

# GLOBAL ACADEMIC RESEARCH INSTITUTE

COLOMBO, SRI LANKA



## GARI International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research

ISSN 2659-2193

**Volume: 04 | Issue: 01**

On 31<sup>st</sup> January 2018

<http://www.research.lk>

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GARI Publisher | Sociology | Volume: 04 | Issue: 01

Article ID: IN/GARI/ICSSH/2017/162 | Pages: 44-56 (13)

ISSN 2659-2193 | Edit: GARI Editorial Team

Received: 01.12.2017 | Publish: 31.01.2018



## HEGEMONY OF NAGA IDENTITY AND NATIONALISM IN ITS CONTIGUOUS AREAS.

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### **ABSTRACT:**

*The generic term Naga is unknown to the present Nagas prior to British occupation (1828 British annexation of Assam) in North East region of India (in present), nor do the various tribal communities (which is in the fold of Nagas) do not have such collective identity called "Naga" but no doubt there is a strong village identity among the tribal communities which is firmly build on independent self-sustained village republic system. The collective identity of the generic term Naga become very strong soon after First World War by the formation of Naga Club in 1918 with the initiative of few Nagas village chief, elders, British missionaries, government servant and World War I Nagas crops laborers with its objectives to protect Naga village sovereign system, to protect self determination and to protect Nagas identities and rights. Since then the collective identity "Naga" spearhead in the psychological mindset of one's individual and ignite incessant nationalist spirit. So this paper aims to focus on what accounts for the persisting Nagas Nationalist movement in spite of various political dialogues and agreements. How collective identity of Nagas formed hegemony in one's (Nagas) psychological mindset and fuel the Naga nationalist movement till today. Secondary materials like books, Ph.D. thesis, journals, academic articles, news paper articles, souvenirs of various forum and Internet related materials sources were used for analyzing and presentation of this conceptual paper. Keywords: Naga identity, Self determination, Nationalism.*



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### INTRODUCTION

The origin of the term “Naga” itself is mystifying, as the word “Naga” originated as an exonym and that there is no universal derivative term/word tracing the origin of the term ‘Naga’. Naga legend and mostly Nagas Scholars stress forward the term ‘Naga’ derived from the Burmese Word ‘No-ka’ meaning people with pierced earlobes (Shimray, 1985) and some Naga scholars claim the term ‘Naga’ derived from Kachari word ‘Nok’ or (Nokhhar) meaning ‘warrior’ or ‘fighters’ as the Kacharis came into violent conflict with Some Nagas Tribes. JH Hutton an European anthropologists and some Indian scholars trace the Origin of the term from Assamese word ‘Naga’ (pronounced " noga ") and Sanskrit word ‘Nagna’ meaning ‘Naked’ (Hutton, 1921), some European Scholars and writers also cite the possibilities proposed by other Indian Scholars which claim its derivation from Hindustani word ‘Nag’ referring to ‘hill man’ or ‘mountain people’ (Mills, 1992; Elwin, 1961). S E Peal traces its from Tibeto- Burman language ‘Nok’ meaning ‘Man’ or ‘Folk’ (Horam, 1975) this S E Peal theory is more convincing, and many European scholars, Indian scholars and Naga scholars welcome this approach of tracing the term Naga from the Tibeto-Burman language ‘Nok’. It is said the term Naga was first used by Ptolemy Greek geographer in Egypt during fourth century AD as ‘Nagaloga’ meaning in Sanskrit ‘Nanga’ to Naked and ‘Logae’ to People referring to the people living in Eastern India, this is also one among the theory that trace the origin of the term Naga (Longchar, 1995). Other scholars also opined that the term Naga derived from Sanskrit word ‘Naga’ meaning ‘Serpent’ but this synonym term to serpent is very vague and poorly justified.

All these derivative term use by scholars and writers refer to the people living in the mountain or hill between Hudkawang valley in north-east to plain of Brahmaputra in north-west and Cachar in south-west to Chindwin in east and roughly Manipur valley in south (Mills, 1922). The Naga is a generic term comprising of various

Mongoloid tribes speaking Tibeto-Burmese languages and greatly influenced by Caucasia region. According to Naga National Right and Movements NNC, there are 77 Nagas tribes (sub-tribes and major tribes) and according to 2001 census the Nagas from Manipur and Nagaland comprise of 2.7 million and 0.3 millions population from other (Assam, Arunachal and Myanmar). The Nagas are mostly concentrated in the state of Nagaland and Manipur. Some few tribes are also scatter in Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and Somra Tract of upper Burma. Various Naga tribes are been identified as follow:

In Nagaland: Ao, Angami, Sema, Lotha, Rengma, Chakhesang, Yimchunger, Kalya, Kongnyu, Konyak, Chang, Sangtam, Phom, Zeme, Liangmei, Rongmei, Kheinungan.

In Manipur: Anal, Maring, Moyon, Lamkang, Chothe, Tangkhul, Mao, Paomei, Maram, Thangal, Zeme, Liangmei, Rongmei, Puimei, Chiru, Kharam, Koireng, Tarao.

Assam: Zeme, Rongmei and Rengma.

Arunacal Pradesh: Tangsha, Wancho, Nocte

Burma: Konyak, Tangkhul Somra, Dikhiri, Hemi, Hklak, Htangam, Khiamungan, Leining, Mukhori, Pangmi, Phellungri, Pyangoo, Rangpan, Shangpui, Tsaplo, Phom and Yimchunger.

They (above mention tribes) formed the major tribes which are recognized by their concern state authority and by the government as Scheduled Tribe. And there are still some sub-tribes which are not legally recognized as Scheduled tribe under the fold of Nagas. In spite of vast division on tribes and sub-tribe their culture, custom, language they share similar social affinity and cultural way of life. From time immemorial the Nagas have always been harboring the ideas that they had originated from the same root and it is believed that’s the Nagas had originated from Mongolia race which migrated from Huang-Hao River (Central China) towards the Western side of China by Myanmar Burma and Yunnan province and so on (Horam, 2014).



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### IMMIGRATION WAVES

J H Hutton mention the Nagas were settling by the side of Huang-Hao River of central China. It is also said the river is called Yellow River because Huang-Hao (yellow people referring to Nagas skin color) live by the bank of the river. They were migrated toward western side of China via Myanmar and Yunnan province as the settlement was disrupted by sudden terrible catastrophic incident the melting of glacier from Tibet, so the nick name of this Yellow River Huang- Hao is also called “Sorrow River”. It is believed that Huang- Hao people live about 300 years from 1100 BCE (Before Common Era) to 700 BCE before migration toward Burma (Horam, 2014).

“The country now occupied by the Naga tribes was most likely subjected to mainly four immigration waves” (Horam, 1988). They are

First immigration was from Tibet and Nepal direction entering by Arunachal Pradesh (formerly known as NEFA) as some tribes Noctes and Akas belong to same Naga family.

Second immigration was Mon-Khmer, also known Kol-Mon-Annam these were tribes of Indo-China peninsula which is now settled as Nagas.

The third immigration was from Southern China province of Yunan across the valley of Irrawaddy. These groups consist of Tais, Shans and Ahom and this takes place during first millennium of Christian era.

The fourth immigration was Chin Kuki group who belongs to Chin tribes of Burma. This migration was the most recent one. They migrated towards Lushai Hills (now Mizoram) and district of Churanchandpur now in Manipur. This migration was stopped by British Government during the 1917-1918 Kuki revolt.

Konyaks Nagas is believed to be the oldest settlers among Nagas, but the Konyaks and other Nagas tribes share very close affinities in social, economic and political lives. “A close examination of the implements

and weapons used by the Naga tribes reveal that these very same tools are used by the Indonesia groups as well as by Igorat tribes of the Philippines” (Mills, 1922). Food habit, way of life and other social and cultural forms share its similarity with some communities of Asian countries this shows that they (Nagas) might be immigrants from those countries.

Self sufficient independent nature of every villages, geographical isolation, no communication and lack of mutual exchange of ideas between neighboring villages has gradually lead them (Nagas) to become stranger to one another and thereby slowly developed a separate dialect in every village living in certain geographical area and climatic condition. As sharing of feeling, thought, action and concern for one another villages were limited they (Nagas villages) gradually build up hatred and suspicious among one another villages resulting to never ending conflict, tension and village feud (Hodson, 1911; Horam, 2014). Prior to British Occupation in Assam and North East Region the Nagas were not united as one. Every village was in enmity and feud with other villages and there is no common identity and sense for common oneness. Each village was independent and more or less like Greek “City-State” every Naga villages had been a small state having its own village government and socially self sufficient (Singh, 1982) but by the advent of British in 19<sup>th</sup> century things has drastically changes. Head hunting and village feud has stopped by British administration and Christian missionaries. Modern education and health care system were introduced to the villagers. Different villages and tribe begin to share common belief and spirit of one bond. British education and Christianity has strengthened the spirit of oneness and brotherhood. In fact the seeds of nationalism were already sown in the minds of the Nagas during British rule (Horam, 2014). Love for one country fellows (Nagas) and desire to live together under one political system become very strong among the Nagas. “Like all social phenomena, nationalism as a historical process had emerged in the social world at a certain stage of evolution of the life of



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the community when certain socio-historical conditions, both objective and subjective matured” (Desai, 1982).

### STAGES OF NAGA NATIONALISM

In the early days prior to British advent the Nagas villages were independent and self sufficient but they are not united as one, thus they (Nagas villages) were annex by the British easily. It was in January 1832 Captain Jerking Pembeton and Gardon with 700 Manipuri Troops and 800 coolies march through Mao from Imphal to open a suitable route between Assam and Manipur the British troop encounter Nagas for the first time. They were fiercely attack by Nagas and in retaliation by the British troops the Nagas villages were burnt, villagers were killed and incur severe damages in both life and properties. Since then the Nagas were invaded and many British expedition was carried out frequently in Naga Hill till it reach an agreement to pay annual tributes to the British but in April 1844 when assistant of Grange (British Sub Assistant commander) went to collect tribute the Nagas refuse to pay and fighting took place again. It is accounted that during 1850 to 51 there are about 10 expeditions on Naga hill by the British and in 1866 Naga Hill district was created by the Government of British India and resulted to the signing of Non-interference (Horam, 2014). The British kept the Nagas areas under indirect control and also passed Inner Line Regulation in 1873. The British policy towards Nagas was more of reformation, safeguarding the culture and identity and development rather than exploitation (Horam, 1974).

### NAGA CLUB

“The origin of the present Nagas movement could be traced first to the formation of Naga Club in the year 1918 at Kohima with a branch at Mokokchung” (Singh, 1982). The pioneers in the foundation of Naga Club were Ruffuno, RS Ruichumhao, Naga villages chief, elders, intellectuals, government servant and world war I crops laborer who realized the importance of protecting their socio-political and cultural identity. The

objective of Naga Club is to insure and protect Naga Identities, Self determination, Village sovereign system, land, resources and ownership right.

The Naga Club submitted a memorandum to Simon Commission in 1929 for the first time. The memorandum requests the Commission led by Sir John Simon with Mr. Attlee to keep the Naga Hills outside the scheme of Indian reforms policy and under direct British administration.

Our Country is poor and it does not pay for its administration. Therefore, if it is continued to be placed under the Reformed Scheme, we are afraid that new and heavy taxes will have to be imposed on us, and when we cannot pay, then all lands will have to be sold and in the long run we shall have no share in the land of our birth and life will not be worth living then. Though our land at present is within the British territory, government have always recognized our private rights in it, but if we are forced to enter the council the majority of whose number is sure to belong to the other customs to supersede our own customary laws which we now enjoy.

For the above reasons, we pray that the British Government will continue to safeguard our right against all encroachment from other people who are more advanced than us by withdrawing our country that we should not be thrust to the mercy of other people who could never be subjected; but to leave us alone to determine ourselves as in ancient times. We claim not only the members of the “Naga Club” but to represent all those regions to which we belong viz. Angamis, Kacha Nagas, Kukis, Semas, Lothas, and Rengma and also other regions of Nagaland. (Memorandum submitted by the Naga Club to Simon Commission Dated 10<sup>th</sup> January 1929).

In May 1935 the report of the Commission were placed before the Common house of London under special committee on Indian Bill and the Nagas issue was taken up on the term “backwards”. After careful discussion in the Common house of London the British realized that all the tribal areas in India need to be given special kind



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of administrative care, thereby as per the Government of India Act 1935 the Naga Hill district along with North Eastern Frontier Tract, the Lushai hill and Cachar Hill were declared as “Excluded Area” within the province of Assam and in which the Governor has to administered the areas.

After Second World War the Naga Club members and intellectual of Nagas began to discuss openly the concept Naga Federal State comprising of all contiguous areas but in spite of numerous appeal and request, the British have not given satisfactory responses and commitment toward the future of Nagas. Nevertheless there are some British administrative officer who has a deep love and concern for the Nagas. The Deputy Commissioner of Naga Hills District Sir Charles Pawsey established Naga Hills District Tribal Council in 1945 with its main objective to unite the Nagas and reconstruct the Naga Hill villages that has been badly effected by Second World War (Elwin, 1961). But the Naga Hills District Tribal Council established in March 1945 has a very short life, in March 1946 the Tribal Council had a meeting and passed a resolution to change Naga Hills District Tribal Council to Naga National Council and thus the Council becomes the flag bearer to unite and demand for sovereign state. Later NNC (Naga National Council) under the leadership of Phizo has brought together a feeling of oneness and solidarity among various feud tribal Naga villages (Ao, 1993).

### **NAGA NATIONAL COUNCIL**

Like the formation of Indian National Congress in 1885 the Naga National Council was also established to demand Nagas self autonomy and self determination. The organization work to unite and foster social welfare under self local government within the province of Assam (Elwin, 1961). Their first political move was by passing a resolution in October 1946 to restrict any members of political party to enter Naga Hills without the consent of the NNC. And in June 1946 NNC meeting they submitted a memorandum to Pandit Nehru the

president of Indian National Congress. The points mentions in memorandum are:

“This Naga National Council stands for solidarity of Naga tribes, including those in the un-administered areas; This council strongly protests against the grouping of Assam with Bengal; The Naga Hills should be constitutionally included in autonomous Assam, in a free India, with local autonomy and due safeguards for the interest of the Nagas; and The Naga tribes should have a separate electorate” (Ramruny, 1988).

Jawaharlal Nehru on 1<sup>st</sup> Aug. 1946 (President of Indian National Congress) gave his opinion that he does not favor Nagas having separate electorate, however he emphases the tribal areas will have maximum freedom and autonomy to lives their life according to their customs and desire. As Naga National Council delegates met Mahatma Gandhi on 19 July 1947 and told him that the Nagas were resolved to declare Independence before India do so, Mahatma Gandhi told the Naga delegate that;

Nagas have every right to be independent. We did not want to live under the British and they are now leaving us. I want you to feel that India is yours. I feel that the Naga Hills are mine just as much as they are yours. But if you say that they are not mine, the matter must stop here. 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. When Naga delegates said the governor of Assam Sir Akbar Hydari was threatening to use force if Naga refuse to joint Indian Union. Gandhi exclaimed “Sir Akbar is wrong. I will come to Naga Hill; I will ask them to shoot me first before one Naga is shot at” Gandhi even went to the extend “why wait until 14<sup>th</sup> August? Why not even declare your independence tomorrow? (Vashum, 2000).

The Nagas delegate were convince from the words of Gandhi and the NNC (Naga National Council) under the leadership of Phizo declared Naga Independence day on 14 August 1947 and adopted the slogan “British must



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go” and the Government of India should act as the guardian for a period of ten years and after which the Nagas would decide for their future, base from their memorandum submitted by NNC (Naga National Council on 27 Feb. 1947) to Lord Mountbatten (Viceroy of India) for setting up Interim Government for Nagas (Ao, 1993).

### **AKBAR HYDARI NINE POINTS AGREEMENTS**

In June 27-29 1947 the Hydari Agreement was signed between the Government of India represented by Sir Akbar Hydari Governor of Assam and the Naga National Council (NNC) delegate. The preamble read, as “The right of the Nagas to develop themselves according to their freely expressed wishes is recognized.” The Nine points includes Judiciary, Executive in regard to Agriculture, PWD and education, Legislature, Land, Taxation, Boundaries, Arm Act and regulation. And concluded “The Governor of Assam as the agent of the Government of India Union will have a special responsibility for a period of ten years to ensure the due observance of this Agreement; at the end of this period, the Naga National Council will be asked whether they require the above Agreement to be extended for a further period, a new agreement regarding the future of the Naga people arrived at.” (Akbar Hydari Nine points agreements June 1947)

Sadly differences in opinion toward Naga Nationalist movement and differences in the interpretation and understanding of Nine Points Agreement of June 1947 emerge among the NNC (Naga National Council) members. This resulted to the split of Naga National Council into two groups one which demands immediate Independence and other who does not favor complete break from India. The extremist was lead by AZ Phizo the Pioneer and the moderate group was lead by T. Sakhrie General Secretary of NNC but in 18<sup>th</sup> January 1956 T. Sakhrie was found murdered which gradually lead to the weakening of moderate group.

Vagueness and non-implementation of the 9-points agreement and different interpretation of the agreement

by NNC and Indian Government resulted in confusing the Nagas about their future (Ramunny, 1988). Conflict, violence and bloodshed became a common routine in Naga Hills areas as the Naga Movement continues. In 31 January 1956 the Naga Hills were declare as “Disturbed Area” and Assam Rifles and Military force were deploy to curve the turmoil and unrest but further added to more bloodshed, rape, torture, arson and killing. The Nagas Civilian became the victim of both Naga Underground military group and Indian Military groups. Sick of violence and bloodshed in the areas some Nagas leaders from Moderate groups and Church Leaders formed Naga People Convention (NPC) in 1957. The main purpose of the NPC (Naga People Convenion) organization is to act as a mediator between Nagas Underground militant and Indian Government, fostering to bring mutual agreement between them. The NPC miserably failed in achieving its objective due to lack of vision for Naga future. They (NPC) drafted 16 points agreement and submitted to Prime Minister of India and concluded the agreement with India in July 1960. The Chairman and Architect of NPC Dr. Imkongliba was assassinated in August 1961. Thus widening and drifting apart the bond of social relationship among the Nagas themselves.

### **THE SIXTEEN POINT AGREEMENT**

In July 1960 the Naga People Convention (NPC) and Government had reach its agreement for the formation of Nagaland state believing to settle the violence and bloodshed between Nagas and the Government of India. The Federal Government under NNC (Naga National Council) considers the 16 points agreement as the outcome of Instigation by the Indian Government on few handful of Nagas leader outside the NNC fold (Horam, 1988). The 16 – points agreement includes (1). The Name (2). The Ministry Incharge (3). The Governor of Nagaland (4). Council of Ministers (5). The Legislature, (6). Representation in thee Parliament (7). Acts of Parliament (8) Local Self Government (9). Administration of Justice (10). Administration of the Tuensang District (11). Finance Assistance from the



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Government of India (12). Consolidation of Forest Areas (13). Consolidation of Contiguous Naga Areas (14). Formation of Separate Naga Regiment (15). Transitional Period (16) Inner Line Regulation. (The 16-points Agreement between Govt. of India and Naga People's Convention July 1960)

The Agreement was denounce by to all the prominent leaders of Naga National Council (NNC). The 16- points Agreement has granted for the formation of Nagaland State which constitute only a part of Naga Hills Areas comprising the territory of Tuensang Area. On 1<sup>st</sup> December 1963 the President of India Dr. Radhakrishna officially inaugurated the Nagaland State as the 16<sup>th</sup> State of Indian Union.

The agreement neither solves nor brings complete peace or maintains law and order in Naga contiguous areas. But rather made the Naga Issue more complicated and create more problems between Government of India and Nagas. As the situation hardly improved Christian British Missionaries Rev. Michael Scott initiated a direct talk between Naga militant group and Indian Government leaders. An agreement was signed on 15 August 1964 officially christened as "Cease-fire" and enforce on September 1964 (Horam, 2014). Thus peace talk or peace mission came into being and gradually organized and form Nagaland Peace Council. Cease fire signed on 15 August 1964 erupted shortly as both the party the Naga Militant and Indian Militant could not abide by their agreement. However Nagaland Peace Council tries their best in bringing peace in Nagaland and in its Nagas contiguous areas. They NPC (Nagaland Peace Council) work under two principles: The solution should be "Honorable" to all concern and it should be "Acceptable to both sides". After many discussion and round of political talk both in Governmental and Ministerial levels they (NNC Nagas leaders, Naga intellectual civilian and Indian Government) decided to sign an agreement and came to be known as the "Shillong Accord 1975"

### SHILLONG ACCORD 1975

Under the peace mission initiative of Nagaland Peace Council (NPC) and six members of Naga National Council (NNC) lead by Kevi Yalya met LP Singh at Raj Bhavan Shillong on 11 November 1975 and signed the agreement which came to known as Shillong Accord. The following are the provisions of the Accord: The Representative of the underground organization decided of their own volition to accept without condition the constitution of India. It was agreed the arms possessed by underground would be brought out and deposited at appointed placed. The details to give effect will work out between Government representatives and Liaison committee. It was also agreed that Naga underground should have reasonable time to formulate other issues or for final settlement. On 5 January 1976 Shilong Accord 1975 was implemented with Clause II. It was decided that the collection of arms would commence as early as possible and will be completed by 25<sup>th</sup> January 1976. Peace council team will ensure all arms that have collected will be transported to Chedema Peace Camp for safe custody of arm. Similar arrangement will be made in Manipur and the underground may stay at Peace Camps and their maintenance will be arranged by Naga Peace Council (Horam, 1988)

Many other Nagas and even from Naga National Council (NNC) members consider the agreement was not an Accord rather it is an unconditional surrender to realize permanent peace, as some leaders of Naga National Council and educated Nagas badly desire for peace. This agreement resulted in releasing capture Nagas underground card and lifted Emergency (President rule) which was impose on the state in May 1975. This total surrender gave some relief for short period but the pressure and condemnation by some Naga National Council members continues which resulted to the split of Naga National Council (NNC) in 1980 and formed new organization called National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN).

### NAGA NATIONAL COUNCIL OF NAGALAND (NSCN)





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The Shillong Accord was another great blow to the aspiration and future of Naga National movement. Prominent rebel leader feel that the Accord was a complete sellout of Nagas' right (Vashum, 2000). Muiva and Isak condemn the signatories of the Accord as a 'Traitor' and asked AZ Phizo who is in England to condemn the Accord Agreement but Phizo ignored and remained silent. As many internal crisis increase Isak Chishi Swu, S.S Khaplang and Th Muivah formed National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) on 31<sup>st</sup> January 1980 and become the Chairman, Vice Chairman and General Secretary respectively. They (NSCN) continue to take the path of violence in demanding for complete self-determination rule for the Nagas. Sadly on 30<sup>th</sup> April 1988 the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) split in to two groups as NSCN- IM and NSCN-K former lead by Isak and Muivah and the later lead by Khaplang.

Effort to bring peace and settlement for Naga Political issue failed measurably due to lack of understanding on Naga issues by the Indian Government, lack of trust by Nagas, lack of seriousness and commitment from both the concern authority Nagas and Government of India sides. Continuous violence and conflict and violation of Human Right caught the attention of International organization which resulted to another level of Political dialogued with Government of India and NSCN –IM and thereby signing another "Cease fire" agreement in 1<sup>st</sup> August 1997. The terms and understanding of the Cease fire (1997) Indo-Naga political talk were: 1. Talks shall be unconditional from both sides; 2. The talks shall be at the highest level; that is, at the Prime Minister level; 3. The venue of the talks shall be anywhere in the world, outside India. And after nearly two decades of cease fire and fifty round of political talk they arrived at the signing of the historic "Frame Work Agreement" on 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2015 between the Government of India and NSCN-IM. In the signing ceremony Prime Minister Narendra Modi address with warm greeting to all those present and thank Shri Isak Swu, Shri Muivah and other Naga leaders for their wisdom, courage, efforts and cooperation which has resulted in this historic

agreement. He express his deepest admiration for all the Naga people for their extraordinary support to peace efforts and complemented NSCN for maintain the ceasefire agreement for nearly two decades with sense of great honour. He expresses the rich diverse beauty and unique way of life the Naga people have in making the nation and world a beautiful place. He acknowledges the Naga problems have taken so long to resolve due to lack of understanding, he said, "There were not many like Mahatma Gandhi, who loved the Naga people and was sensitive to their sentiments." He assure today's agreement is a shining example of what we can achieve when we deal with each other in a spirit of equality and respect, trust and confidence; when we seek to understand concerns and try to address aspirations; when we leave the path of dispute and take the high road of dialogue." Moreover it marked not merely the end of problems but beginning of new future. And with its concluding statement, "Today, as you begin a new glorious chapter with a sense of pride, self-confidence and self-respect, I join the nation in saluting you and conveying our good wishes to the Naga people. Thank you" (Full Text: PM Modi's speech on historic deal 3<sup>rd</sup> Aug. 2015). In spite of much pressure from various groups, associations and civil organizations to make it public the points of agreement inked between Central Government of India with NSCN – IM, so far the content of the historic frame work agreement has not been disclose till date.

### **BRIEF ACCOUNT ON PSYCHOLOGICAL HEGEMONY; A QUEST FOR COMMON IDENTITY**

Hegemony in Gramscian thought is a way of life and thought which is dominant, influential and diffused throughout society norms, values, tastes, political practices and social relations (Katz, 2006). Erik H Erikson stress psychology plays a crucial role in the formation of Identity (Erikson, 1968). Nagas consciousness of who they were in the past before the British advent have seem to formed strong



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psychological hegemony and stability in the mind of one's Nagas. Sharing similar Socio-Cultural, Ethnic, Historical, Political, Religious and Geographical aspects has attributed to 'we feeling' among the Nagas communities and a sense of common social identity (Vashum 2000).

**Socio-Cultural aspect:** The Naga society is an egalitarian society. Every village is self sufficient, and independent with the principle of socialism and democracy in its nature (Elwin, 1961). Tradition and culture has been passed down from generation to generation though oral means like storytelling and folk song (Horam, 2014). The Nagas society is a patriarchal society and also shares similarity to monarchy or republic system where the chief of the village is appointed in hereditary manner. Social cultural norms and values are guarded closely by their social institution where village council and youth dormitory play a vital roles (Aosenba, 2001). PM Modi quote in his speech that, "The respect for the infirm and elders, the status of women in society, sensitivity to Mother Nature, and the emphasis on social equality is a natural way of Naga life. These are values that should constitute the foundation of the society that we all seek" (Full text: PM Modi's speech on historic deal between Centre, NSCN-IM Aug.2015).

**Ethnic race:** The Nagas are mongoloid race, sub – family classified under Tibeto-Burmese of the Sino-Tibetan supper family and they speak Tibeto-Burmese language. They seem to have migrated to this present Naga hills before Ahoms came. It is believe that the Ahom came to Naga Hills during 1228 AD and Ahoms were the first outsider for the Nagas to come into contact with. In the account of Ahom history the Ahom prince Sukhapa came into fierce encounter with the Nagas tribes as they marched across the Burmese corridor through the Patkai Hill (Burman, 2008). They share close association for nearly 600 years that is from 1288-1819. Geographical Terrace, climate, constant feud among clan and villages might have compelled the people to scatter into different areas leading to the

development of new dialect and similar way of culture (Hodson, 1911). Elwin writes, Ahom King regard the Nagas as their subject, while some Nagas scholar writes Ahoms never consider the Nagas as their subject. However it is believe that not all the Naga village came into contact with Ahom King but only the Naga villages living near the present Assam came into contact with Ahom King. (Vashum, 2000).

**History:** Nagas claimed their unique history by stating that the Nagas were the first settler in the areas prior to Ahoms advent. Ahoms believe to have come to Nagas Hills during 12 centuries i.e., around 1228 AD and they (Ahom) were the first outsider to come into contact with Nagas (Horam, 1988). According to the evidence of Geologist the entire Manipur valley was under the water for about 500 years ago and Meitei (Manipuri) Scholar O. Tomba Singh in his book "A Need to Rewrite Manipuri History" claim the Meiteis (Manipuri) did not settle in Manipur before fourteenth century (Tomba, 1993). They (Nagas) believe and claim common ancestors though scatter under various geographical areas, dialect, culture, tradition, tribes and sub-tribes. T.C. Hodson pointed out, "At Makhel is to be seen a stone now erected which marks the place from which the common ancestors (of the Nagas) emerged from the earth" (Hodson, 1911). Makhel is regarded as the centre from where the migration took place (Aphun, 2008). Moreover historically they claim they (Nagas) were not the subject of any rulers or king nor do the British could entirely administer the whole Nagas areas. It is also clear from their memorandum submitted by NNC (Naga National Congress) to the visiting British Cabinet Mission and president of INC (Indian National Congress) Pandit Nehru on 19 June 1946, the first point itself stated, "This Naga National Council stands for solidarity of Naga tribes including those in the un-administered areas" (Vashum, 2000).

**Political:** The political system of Nagas villages were mostly Republican types of government while Monarchical Village Head system was also found in some Nagas communities like Konyaks, Semas, Maos,



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Poumai, Thankhuls, Zeliangrong, Changs etc. Whether republic or monarchical system, the Nagas village political system was carried out by the village council representing the villager as a whole. "Each village was a kind of independent republic and ruled by a chief or Village Council following its customary laws" (Burman, 2008). Elwin writes that the Nagas societies present a varied pattern of near dictatorship and extreme democracy (Elwin, 1961). Sir Robert Reid the Deputy Commissioner of Naga Hill when he became the governor of Assam recommended a scheme to carve out a Trust Territory called Crown colony comprising the "Naga Hills", North East Frontier area in upper Assam and the Hill areas in upper Burma. As he understood the great differences of socio-cultural, belief and custom of Nagas with Burma, India and British. But his move for carving out separate territory was effectively criticized by Sir Andrew Clow in 1945 Governor of Assam and it became unsuccessful. However this idea brought the Nagas to be conscious of one administrative unit for themselves free from any foreign political domination. On October 1946 the Naga National Council (NNC) made a resolution and submitted to visiting British Cabinet Mission and president of INC Pandit Nehru to restrict any members of political party to enter Naga Hills without the consent of the NNC (Ramrundy, 1988). This demand for one political administration in all the Nagas contiguous areas is still the focus in any agreement. Muivah the General Secretary of NSCN-IM in his speech on its 38<sup>th</sup> Republic Day he spelled out for the first time the closely guarded 'Framework Agreement' that, "the historic 'Framework Agreement' recognizes the unique history, the identity, the sovereignty, the territories of the Nagas" (Time of India city: Guwahati 22 March 2017).

**Religion:** Prior the British advent western anthropologist scholars pointed out the Nagas were animist while the British Missionaries consider their Nagas religious ritual practices as a heathen way of life and Nagas scholars view their religion as a primal religion. As Sir Robert Reid (Deputy Commissioner of Naga Hill and later Governor of Assam) has clearly

understand their (Nagas) religious belief, culture and way of life is quite different from British, Burma, Hindu, Muslim and Christian (Vashum, 2000). But gradually the Christian Missionaries began to win the heart of the Nagas by providing medical facilities, education facilities and other socio-economic facilities moreover they could bring together the feud villages among the Nagas by stopping head hunting and heathen ritual all this greatly shaped for conversion to Christianity. Now Protestant Christian is the dominant religious group in Nagaland and its contiguous areas. Thus commonness among the Nagas is also sought though common religious belief (Ranganathan et al., 2008).

**Geography:** In the words of J.P. Mills Nagas inhabit in the area, "bounded by the Hukawang valley in the northeast, the plains of Brahmaputra valley to the northwest, of Cachar to the southwest and of the Chindwin to the east. In the south, the Manipur valley roughly mark the point of contact between the Naga tribes and the very much more closely interrelated group of Kuki tribes Thadou, Lushei Chin, etc" (Mills 1922). Sir James Johnstone noted that "a kind of vague boundary between Manipur and the Naga Hills had been laid down in 1842 by Lieutenant Biggs" (Johnstone, 1971). After Indian Independence the Nagas were split into five administrative units they are Nagaland State (gained its statehood in 1963), Manipur State (gained its statehood in 1972), Arunachal (gained its statehood in 1972), Assam State and in Burma (bifurcated during the division of international boundary). They (Nagas) continue to demand their right to integrate all the Nagas contiguous areas. As clearly spelled out by NSCN-IM General Secretary Muivah on 38<sup>th</sup> Republic Day celebration that the historic Framework Agreement signed between NSCN-IM and Government of India on 3<sup>rd</sup> Aug. 2015 "recognizes the legitimate right of the Nagas to integration of all Naga territories" (Time of India city: Guwahati 22 March 2017).

## CONCLUSION



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Common Identity as 'Nagas' has formed alternative culture hegemony among the Nagas tribes and not in favor of the main land culture. This ideology has become very effective soon after the formation of Naga Club in 1918. Awareness and consciousness among the Nagas for common identity become more define by the spread of Christianity and education. Moreover various British Administrative Act, rules and regulation and two World Wars have greatly strengthen this ideology for the formation of alternative culture hegemony among the Nagas. Every Nagas villages which were in feud and conflict with one another before the advent of British were gradually being brought united physically by British administrative policy and emotionally by Christian belief which resulted to feel consciousness among themselves and began to demand for self determination as they were before the advent of the British.

Every Nagas has a close bond with their land and they made every effort to protect and preserve their land, culture and social institution. Their resistance and raid against the British during 1820s- 1830s cannot be term as a demand for self determination. Demand for self determination was clearly visible during 1920s when Jadonang Malangmei took up a religious-political movement in 1925 to overthrow the British rules from their (Naga) soil. He raise voiced for unity among the Nagas and proclaimed a kingdom for the Nagas (right to self-determination in terms of social, economic, and religious life). He strongly denounces paying taxes to the British which lead him to direct confrontation with the authoritative of British Empire. He was arrested and fined on murder charge against him. J.C. Higgins, political Agent who played the role of judge, policeman and prosecution lawyer sentenced Jadonang Malangmei to death. He was hanged to death on 29 August 1931. After the death of Jadonang, the movement was taken up under the leadership of Gaidinliu Kamei his cousin, who later came to be called 'Rani' (Queen) by Jawaharlal Nehru. (Longkumer, 2007; Kabui, 1982).

In 1946 Naga National Council came into being as political organization, and began to stress forward for self autonomy and self determination. On 16<sup>th</sup> May 1951 historic plebiscite 99.9% of Nagas voted for Independent Naga State. Thus far the plebiscite formed the basis that keeps the Nagas to reaffirm and uphold their struggle for self-determination (Ao, 1993). Uneasiness and fear of losing their identity, cultural customary law, land and resources were the root causes that strive them forward for self determination (Burman, 2008). Solidarity and Integration of all the contiguous Nagas areas were the main focus in their course of struggle for self-determination. Since the formation of Naga Club in 1918, it has brought forth numerous stages in the history of Nagas struggle for self-determination. Right from the declaration of Naga Hills as excluded areas in 1937 to till the recognition of their unique history of Nagas in Amsterdam Declaration dated on 11/07/2002 and signing of historic Framework Agreement in 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2015. In spite of many up and down, violence, bloodshed, misunderstanding and division even among themselves (Nagas) their demand for self-determination has never given up. However they the Government of India and the Nagas realized the futility from the past experiences, thus keeping in mind all these shortcoming the concern authorities that is, the central Government of India and the Nagas various civil bodies and organization are genuinely working together toward bringing honorable solution at earliest. One can be clearly observed from the acknowledgement made by Nagaland Tribes Council (NTC) during the second round of peace talks between the Working Committee of 6 (six) Naga National Political Groups (NNPGs) and the Government of India lead by RN Ravi the Interlocutor held in Dimarpur on 23 Oct. 2017. They (NTC) sincerely appreciated the Government of India gracious response and initiative for an inclusive political dialogue on equal footing toward bringing lasting solution to this protracted Naga political problems. "We sincerely appreciate the gesture of Government of India for bringing the talk to Naga soil with a renewed spirit to connect with the people and to rebuild the trust which has been missing for a long time.



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This sincere effort of taking everyone together will usher in a new hope for a new future” (The Sangai Express 23 Oct. 2017).

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