

# Traditional Naga Village System and its Transformation



A. Nshoga

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A. NSHOGA

*Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Institute of Asian Studies, Kolkata*



**Anshah Publishing House**

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## Chapter 1

# Introduction

The Nagas belong to cognate constellation race. They are classified as one of the Mongoloid stock and trans-migrator races in India having come from outside as is evident from their physical and cultural traits. Most of the authorities have suggested that the Nagas were known as Kiratas, who bear a golden skin, living in the Sub-Himalayan region. Although the primeval history of the Nagas was sketchy, the presence of the Nagas was possibly known in the region some 2000 years ago. They are, therefore, predominantly described as Mongoloid races with a golden-skin, black hair and slanting eyes, evidently of Mongoloid features in physical characteristics. Nagas can be described as of medium, well built body, mesocephalic head, euryprosopic round face, broad high cheek bones, flat platyrrhine nose, brownish yellow or golden-skin, black slanting eyes, epicanthic eyefold and black hair. The hair is projecting straight leiotrichy but are wavy and wooly. They are stalwart in body structure.<sup>1</sup> They speak different language and dialects, differing from one another, and their written script is non-existent. Their languages are branded as derived from Tibeto-Burman speaker groups. The Nagas belong to the same stock but they form different linguistic groups, which distinguish them into different tribes, varying from each other. It is not surprising that originally they belonged to the same blood group from their primeval stage of emergence. The entire Naga races are no doubt living within the same geographical contiguity but due to the divide and rule policy of the British, the Nagas are now bifurcated into different territories, comprising the present territories of Assam, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh and Myanmar.

The Mongoloid population were said to have spread over in China, Amazonia, South-East Asia and North-East India, thousands of years ago.<sup>2</sup> The Nagas are, therefore, considered as Mongoloid, who bear physical and cultural affinity with the people of Mongolia, China, Tibet and South-East Asia. These Mongoloid groups speak Tibeto-Burman languages, as it was inferred by Grierson. Sir George Grierson, a linguistic scholar, who tirelessly studied different languages and he later classified Naga languages

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under Tibeto-Burman speakers. The Mongoloid races who speak Tibeto-Burman languages are Tibetans, Chinese, Japanese, Siamese, Burmese and the Nagas. In the North-East India, the tribes who speak Tibeto-Burman languages are Abors, Miris, Akas, Dafias, Mishmis, Apatanis, Nagas, etc. The Mongoloid races are characterized by golden yellow or brown skin and black, stretched or flat wavy and coarse hair. The eyes are black or dark brown in colour. The eye-slit is oblique and palpebral fissure is narrow. Mongoloid race has a typical eye folds. Their face is broad and zygomatic arches are very prominent. Another characteristic feature of this group is scanty growth of facial and body hair.<sup>3</sup>

It is observed that all the Tibeto-Burman speakers bear common cultural affinity and physical conformities in all respects. However, Nagas are one of the patois-speaking group. They belong to multi-lingual region, widely varying from tribe to tribe, village to village and *khel* to *khel*. There are some languages and dialects, which are spoken by some Nagas but cannot be communicated to another village of the same tribe or the same tribe living in the same village cannot understand the dialect spoken by another *khel*. These complex characteristics are found among the Aos, who speak Chongli and Monsen; among the Rengmas, Tseminyu and Kongsunyu; among the Chakhesang, Chokri and Khuza; among the Semas, Pughoboto and Zunheboto; among the Konyaks, where dialects vary from village to village. Another peculiar characteristic of Naga dialect is that it is spoken in different *khels* of the same village, which are found in Tesophenyu village, Sungratsu, Longmisa, Chungtia, Longsa etc.

Obviously the Nagas belong to one stock but they are isolated from their villages, tribes and languages, though they were originally descended from the same collateral group in the remote past. The isolation of the Nagas might have taken place, probably, thousands of years ago, and they might have assimilated with the aborigines of China, Tibet and South-East Asia. But in course of time, they might have lost their common language and later they brought with them different languages, customs and traditions when they came to the present habitat. It is, therefore, speculated that the Naga dialects are possibly exotic in their origin. As William Robinson writes:

*“There, however, appears to be some mark by which these tribes are distinguished from their neighbours, and some common ties by which they are all bound together as one people, though possibly at present divided into tribes by a diversity of dialects. In all probability, this common ties may have descended to all the present tribes, from the great aboriginal stock by which the hills were first peopled. Other races may from time have entered, and taken refuge in the hills, bringing with them their own dialects; but they have probably amalgamated with the old stock in habits and manners, and*

*above all, in religious and superstitions; and these last especially, may from the great connecting link of all the Nagas, and the cause of separation from other hill tribes.*"<sup>4</sup>

According to the tradition of the Nagas, there was a time when the Nagas had a common language. They were said to have built a huge tower to kiss the sky. The tower reached to a certain height when God forestalled them by enabling them to speak different languages which confounded them on the site when they moved in different directions, leaving the tower incomplete. And that was how the Nagas were believed to have spoken different languages, varied from tribe to tribe and village-to-village.<sup>5</sup> During the 13th and 14th centuries, a number of Naga groups were said to have emigrated from the North-West border of China, probably during the sanguinary conflicts for supremacy, which took place between the different members of the Chinese and Tartar dynasties; others, from political causes may have been driven into the fastnesses of these hills from far-off land bringing with them languages different from each other. Thus, whilst some of the Nagas might have spoken the dialects, derived from a common source, others speak languages of a perfectly distinct stock.<sup>6</sup>

The pre and proto-history of the Nagas is shrouded in mystery, due to the absence of chronicles. The absence of written history, is a great set back to write and learn about the traditional history of the Nagas. Obsolescent Naga myths, legends, folklores and traditions are to some extent still prevalent, but the present generation now is in a state of ablation, and a few Naga elders who have survived till this day are equipped with few memories with them on account of dotage or other reasons. To write about the Naga history is, therefore, a predicament. Hence, it is not tangible to present incisive, compendious and authentic history of the Nagas, for want of written record.

The precise history about the arrival of the Nagas into the present country and their movement, occupying the North-Eastern region is enveloped in complete darkness. Their surviving tradition, myths, legends and folklores simply pointed the routes of migration from the North-East, East and the South, and the time of their arrival and settlement into this region is unknown. However, the presence of the Nagas in this part of the country was first noticed in the 10th century B.C. when the Vedas were compiled.<sup>7</sup> They were referred to as Mongoloid races on the basis of languages, cultural traits, physical characteristics and the route of their migration from South of China and South-East Asia. Probably, the Naga races might have pushed towards the South-East or South-West due to internal conflicts with the aborigines, living between the Hwang-Ho and Yang-Tse Kiang rivers of South China long before the advent of Christ.

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And from this region they possibly began to spread into Tibet, Burma and North-Eastern region through successive waves in different periods of time. The Nagas bear common ties. This common tie, possibly, descended from the same progenitor during the remote past, and from which the present Naga groups are derived. The diverse Nagas are varied in tribe, language, customs and traditions, which are some of the striking points of differences among them but their physical characteristic and cultural traits are some of the strongest point of resemblance and origin.

The history of the Nagas' migration is purely based on their myths, legends, folklores and traditions, which is not supported by any written record. There is no single Naga tribe who has claimed the ancestry of the Nagas, but each Naga tribe holds their own traditions of origins and migration. However, it is amply proved that the Nagas might have been the first settlers in this region. This speculation is believed to be true by the fact that there are no traces of human habitation in this region. Moreover, there is no Naga tradition that relates about the other people preceding the Naga settlement in the region. It is difficult to identify the first settler among the Nagas, but it is certain that the Nagas were the first people in this part of the country before any people arrived and occupied the present place. The Nagas' origin is often blended with myths, legends, folklores and traditions, and some tradition are traced back to their origin of emergence from the bowel of earth, stone and water source. The ancestors of the Angami, Rengma, Chang and Lotha traced their origins from the earth hole; the Aos from Longterok, rock of six stones, while Khamniungan are traced from water source of Noklak and so forth with the other Nagas. There are no definite traces of Nagas migration. This is proved to be true by the fact that most of the Nagas trace their origin or emergence from the present habitat.

There is no definite history leading to the settlement in this country but the formation of the traditional Naga villages were unique, followed with a brief history. The most striking feature of the Naga settlement was the establishment of the village and its location, which is unique and it did not conform with the settlement habits of their neighbouring tribes. The variation of Naga settlement habits was their nature, who invariably lived on the hill-top, while the other neighbouring tribals preferably dwelled on the low land and in close proximity to the river bank.

The primary consideration of the Nagas' settlement culture was the hill-tops, for want of defence. Traditional Naga villages are invariably built on the high elevation places, which is being maintained for healthy defence of the village. The attack of the village is often difficult; strongly built stockades surrounded the village. The approach of the village is usually flanked with narrow path, steep climbs, stone walls and bamboo spike fence

on either sides of the path, leading to the gate. One of the most remarkable feature of traditional Naga village was the strategic defence arrangement. The gate of the village is hewn out of a single tree-trunk, ornamented with various geometrical, human, animal and heavenly objects, symbolizing various motives, which depict the life and culture of the village men. Precautionary measures were often arranged in the village by constructing palisades, stone walls, ditches, planting of itchy or thorny plants around the village and a look-out platforms with sentry on guard. This kind of security arrangement have been provided, so as to thwart the surreptive enemy's attack. Isolated hills, extremities of spurs, a ridge with steep precipice and rising slope sites were selected as the location of the village to provide additional defence. Traditional Naga villages have been living under constant threat from their known and unknown enemies. In view of such threats, the primary consideration of village establishment was to ensure natural and man-made impediments against the enemy's attack. The other consideration of the sites is proximity to water source, cultivable land and forest. Since the villages are often built on the summit of a hill, the supply of water is arranged from below the village. An ideal Naga village is invariably built on the summit of a hill or on the spurs, which naturally serves to overlook the surrounding areas for the approach of the enemies. A defensible position and an accessibility to water source was the most vital consideration of traditional Naga village system.

The distribution of Naga villages are uneven due to the selection of defensible position. Almost all the traditional villages were dotted or perching on the summit of a hill, isolated from each other. When the village engaged in warfare, the approach of the village surroundings were studded with pitfalls and bamboo spikes planted in the ditch, and in the narrow lane which inflicted disability with dangerous wounds upon the advancing enemies. Their bachelor dormitory boys serve further security of the village.

The arrival of the Nagas into the present habitat was followed by formation of the village and led to a settled life. Traditional village system is basically a political, social, economic and religious institutions of the people. The Nagas are predominantly confined to village life and they are greatly attached to it. The identity of a Naga is identified through his village. The formation of the village was the first organization of the Nagas. Each Naga village has a historical link with the formation of the village. Traditional Naga villagers were sovereign and independent institutions, governed by a powerful Chief, whose office was hereditary. Monarchical and democratic forms of village government were found among the Nagas. The monarchical forms of government was found among the Semas and Konyaks, whose Chief was autocratic, while pure democratic or theocracy

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type of governments, based on meritocracy were found among the other Naga tribes. The Chief had a supreme authority over his village. However, the Chief was not a despot but he governed the village in the spirit of democratic principles. Land, territory, Chief and the subjects are the major components of village formation. The structure and function of Naga villages were similar to a Greek city-state, where every village enjoyed independence and the Chief of the village was selected by a democratic process. However, the sovereignty and independence of villages, sometime, is threatened by powerful neighbouring villages, if diplomatic relationship with the hostile villages is frozen. Those were the days when inter-village wars were intermittent, sovereignty and independence of the village could be maintained only when a village had a sound system of diplomatic relationship with its neighbouring village Chief. An emissary is, therefore, often appointed to keep in close contact with the neighbouring villages. It was through the emissaries, that the affairs between the two villages about the war and peace is maintained. Every village is not expected to provide all the security to the inhabitants of the village, although the village is big and powerful. On account of this importance, reconciliation and peace treaty is often concluded between the two warring factions. The usual practice of peace treaty was made in the forms of gift exchange and marriage alliance. Close ties and relationship is often maintained to provide adequate security and independence of the village.

The control of internal law and order situation was another important factor of a village sovereignty and independence. It is, obviously observed that internecine feuds often keep the village weak and divided. A powerful village, however, depends upon the chief's personal influence and charismatic characteristics. A weak village, therefore, often makes an alliance with the powerful village in order to avoid liquidation and subjugation from the third power. In the old days, no village interfered with the internal affairs of another village. This is feasible only when a village had an independent Chief and a sovereign government. Traditionally, the Naga villages were predominantly of autonomous structure. There was no single powerful village which controlled the entire tribal villages. The Chief of the village administers both the secular and religious affairs. He carries out all the religious proceedings and presides over the social gatherings. His words become a law, and his decision is final and binding but he also listens to the advice of his councillors. The Chief declares the agricultural operations and festivals of the village. In some Naga villages, the command of a headman is obeyed only when it is in accord with the wishes of the individuals or community at large, and even then some people would not hold themselves bound in anyway by the wishes and acts of the majority.

Traditional Naga villages are varied in size and population. The villages range from twenty to thousand of houses, closely built together in two rows, where the gable is facing each other and the street is provided in the middle of the houses. A village is further divided into two or more *khels* according to the number of pedigrees or geographical setting of the village. Most of the Nagas maintained the *khels* according to the geographical setting of the village. In the Angami villages, the *khels* is maintained according to the clans. Each *khel* is identified by a separate *Morung*. The number of *khels* are depend on the size of the village. A separate *khel* indicated different identity of the members in competitive spirit. On account of this attitude and interests, a slight insult to his village or *khels* is resorted to war or feuds. However, the entire population of the village or *khels* is bound together by social, political, religious and economic ties; especially when a village is attacked by the enemies, the entire village men put up a combined resistance. There is a spirit of unity and solidarity among the members of the village, irrespective of their *khels*. A Naga village is a unit of political and social relations through which the entire village institutions are interwoven and interdependent, although the village is further subdivided into several *khels*. A close *inter-khel* relationship is the prospect of a village institution.

Each Naga village has a well defined territory which consists of both the cultivable and uncultivable land in it. Inter-village boundary is marked by moveable and immoveable objects. The moveable objects are marked by stones, while the immoveable objects are formed by a river, stream, ridges and hillocks. All the inter-village land disputes are settled by the members of the village court on the basis of customary law. The usual method of settlement is made by the imposition of fine or taking an oath, and the case is dismissed.

The name of the village is suitably chosen from the peculiarities of the site, nature of the site, incidental place and the founder's name. Nomenclature of Naga village is carefully given otherwise misfortune befalls upon the inhabitants of the village. The usual practice of naming the village is that it is given by the wise man, priestess or sorcerer in ritualistic perspectives. The naming of a village is given once for all and it carries the identity of its inhabitant.

The formation of traditional Naga villages might have begun when they learnt to live in a social group from nomadic life after many years or so without proper home and food. There were many factors which contributed to the formation of a settled village life. The foremost form of settled village was the practice of agriculture, while the second instance was the domestication of animals which contributed to the growth of

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settlement in the process of civilization. It is when man settles down to till the soil and lays up provisions for the uncertain future that he finds time and reason to be civilized. When a certain area of habitat is secured with a reliable supply of food and water, he begins to build his house, domesticate his cattles and gradually invents productive tools and implements. He learns to work with the community labour and maintain his family life, and transmits more completely than before the mental and moral heritage of his tribe. More and more settled life would be improved as man continues to remain in agricultural pursuits, which finally contributes the ideas for the growth of barter trade. The physical and mental developments are some of the only prerequisites to the formation of a village though it did not constitute or generate them. These two factors must come into play. There must be political order and certain principles of unity among them, but the most important factor is the affinity of cultural traits among the same group. Probably, there must also be some unity of basic beliefs and practices of equal interests. Common interests, such as economic, political, social and religious beliefs are necessary to evolve within the society. The establishment of a settled village is the achievement from food gathering to food producing community.

Traditional Naga village had plenty of land and forest under its control. It also had community reserve forest and land for cultivation. Collection of fire-wood and raw-materials are done from individual forests as well as community reserve forests. However, random felling of timber, burning and encroachment of community reserve forests is strictly prohibited by the village authority. Traditional Naga village attained its status of self-sufficiency and self-reliance from its own resources. Some Naga villages produced surplus quantity of salt and supplied it to the neighbouring villages on barter system. The only demand from outside the village was the iron implements, which was procured from the plains of Assam in exchange for their cotton and other agricultural products. This demand was, however, required at a *minimum* level of supply. The village was a self-governing and self-determining institution, where the life was one organic whole. It was because of their collaboration in matters of common interest which produced a collective consciousness among the villagers. The village population survived for many centuries without any disruption of economic life, based on self-reliance. Complete independentness in the field of agriculture from outside world was maintained in the villages. Trade and commerce was limited in the village, since there was no necessity to travel outside the village, except on salt and iron requirements which they usually imported from outside. Traditional Naga village population continued to live for centuries without disruption of social, political and

economic autonomy. The village production was exclusively meant for village use and the entire village population lived in the state of self-sufficient life. The economic system of the Nagas is based on simple barter system and *cowrie* shells were used as a mode of exchange.

Traditional Naga villages maintained their glory till the arrival of the British into the soil of the Nagas. Tremendous changes have taken place in the field of political, social, religious and economic institutions with the occupation of the country by the British during the 19th century A.D. The annexation and occupation of the hills led to the transformation of traditional Naga villages into modernity. The transformation of Naga villages correspondingly disrupted and ruined the village institutions. The pre-British Naga village community enjoyed maximum freedom and self-sufficiency in matters economic, and they consumed the things which it produced in the village. The village community obtained all kinds of raw-materials locally and from near the village. They carried out their normal activities like agricultural operation, domestication of animals and observed other social and religious ceremonies without any obstacles. With the advent of the British, the entire Naga village institutions were destroyed and fell into disuse. With the introduction of British administration in the hills, the old order of society, political, religious and economic cooperation have withered away. The social, political and economic function of the village community were undertaken by the British government. The self-governing village, based on local customs and traditions broke down and dismembered. The defence arrangement of the village fell into decay with the banning of head-hunting and raids, which was replaced by the local police to monitor the law and order problem in the village. The village gradually transformed from self-governing village into the puppet of the British government, and from independent economic system into dependent economic condition. The economic and administrative autarchy of traditional Naga village virtually disappeared. Collective village life, based on common interests and the outcome of cooperative relations gave way to individual competition and struggle. The occupation of the British in the hills marked the destruction of economic self-sufficiency and an independent village. The creation and penetration of capitalist economy into the village along with the political and administrative unification in the hills, by bringing all the independent villages into a single unified state system, struck a mortal blow to the seemingly impregnable traditional Naga villages. New systems of law, administration, beliefs and cultures were introduced. Formerly custom and tradition mostly governed the relationship between the members of village community. Many new legal codes were introduced by the British and imposed upon the Nagas; and they imposed

house tax on them which was unknown to the Nagas. The capitalist economy ruined traditional Naga village economy. The British manufactured goods ruined the indigenous Naga handloom and handicrafts industry. Textile industry and other heavy machinery goods destroyed the indigenous hand spinning, weaving and manufacture of baskets and mats. With the introduction of transport and communication, the isolated traditional villages were amalgamated into a unified administrative system. The village solidarity, bound up with self-sufficient nature of the village was discontinued. Money economy, market system, trade and commerce supplanted the traditional barter system of economy. The rule of the East India Company proved to be disastrous to the indigenous Naga handloom and handicraft sectors. The Naga artisans could not compete with the company's industrial finished goods, flowing into the hills in large scale. The Company as a trading company, produced things cheaply and sold them profitably in the market. The replacement of barter system into currency system gave a great impetus to market economy. Traditional handloom and handicraft industry was absorbed by the company's factory and industry. Introduction of new economic system paved the way for the loss of division of labour among the Naga society.

Traditional Naga village systems were further liquidated and suppressed when the East India Company introduced modern education and the Christian missionaries propagated Christianity among the Nagas. With the arrival of modern agencies, the curious head-hunting was stopped and the Naga ancestors' religious beliefs lost their importance and gradually they came to an abrupt end. *Morung*, the vital organs of Naga social institution were supplanted by Christian institutional hostels, while the festival and feasts of prestige were replaced by Christmas and New Year feasts. The priest of the village lost his influence and a local church pastor dominated the religious life of the Nagas. The attitude and mentality of the Nagas gradually changed from old ways of life to modernization. There has been a radical change in the political, social, economic and religious life of the Nagas with the contact with the Europeans.

Traditional Naga villages have been transformed into modern institutions when it attained its statehood in the 20th century. By the 13th Amendment, Nagaland attained its full-fledged status of the 16th state of the Union of India on 1st December 1963. The state of Nagaland lies between 25° 60' and 27° 40' latitude and between 93° 20'E and 95° 15'E longitude, comprising an area of 16,579 sq. km. with a total population of 19,88,636 according to 2001 census.<sup>8</sup> It is a coterminous state with National and International frontiers. The entire state is bounded by Assam on the North and West, Arunachal Pradesh and Myanmar on the East and Manipur

on the South. The topography of the state consists of rugged and unhabitable terrain, which is further divided into deep ravines, spurs and ridges. The landscape of the state is uneven and the altitude of relief is widely varied from 194 metres to 3840 metres above the sea-level. Saramati is the highest peak in Nagaland which is 3840 metres above the sea-level, situated in Tuensang district; while mount Japfu is the second highest peak with 3014 metres above the sea-level, and it is located in Kohima district.<sup>9</sup> On account of unequal distribution of landscape, the climate, weather and temperature is varied from place to place. In Nagaland, Pfutsero town is located at the highest altitude at 2133.60 metres above the sea-level, followed by Tokiye with 2042.26 metres above the sea-level; while the town situated at the lowest altitude is Dimapur at 260 metres above the sea-level.<sup>10</sup>

Nagaland has a few pockets of plains, which are found in Dimapur, Tizit and Naginimora. There are two ranges, Patkai and Barail Range, connected with each other in the vicinity of Kohima. The Barail Range is locally known as Radhura, enters the state from North Cachar Hills and after passing through Kohima, it runs in the direction of Wokha. Mount Japfu is the highest peak of Barail Range. With the sudden rise of Barail Range on its Northern face of about 12 km. wide a miniature type of valley is formed in between the Barail Range and Samaguting Hills. The Patkai Range forms a watershed, which constitutes the International boundary between India and Myanmar. The Barail Range joins the Patkai Range from South of Kohima and crosses the Mao area to Tuensang district.

The state of Nagaland has a few valleys, such as Gaspani, Baghty, Bhandary, Merapani, Lakhuni, Tiru, Dzelake and Dzukou valley. Dzukou valley is known for its natural and scenic beauty, which attracts the tourists and environmentalists. It is situated in Kohima district of Barail Range.

Nagaland predominantly being a hilly state, numerous rivers and streams are drained from the land in serpentine courses. Most of these rivers and streams originate from the state and run towards the South and North to Assam and Myanmar. The entire state of Nagaland has serrated ridges, separated from each other by deep gorges through which rivers and streams originate and drain into the plains of Assam. Doyang is the largest river in Nagaland, originated from the vicinity of Mao and Angami territory. It flows toward the North before it joins the Brahmaputra river. Dansiri is the second largest river which rises from the South-West of Kohima district and runs in Dimapur district. It flows westward and then towards the North, which forms the natural boundary with the North Cachar Hills before it falls into the mighty Brahmaputra. Dansiri river receives all the drains from Western and Southern streams; it was navigable for six

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months during the British period. Diboo (Chathe) river is another important river originating from Paona peak, flowing northward direction and with confluence with Dansiri river. Tizu and Zunki are important rivers, originating from Tuensang district and swiftly flowing towards the south, crossing Tuensang, Zunheboto and Phek district and join the Chindwin river of Myanmar. Tizu is the only river in Nagaland which flows across the International boundary. Dikhu is another river in the state, originating from Mokokchung district and flows toward the East. River system in Nagaland has a peculiarity, in which the rivers discharge little quantities of water during winter seasons, but during the rainy seasons, it suddenly increase to a devastating flood.

There is no prominent waterfall in Nagaland, though some irregular falls are formed during rainy seasons. There are some lakes which are found in Phek district, such as Lacham, Achic and Shilloi lake. Shilloi lake is one of the most beautiful lakes in Nagaland, situated in Meluri Sub-division. It is a fascinating spot for the tourists. In Nagaland, lakes are found in a glen amidst the grotesque heights over the stretching ranges.

Tropical monsoon type of climate is found in Nagaland. The monsoon summer occurred during the month from June to October. Monsoon climate is received from South-West and North-East monsoon winds. The North-East monsoon winds originate from West to East, while during the South-West monsoon, it is oceanic in origin and blow mostly from South-West to North-East. Winter season in the state usually commences from November and last till February. During this time a high pressure belt extends over the North-East India. The prevailing direction of winds is from West, North-West to East, owing to the pressure, distribution and influence exerted by the Himalayas. The state being hilly, the minimum and maximum temperature reads between 5°C to 28°C. December and January are the coldest months of the year, when the temperature sometimes comes down to 5°C and goes to a maximum of 15°C to the place where the altitude is situated above 2000 metres above the sea-level. Monsoon rains occur from June to October with an average rainfall of 200 cms. with an annual total rainfall of about 70%. The state also receives pre-monsoon rain which is highly beneficial to agriculturists as the people mostly engage in sowing during this period. Soil erosions are common in Nagaland due to the practise of *jhum* cultivation in the hills.

The state of Nagaland is rich in flora and fauna. It is rich in the concentration of bio-diversity in flora and fauna. The moderate type of climate in the state is favourable for concentration of animals and the growth of natural vegetation. The natural vegetation of the state has a great diversity, ranging from alpine and bamboo – shrubs to scrub – forests in the

foothills to the deciduous forest at the lower altitude and gentle slopes. Nagaland has both the tropical and sub-tropical forests. The main species of these forests are Nahor, Sam, Poma, Khokan, Jhar, Makai, Koroi, Gonseroi, Amari, Hingari, Hollok, Lali, Rata, Titasopa, Bonsun, Gomari, Champa, Walnut, Alder etc. The tropical and sub-tropical forests cover vast area of land in the state, where varieties of birds and animals find safe haven for their natural habitation. Some wild animals, such as elephants, barking deers, wild buffaloes, wild boars, antlers, reindeers, tigers, sambars, serows, bears, wild dogs, monkeys, stags etc., are found in the state. Birds are found in different varieties, such as partridges, nightjars, warblers, robins, quails, wood-peckers, pheasants, crows, bulbuls, sparrows, cuckoos, mynas, royal pigeons, hawks, eagles, hornbills, blithe tragopans, etc. Blithe tragopan is found in Kohima, Tuensang and Zunheboto districts, which is a rare species, found probably only in Nagaland. Blithe tragopan is found only at the high altitude of about 1500 metres above the sea level. Different species of reptiles and insects which are found in the state are pythons, cobras, lizards, toads, kraits, monotors, alligators, tortoises, bees, wasps, crickets, dragonflies, grasshoppers etc.<sup>11</sup>

The state is divided into eight administrative district headquarters. They are Kohima, Mokokchung, Tuensang, Wokha, Phek, Mon, Zunheboto and Dimapur. The Angamis, Rengmas and Zeliangs live in Kohima district; Semas in Zunheboto district; Aos in Mokokchung district; Chakhesangs and Pochuris in Phek district; Lothas in Wokha district; Konyaks in Mon district; Changs, Phoms, Sangtams, Yimchungrüs and Khiamniungans in Tuensang district, while Dimapur is the district for cosmopolitan group of the Naga tribes. There are 14 major Naga tribes and many sub-tribes inhabiting the state. According to 1991 census, there were 1225 Naga villages in Nagaland.<sup>12</sup> Nagaland is a land of enchanting villages. At least 80 per cent of the Naga population lives in the villages.

Nagaland, the homeland of the Nagas, is a land of picturesque undulating hills, belvedere of its landscape, fascinating with lush green and massive folding mountains, bewitching valleys, swift flowing streams and rivers, enchanting villages habited with a diversity of colourful tribes and sub-tribes. In this gorgeous land, dwell many people of diverse customs, traditions and tribals. This diversity of Naga tribes has a great prospect of sociological importance in its research and analysis.

The Naga races are found in the North-East region and Myanmar, comprising the present state of Assam, Manipur, Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh and Myanmar, across the International border of India. The Nagas belong to multi-complex tribes and sub-tribes, where their languages and dialects, cultures and customs, traditions and legends vary from tribe to tribe

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and village to village. However, there is a striking feature of physical and cultural affinity, and their habitating contiguous. There are more than 46 Naga tribes and Sub-tribes inhabiting the North-Eastern region and Myanmar, bordering the Eastern hills of Nagaland.<sup>13</sup> But this thesis is exclusively concerned with the 14 major Naga tribes of Nagaland, such as Angami, Ao, Sema, Rengma, Lotha, Chakhesang, Phom, Khiamniungan, Yimchungrü, Sangtam, Pochury, Konyak, Chang and Zeliang.

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13. The 46 Naga tribes are Anal, Angami, Ao, Chakhesang, Chang, Chirri, Tikhir, Chothe, Kharam, Khiamniungan, Koireng, Kom, Konyak, Heimi, Lainung, Lamkang, Liangmai, Lotha, Marang, Maring, Mao, Makhori, Monsang, Mayon, Nocte, Pangmi, Phom, Pochury, Loumai, Rengma, Rongmai, Rengpang, Sangtam, Sema, Samphty, Shangnu, Shepou, Tangkhul, Tangnu, Tangsa, Tarao, Thangal, Wancho, Yimchungrü, Yudangleanung and Zeme.

The Nagas, with a golden skin, black hair and slanting eyes, are classified as one of the Mongoloid stock and trans-migratory races in India. The Nagas were known for their rich cultural heritages, but their unique history remains unknown to the outside world owing to non exploitation of their cultural history.

The book, a comprehensive one based on oral tradition of fourteen major Naga tribal histories, brings out as to how traditional Naga village institutions were transformed into modernity through the contact of the Western Culture.

The book may be useful for research scholars and students of History and Anthropology and readers interested in the subjects dealt in.

Dr A. Nshoga (b. 1968) obtained his Ph.D. from Nagaland University, Kohima and is presently teaching in Department of History and Archeology at Peren Government College, Peren, and before this assignment he was associated with Zunheboto Government College under the same University. He has contributed many articles in reputed journals and is the co-author of the book *Martial Tradition of North-East India*.

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Marketed by Shipra Publications, Delhi – 110092

ISBN 978-81-8364-051-0



9 788183 640510