the help of traditional Chiefs. No conscious efforts were made to bring about radical change in the economic and social structure of the Nagas but the missionaries role in spreading Christianity help in mitigating the anti-British feelings. Educational institutions and the churches brought Nagas belonging to different tribes on the same platforms and a new class of educated Naga elites and the traditional Naga chiefs emerged.

By the beginning of the twentieth century Naga hill became an integral part of the British India. After the annexation of Naga territories all the rival sub-tribes of the Naga group came under unified administrative control of the British power. Gradually, the British be friend the Nagas through Christian Missionaries and consolidated its administrative control over them. But due to the temperament or revenge, which is an essential element of Nagas' mental up and chequered history of travail and suffering. Despite the political consolidation of different regions of this country under its rule the British deliberately kept the Nagas in their primitive psyche by restricting the entry of the freedom movement in this isolated region and preventing it to become a part of the unique geo-cultural bond of Indian Nationalism.

Gradually these sprang up a native class of intellectuals for the eventual rise to the idea of Naga nationalism. At the same time regional and international events also influenced the Naga society (Venuh:2005:56).

The voluntary participations of thousands of Nagas, in the First and Second World wars also led to the emergence of the concept of patriotism and the Modern Nation State. However, the Nagas were kept away from the influence of Indian National Movement and made to feel that they were racially, culturally and historically different from plainsmen. Thus nurtured a sense of fear against the plainsmen. It found its initial political expression in the form of memorandum submitted by the Naga club to the Simon Commission, requesting the British to keep the Nagas out of the proposed constitution reform.

References

- [1]. Allen, B.C. (2009). Gazetteer of Naga Hills and Manipur, Mittal Publication, New Delhi.
- [2]. Allen, B.C, Gait, E.G, Allen, C.G.H, Howard, H.F. (2010). Gazetteer of Bengal and North – East India, Mittal Publication, New Delhi.
- [3]. Brown, R. (2001). Statistical Account of Manipur, Mittal Publication, New Delhi.
- [4]. Singh, Chandrika (2004). Naga Politics – A Critical Account, Mittal Publications, New Delhi.
- [5]. Sema, Hokishe(1992). Emergence of Nagaland Socio – Economic and Political Transformation, Vikas Publishing House Pvt Ltd, 576 Masjid Road, Jangpura, New Delhi.
- [6]. 6 Horam, M. (1988). Naga Insurgency – The last thirty years, Cosomo Publications , Ansari Road, Daryaganj, New Delhi.
- [7]. Glancey, Jonathan (2011). Nagaland – A journey to India's Forgotten Frontier, Faber and Faber Ltd, Bloomsbury House 74 – 77, Great Russell Street, London ,WEIB 3DA.
- [8]. Lanunungang, Ao. A. (2002). From Phizo to Muivah – Question in North East India, Mittal Publications, New Delhi , First Edition.
- [9]. Venuh, Neivetso (2005). British Colonization and Restructuring of Naga Polity, Mittal Publication, New Delhi.
- [10]. Nuh, V.K. (2002). The Naga Chronicle, Edited by Wetschokhrolo Lasuh, Indian Council of Social Science Research – North – Eastern Regional Centre, Shillong.
- [11]. Singh, Prakash (1995). Nagaland, National Book Trust, A – 5 Green Park New Delhi.
- [12]. Proceedings of North East India History Association, (2012) Thirty second session, Tripura University, Agartala,2011, Edited and Published by Amrendra Kumar Thakur Shillong.
- [13]. Nuh, Rev. Dr. V.K. (2002). MY Native Country – The land of the Nagas, Spectrum publication, Delhi.
- [14]. Johnstone, Sir James. (2002). Manipur and Naga Hills, Gyan Publishing House 5, Ansari Road, New Delhi.