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THE NAGAS
in the
Nineteenth Century

BY VERRIER ELWIN

MONOGRAPHS

- † The Baiga (Murray, 1939)
- † The Agaria (OUP, 1942)
 - Maria Murder and Suicide (OUP, 1943, second edition, 1950)
- † Folk-Tales of Mahakoshal (OUP, 1944)
- † Folk-Songs of Chhattisgarh (OUP, 1946)
- † Myths of Middle India (OUP, 1949)
- † The Muria and their Ghotul (OUP, 1947)
 - Maisons des Jeunes chez les Muria* (Gallimard, 1959)
 - I costumi sessuali dei Muria* (Lerici, 1963)
- † Bondo Highlander (OUP, 1950)
- † The Tribal Art of Middle India (OUP, 1951)
- † Tribal Myths of Orissa (OUP, 1954)
- † The Religion of an Indian Tribe (OUP, 1955)
- † Myths of the North-East Frontier of India (NEFA Administration, 1958)
- † The Art of the North-East Frontier of India (NEFA Administration, 1959)
 - Nagaland (Adviser's Secretariat, Shillong, 1961)
 - Democracy in NEFA (NEFA Administration, 1966)
 - The Kingdom of the Young (abridged from *The Muria and their Ghotul*, OUP, 1968)

GENERAL

- Leaves from the Jungle (Murray, 1936, second edition, OUP, 1958)
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 - Motley (Orient Longmans, 1954)
- † A Philosophy for NEFA (NEFA Administration, 1957, third edition, 1961)
- † When the World was Young (National Book Trust, 1961)
- † India's North-East Frontier in the Nineteenth Century (OUP, 1959, reprinted 1962)
 - A Philosophy of Love (Publications Division, 1962)
 - The Tribal World of Verrier Elwin: An Autobiography (OUP, 1964)
 - Elwin Kanta Pashankuti Makkal* (Bookventure, 1967)
 - Verrier Elwinnara Girijana Prapancha* (Janapada Sahitya Academy, 1967)

NOVELS

- † Phulmat of the Hills (Murray, 1937)
- † A Cloud that's Dragonish (Murray, 1938)

WITH SHAMRAO HIVALE

- † Songs of the Forest (Allen & Unwin, 1935)
- † Folk-Songs of the Maikal Hills (OUP, 1944)

† Out of print

THE NAGAS
in the
Nineteenth Century

Edited with an Introduction by

VERRIER ELWIN



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in the

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FOREWORD

THE TYPESCRIPT OF THIS ANTHOLOGY was almost in final shape at the time of Verrier Elwin's death, and, as I had been associated to some extent with the early stages of the work, I was happy to accept Mrs Elwin's and the Oxford University Press's request to tie up the loose ends and prepare it for publication—which meant little more than crossing the t's, dotting the i's, rummaging for suitable illustrations and, where the text was obscure, exploring the original sources. It has been, in every sense, a labour of love, as Verrier Elwin and I had been close colleagues over a number of years, and particularly so during my terms of office as Adviser to the Governor of Assam, when our work kept us in intimate and practically daily touch with each other. Although Dr Elwin never functioned as an executive—for this he had neither the inclination nor the temperament—he exerted nonetheless a powerful influence on our executive officers, and through them, over the entire field of the administration. He was friend, philosopher and guide to the Government and to the tribal people, and his deep understanding, sensitiveness and humanity were variously reflected in the policies of Government.

Verrier Elwin had shown me, and we had often discussed, the manuscript of this anthology while it was under preparation. It was only with the greatest diffidence, however, that I would venture to advise him in his own field of literature and scholarship. Re-reading the anthology has taken me back to old friends—to Dalton, the Butlers, Mrs Grimwood and the indomitable General Johnstone, among particular favourites, and I have felt very much the better—and the wiser—for treading again the passages of the past. The days of the scholar-administrator are, alas, over, but it is good to be able to savour, if only for a brief, golden interlude, the taste of a former age, when there was time, and also a sense of pride and an urge, for presenting an official report not as a mere compilation of facts and figures but as an essay of literary endeavour.

As in Verrier Elwin's companion volume on the North-East Frontier, the original spelling and punctuation have generally been retained in these extracts, except in the case of very obvious

printer's errors. The absence of punctuation marks in some of the tour notes conveys a sense of urgency and raciness (also, be you warned, confusion!) and has not therefore been 'corrected'. Mr Jagadish Saha of the National Library, Calcutta, and Mr Bibhas Bhattacharjee, my private secretary, took great pains in tracing for me the original sources and I gratefully acknowledge their assistance.

It has been a privilege and a joy to have been associated with Verrier Elwin, albeit remotely, in the editing of this anthology. And I like to think of my small contribution as an act of respectful homage to the memory of a very dear friend and colleague.

N. K. RUSTOMJI

Shillong
March 1968

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INTRODUCTION

A FEW YEARS AGO I made an anthology of extracts from the nineteenth century books and articles, now rare and only available in the larger libraries, about the North-East Frontier of India. This book, which was published by the Oxford University Press in 1959, was unexpectedly successful and a new impression was issued in 1962.

At the time when I made this anthology I thought that I might do similar books for other tribal areas in India and the present work represents the first fruit of this idea. Here I have extracted passages about the Naga people on a broad geographical basis from printed books and articles covering the period 1827 to 1896. As in the earlier book I have concentrated on passages which illustrate the history, ethnography and problems of the people. My main interest, as it always has been, was in people, but inter-village feuds and punitive expeditions are inextricably mixed up with the story of Naga life.

This record is not presented as a correct picture but to illustrate how outsiders looked at the Nagas at the time. There are certainly many mistakes of fact, misunderstanding of customs and institutions; almost everything is very different now; some passages reveal a condescending and a hostile or resentful attitude on the part of the writers. I have left most of these in, for they are part of history and the Nagas themselves, who have a great sense of humour, are not likely to resent them.

The men who wrote these extracts found it difficult to get information. The Naga languages in those days, before English or even Assamese had become popular, were some of the most complex and difficult in the world. Visitors to the Naga Hills nearly always had to go under escort and Dr J. H. Hutton points out how difficult this made inquiries even in his own case as late as 1923. He and his party could go nowhere, he says, during a tour in what is now called Tuensang 'without armed sentries standing over us like warders guarding a recaptured convict'. Captain W. B. Shakespear, he notes, who commanded his escort and who should at least have

had a sort of 'family feeling for ethnology',¹ was sympathetic but took no risks. In addition to this supervision in what was then very wild territory, much time was inevitably taken up with 'transitory matters of politics, supplies or transport arrangements' and on the top of it there was constant bad weather. 'A succession of very rainy days not only dilutes enthusiasm, but very much limits opportunities' for obtaining information.

Moreover, none of the writers represented here were professional anthropologists, though some of them wrote better anthropology than many of the supposedly 'trained' young men of the present day. Most of them were soldiers. Dalton belonged to the Bengal Staff Corps. Johnstone began his career in the 'Bengal Army'. Woodthorpe was commissioned in the Royal Engineers. Godwin-Austen was educated at Sandhurst and commissioned in the old 24th Foot, afterwards the South Wales Borderers, and the same may be said of several others. Mackenzie and Damant were members of the Indian Civil Service and some of the officers of the Topographical Survey were civilians, but the soldiers predominated.

A last and unexpected problem arose in the fact that in those turbulent days precious notes and documents were lost. Many of Dalton's manuscripts were 'lost to him during the mutinies' with the result that his notes on some of the Assam tribes were 'not as full as he should have liked to have made them'. Damant's invaluable Manipur Dictionary and a paper on the Angami Nagas were destroyed by the Nagas in the Kohima stockade. In fact, far from criticizing the nineteenth century men for their defects we should be astonished that, under the circumstances, they collected so much information and wrote as well as they did.

It has been impossible to avoid references to head-hunting and war for, as H. G. Wells said of the Europe of 1918, war was 'an atmosphere, a habit of life, a social order'. Some of the comments on Naga methods of war by these writers are very severe. But we should remember that in the nineteenth century, when they wrote, war was still comparatively a gentlemanly affair. I doubt whether officers who had had experience of the methods of Commandos or of Resistance Movements in modern Europe would have found anything very astonishing in what some of the Nagas used to do.

¹ For his father, Colonel Shakespear, see Bibliography.

I found work on this book fascinating and it would have been possible to spend another two years editing it with appropriate footnotes and comments. It is, I think, the small details which are particularly delightful—General Johnstone's cat carrying off his breakfast at Samagudting; the bathing-drawers presented by Mrs Grimwood to her nine *malis*; Lieutenant Browne-Wood digging up surface coal with a Naga spear, the only implement he had with him. Then there is the delightful incident on Christmas Day, 1844, when Major Butler's surveyor came into camp completely exhausted after a long march. He was, Butler tells us, 'a very abstemious man and was always boasting of the inexpressible delight he experienced in satisfying his thirst from every limpid stream and eating sweet biscuits'. But in view of his condition that day Butler gave him a pint of warm porter whereon he rallied instantly, and with a dish of 'hermetically sealed soup' and a slice of ham soon got over his fatigue, and in later years found a glass of brandy more refreshing than the waters of a stream. Another day we see a party of surveyors buying a large basket of rice for one rupee paid in four-anna pieces, with which the Nagas immediately bought a worn spike of a spear, iron being more valuable to them than silver.

And there was the old lady with a very large goitre whose house Dr Brown approached when he visited her village. 'Standing at her hut-door she seemed enraged at our appearance and kept muttering as we passed. Occasionally she clutched her throat and made a motion of throwing her goitre at us, doubtless cursing volubly the while. We smiled benignly on the hag and passed on.'

The death of Captain Butler's Madrassi cook on tour was a serious loss for, says the narrator, 'a good cook is required to vary the monotony of camp diet by ingenious little culinary arts'. Perhaps the most sensational event in all John Butler's camps was the arrival in the evening of January the 5th, 1873, of a dak runner, staggering under the weight of Dalton's great book on the *Ethnology of Bengal* and the young Captain reading far into the night and eagerly spotting its few mistakes.

I am greatly indebted to Mr N. K. Rustomji for reading the manuscript of this book with his customary thoroughness and care and for his many suggestions, as well as to Dr J. H. Hutton who directed me to many documents about the Nagas which escaped the attention even of the late Mr J. P. Mills in his Bibliography. I owe

much to Mr B. S. Kesavan, Mr Sourindranath Roy, Mr J. M. Chowdhury, the Librarian of the State Library of Assam and the Librarian of the Anthropological Survey of India. Mr Kesavan and his staff in the National Library in Calcutta gave me every possible assistance while I was preparing this book and their courtesy and friendliness will always remain with me as a very happy incident in my literary endeavours. Mr Chowdhury, most obliging of men, did much to discover for me the books available in Shillong.

Although at no time did I hold an official position in the Naga areas, my knowledge of the Nagas is not confined to books. My first long tour in the Ao and Konyak areas (with a visit to Kohima thrown in) was in June and July 1947, when I had to walk from Nakachari to Mokokchang. At the beginning of 1954 I did a seven weeks' tour on foot in what is now the Tuensang District, and later I paid a number of visits to Nagaland.

V. E.

Shillong

2 October 1962