Neivetso Venuh

British Colonization and Restructuring of Naga Polity

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The British occupation of Kohima was a landmark in the history of the British colonisation of Naga Hills. Broadly speaking, the history of British colonisation may be divided into several periods : The period of control from without conducted by a system of expeditions; the period of control from within; the period of non-interference; and the period of control from within, merging into gradual absorption into British territory.

The British colonisation of Naga territory gradually brought about certain changes in the administration of the Nagas while leaving them to administer their villages according to their respective customs and traditions. This book is a study of the British Colonization and the restructuring of the Naga polity.

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LAND AND PEOPLE

The State of Nagaland lies on the eastern side of North East India. It has a total geographic area of 16,579 sq. kms.[1] The State lies between 93°21' to 95°15' E longitude and 25°6' to 27°4' N latitude in the shape of a peanut bordering Myanmar in the east, Manipur in the south, Assam in the north and west and Arunachal Pradesh in the North.[2] The State was inaugurated on 1st December 1963 by the then President of India, Dr. S. Radhakrishnan. Thus it became the sixteenth state of India.

Topography

The topography of Nagaland is similar to that of any other young mountain terrain featured with high hills, sharp ridges, with deep and narrow gorges. Barring a few square kilometers of plains along the western foothills and a few small valleys along the rivers, the entire State is covered with hill-ranges. The terrain of Nagaland can be sub-divided into three: (i) high hill-ranges in the east, (ii) medium high hill-ranges in intermediate zone, (iii) outer foothill areas in the west.[3] The altitude of this characteristically hilly State varies between 110 metres and 3,840 meters above sea level.

Nagaland is devoid of any plateau or tableland like the adjacent areas of Arunachal Pradesh and Myanmar. In the outlying hill tract on the western side there are a number of valleys located at an average altitude of 300 metres. On the east of the outer foothills is the intermediate zone, which is characterized by a continuous hilly range with an altitude between 600 meters and 1,200 meters. These medium hill ranges run through the middle of the State from north-east to south-west like a spinal column. The hills gradually rise to an altitude of more than 1000 meters and then spread further towards east. Unlike the medium ones in the intermediate zone, the high hill ranges, which rise to more than 3,000 metres do not

maintain a continuous range. The hills are marked by serrated ridges separated from one another by deep valleys. The eastern part of Nagaland dominated by rugged terrain and lofty hills, remain clothed for a greater part of the year with dense forest.[4] The Patkai Range, the highest mountain range in Nagaland, attains a height of 3,480 meters at Saramati, the extreme eastern high peak. It takes a north-south course separating Nagaland from Myanmar and also acts as a watershed between the rivers of India and Myanmar.[5]

The Barali Range is another important mountain range in the southwestern part of Nagaland. It enters from North Cachar of Assam, which is situated southwest of Nagaland and runs towards Wokha through the vicinity of Kohima. The Japfü, which attains a height of 3,014 meters, is located a few kilometers south of Kohima and is the second highest peak of Nagaland. The Barak Range is connected with the Patkai Range by some small ranges. One of these ranges connects them in the south of Kohima. Upto Mao in Manipur it runs in a southeast direction and from there the range assumes an eastward trend and runs for a few kilometers until it follows a southward direction. It reaches Ukhrul and thereafter continues in an eastern direction.[6]

The hilly nature, rugged terrain and lofty ranges have a great bearing on the population distribution and the human landscape of Nagaland. It is the extreme eastern part adjoining Myanmar, which is less developed and inaccessible mainly because of the constraints imposed by the comparatively formidable physical terrain.

Climate

Nagaland has a typical monsoon climate ranging from tropical to temperate condition. Over the foothills it is warm and tropical, and that over the high hills is cool and temperate. The mid-slopes and lower ranges of the western flank have a moderate sub-montane climate. The summer and winter temperature over the hills vary from 5° to 25° and those over the foothills have a range between 12° to 32°. Over the high hills temperature is cool during winter and occurrence of frost over large tracts is observed; however, snowfall is rare in the inhabited areas.[7] January is the coldest month, winter winds are generally weak and variable. Monsoon lasts from May to September and the annual rainfall varies from 100 cm. to 250 cm.

River System

Nagaland is dissected by a number of seasonal and perennial

streams with U-shaped tiny valleys in between. There are four major rivers that run through Nagaland, viz:– Dhansiri, Doyang, Dikhou and Tizi. Of these, the Dhansiri, Doyang and Dikhou flows towards west and falls into the Brahmaputra, while the Tizi river flows towards the east and south-east and joins the Irrawady in Myanmar.[8]

The Doyang is the longest river in the State originating from the Japfü Hill near the northern slope of Mao of Manipur. It first flows in the northeasterly course for about 74 kms, thereafter, it turns suddenly to the north-west at right angle and traverses in the south-west direction. The river drains the inhabited areas of different Naga groups, sometimes forming itself a boundary for different tribal territories. In the south, it passes through the Angami territory and flows towards the eastern edge of the Rengma territory. Moving northwards, it enters the Sema area and then flows through the Lotha territory. It passes through a great part of the Lotha territory and after flowing towards the south-west for a few kilometers finally falls into the Dhansiri in Golaghat district of Assam.[9]

The Dhansiri, which rises in the southwest of Kohima district, flows in the southwestern part of the Sate. It runs a west wardly course forming a natural boundary with North Cachar Hills at the extreme southwest of the State. Having debauched from North Cachar, it takes an eastward direction and flows through the Rangapahar-Dimapur plains. Again, it runs northward until it falls into the Brahmaputra.[10]

The Dikhou is another important river that originates from the central part of Nagaland near the Nuhuto Hill. The river traverses towards north along the border of Ao, Phom and Konyak tribes and drains their territories. Towards the north, it is joined by its main affluent, the Yangu, which is an important river in the territories of Phoms and Konyaks. The Dikhou flows further to the north and wending its way in the hills of Konyak area, finally. takes leave of the hills at Naginimara. It flows into the Brahmaputra river in Sibsagar district of Assam.[11]

The Tizu river forms an important drainage system in the eastern part of Nagaland and in its deep gorge sections provides vital geological data. It originates from the central part of Nagaland and runs in a northeast direction for about 20 kms. It then takes a bend and assumes a southeasternly course. The river finally leaves Nagaland and exhausts itself into the Chindwin river in Myanmar. The Zunki, the most important tributary of the Tizu starts from the

extreme eastern corner of Tuensang district and flows southward mostly draining the Khiamnuingan territory.[12]

Flora

The wide variation in the altitudes, have given rise to diversity in climate and vegetation. Coupled with the geological formations in various climatic, vegetation and geological belts of the State. Topography and climate, therefore, are the most predominant factors involved in the soil process.[13]

The soil of the valleys and the foothills are alluvial and that of the slopes is colluvial. The soils of the lower ranges are subjected to stronger weathering than those over the high altitudes. The hill slopes of the temperate region are very rich in organic matter, while those developed under pine forest vegetation do not exhibit accumulation of organic matter.[14]

The vegetation and the forest in Nagaland exhibit distinct gradient depending on altitude, physiography, rainfall and soil. Besides, the intensity of biotic interference either single or in combination creates a striking variety of ecological situation. Exposed to the heavy rainfall of monsoon current, the area is endowed with rich flora to high relative humidity and low rate of evaporation. The quantity of rainfall received in the area should have been sufficient to keep the vegetation green throughout the year. But for two reasons this does not happen—first, due to hilly terrain of the land and high ferocity of the soil, water retention capacity is less; secondly, the plants at higher altitudes cannot stand the cold which last for about six months. As a result, most of the undergrowth including shrubs, herbs and grasses start drying-up from November and continues up to March. Further, the conditions are not uniform all over the area but differ from the foothills to the hills and from the hills to the high hills.[15]

Tropical forests occur in the northwestern part viz., Mokokchung district along the foothills adjacent to Assam and a small patch in the Dzuku valley. In the belt the main species are *Oligocephala, Amoora (Wallichu), Dhillenia, T. Chebula Talauma Hodysoni,* bamboos groves, etc.

Sub-tropical vegetation does not climb high altitude and is restricted generally to a limit of 1850 m. Numerous species abound and are allied to Assam hills evergreen type. They also occur as a mixed association of evergreen and deciduous species with bamboos occurring in almost pine patches covering extensive area,

as a result of secondary succession follows degradation of evergreen forests.[16]

Temperate vegetation is found in the higher altitudes between 2000 m. and 3000 m. High altitude and high humidity coupled with heavy rainfall in the area have favoured a high diversity plant species. At slopes of low elevation there is an admixture with *Quercus, Castanopsis, Albizzin, etc.* Pure fine patches ascend the higher hill slopes and ridges on the sunny sides as in the Kiphiri, Pongro, Changsang Range, the Saramati Range in Tuensang District.[17]

Rhododendron forests occur in ridges at high altitudes ranging from 2100 m. to 3000 m. as in the Saramati Range. Rhododendron dominated forest, lichen flora is very prominent with their luxuriant growth on the tree trunks and branches as well as on the rocks.[18]

Alpine vegetation is met with at high altitudes in the ridges of the Saramati Range, which remains covered with snow from October to April. During the mid-summer, after the melting away of the snow, herbs and shrubs along with mosses and lichens come up. High altitude grasses and dwarf Rhododendron are also found, but due to long period of snow the vegetation disappears.[19]

Fauna

Major part of Nagaland, is being covered by forests and jungles where plenty of birds, animals and reptiles are found. Animals like elephant, tiger, jungle cat, golden cat, wild buffalo, wild pig, porcupine, sambar, swamp deer, barking deer, four horned antelope, pangolin, wolf, flying fox, flying squirrel, monkey, bear, giant, monitor, and reptiles like Indian Python, Chines green, tree viper, eastern green mamba and birds like tragopan, nose ring parakeet, woodpecker, great Indian hornbill, red whiskered bulbul, house sparrow, greater raquit, tailed drongo, rock black crow, wild fowl, polyplectrum are the major species of fauna in Nagaland. Tragopan is found in Kohima and Phek Districts whereas elephant is found in Mokokchung, Wokha, Mon and Kohima districts.[20] It may be noted here that the people eat meat of any animal, sometimes including monitor (giant lizard) and snakes. In the wake of modern civilization, which has brought guns to the people after the Second World War, indiscriminate killing of animals and birds have depleted greatly the number of wild animals and birds. The fauna wealth is now no more a wealth except in some pockets of the forests.

Cultivation

The Nagas are mainly agriculturists. There are two methods of cultivation, namely- wet terraced cultivation and jhuming. Angami, Zeliang, Chakhesang, Tangkhul and Mao practice both terraced cultivation and jhuming, whereas Ao, Sema, Lotha, Rengma, Konyak, Sangtam, Phom, Chang etc. practice only jhum cultivation.

By following their age-old method of terracing and irrigation in which they are expert even the hill slopes are turned into flooded rice fields. The method of preparing land for wet cultivation is to dig and build the side of the hill into terraces from 2 to 20 feet broad, 150 feet in length, if the ground level is enough.[21] The terraces are irrigated by channels which carry water from stream or torrent, for a distance that may sometimes be measured in kilometers and many fields being fed on the way. Each terrace, of course, cannot have its own channel, but usually obtains water, either from the next terrace above it or from one of the terraces in the same row.[22] The terrace being so carefully graduated so that the water may flow from terrace to terrace round a whole square and back again to a point little below that from which it started. Water is also often carried from one terrace to another terrace in a hollow bamboo passing over other terraces and channels in between.[23]

Water is considered as property. The first man to dig a channel tapping acquire the right to the water source. The water that is drawn naturally in the course of time becomes itself the subject of all sorts of rights; rights of purchase, of customs and of inheritance.[24] Ownership of terraced fields is not communal but strictly individual.[25]

Transplantation methods in the hills differ from that of the plains. Unlike in the plains, it is planted separately in the hills. After this the field needs cleaning and weeding from time to time. Harvesting is done by the end of October and early November depending on the time of ripening of the paddy. It is reaped with saw-sickle, and then grains are separated from the stalk either thrashed by stick or stamping upon by feet.[26] And then the paddy is brought to the village in baskets carried on the bearer's back.

Jhum is the predominant pattern of cultivation in the hilly regions. Jhum cultivation stands on the field only for two years but jhum cycle might have covered five to nine years. The duration of the cycle is limited because of the efforts made by the administration and villages themselves to keep portions of their forests protected from constant ravages.[27] Each village has a given area set apart

for cultivation, its size is traditionally determined and has not varied significantly for generations. In any particular year the villages would decide on the basis of rough estimate of their requirement and their man power resources to cultivate.[28] Though jhum is the traditional method of cultivation, its production is much less than in terrace.

The main crops of production of the Nagas besides rice are – millet, barley, cotton, potato, sweet potato, sugarcane, chilly, ginger, cow pea, beans, garlic, mustard, oil seeds.[29]

"Naga" is a generic term referring to a group of tribes, who inhabit the hills on both sides of the international border between India and Myanmar. Within India, Naga tribes are concentrated mainly in Nagaland, and they are also found in parts of Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur and Assam.

Racial Affiliation

The Nagas are predominantly grouped under Mongoloid racial stock.[30] Although the Konyaks reflect all the morphological traits of the Mongoloid group,[31] all tribes are not typical Mongols physical traits. They are medium in size as well as in height and possess straight black hair, black eyes, epicanthic eye-fold and other features which are characteristics of the Mongoloid people. Some scholars claim the presence of Caucasic elements in a remarkable degree among the Nagas.[32] They, however, have not been explained as to how and at what stage this admixture took place. The Nagas are, according to M. Horam a result of the age-old contact between the Mongols and the Caucasic people.[33] Even before the Mongol diffusion from the Tibetan plateau, Caucasic people had migrated and spread to the farther east and South-East Asia and the outlying areas of the Pacific. As all the people affected by the migration of the Caucasoid people has been called the Indonesian culture-complex the Nagas are also included to it. Scholars generally agree as to the general expansion of the Mongoloid people throughout South-East Asia, which may have begun as many as 10 to 12 thousand years ago, and it was possibly from a region of North China. In much of South-East Asia, the mongoloid peoples appear to have supplemented the earlier aboriginal population of the Negritos.[34] This movement of the Mongoloid people is found to have continued till recent historic times.[35] It is for this reason certain non-Mongoloid physical characteristics are found among the Nagas. J.H. Hutton observes, while working among the Nagas in the inaccessible interior Naga Hills, that some individuals or some times whole communities show decided signs of expansion tracts in their

frizzy hair, aquiline nose voluble and crude disposition.[36]

No systematic bio-anthropological information was ever collected on the tribes of Nagaland but only somatoscopy, somatometry and serology are available. The result of Anthromatric survey conducted in Nagaland is still awaited. On the basis of bio-anthropological information, Nagas vary in stature ranging from short to medium height, their nose vary from narrow to broad and the face is generally narrow to broad. No colour blindness and sickle cell has been reported. The frequency of B gene is relatively low but O gene is high. Haplotype R 1 has high incidence but R haplotype is absent, a characteristic of Mongoloid population.[37]

The Mongoloid population, probably brought with them Neolithic traits such as horticulture, stone axes and pottery.[38] This general outline has long been associated with a theory of origin based on the nature of stone tools. Throughout South-east Asia there are two principal language groups- the Austroasiatic and the Austronesian, also called the Malayo-Polynesian.[39] The historic spread of the people, speaking these two languages, is often measured according to the incidence of particular stone axe-heads: a shouldered or danged tool. The axe-head with an elongated butt, which allows more efficient rafting, associated with the Austroasiatic speaking people and a faceted, polished quadrangular edge that is with rectangular cross section associated with the Austronesian people. The Austronesian influence is generally thought to be more recent, perhaps from around the middle of the second millennium B.C. Regarding the point of origin of Autronesian, Julian Jacob thinks that they are either of Island South-East Asia or of China.[40] Both types of tools mentioned above have been discovered in the Naga inhabited areas. The shouldered tool may be taken as evidence of the presence of an Austroasiatic speaking population, and the quadrangular tools give evidence to a more recent Mongoloid and Austronesian speaking population. Tools discovered in Nagaland with a shouldered-butt and quadrangular section suggest a mixed culture that developed either in Naga hills or brought there from outside.[41]

The Austroasiatic and Austronesian groups are of relevance because of the fact that both are connected to the widespread occurrence of what some have called a "megalithic culture" found throughout Island South-East Asia. Its characteristics are the erection of large stone monuments and forked wooden posts raised to commemorate the death and also to enhance status when "feast

of merit" is offered and a set of beliefs about ritual prohibition or taboo and about a powerful soul-substance of virtue residing in the human head.[42] According to Furer-Haimendorf, the megalithic complex found in Assam and in many parts of South-East Asia should not be taken as an accidental aggregation of various cultural elements, but as well co-ordinated system of customs and beliefs, a philosophy of life and nature.[43]

On the basis of common cultural traits, Smith finds a link of the Nagas with the people of Malaya and the people of the Island of Indonesia such as Borneo, Sarawak.[44] Some of traits are the practice of head hunting, common sleeping houses of unmarried men and women, the disposal of dead on raised platform, betel chewing, tattooing etc. R.R. Shimray thinks that the Nagas must have come from sea coast or at least were associated with some island or sea as is evidenced by their lifestyles and their ornaments which are noticed till today in many Naga Villages. He also states that Naga customs and way of life are much similar to those of people living in the remote parts of Borneo, Sarawak, Indonesia, Malaysia.[45] Julian Jacobs opines that the Naga people have some connection with the sea, and he gives two possibilities: (1) Some sea-faring people in out-rigger canoes might have brought this influence from Island South-East Asia to the mainland South-East Asia by the Bay of Bengal, and thence overland to Nagaland through Southern Burma. (2) It may be that the route was more directly overland from a postulated source area in Southern China.[46]

Language

The languages, or dialects as may be called, spoken by the Nagas are marked by numerous complicated dialectical variation which neither belong to the Austroasiatic nor the Austronesian family languages. They speak multitude of dialects often differing from one village to another even within the tribe. In earlier days sometimes it so happened that men and women in the same household had to use different forms of speech.[47] These mutually incomprehensible tonal languages have placed the Naga group to the Tibeto-Burman sub-family of the Sino-Tibetan language family.[48] This group also includes languages of the neighbouring hill peoples, such as the Garos of Meghalaya and Kachins of Myanmar. The linguistic factor does not, however, undermine the theory of a South-East Asian cultural affiliation of the Nagas. The Tibeto-Burman populations, quite possibly, constitute movement into the Naga hills coming after the Austroasiatic or Austronesian influences.[49] Many commentators

have noted the links between the Nagas and other hill people speaking Tibeto-Burman languages. J.H. Hutton notes parallel, for example, between the Sema and the Garo in languages, and in the erection of Y-shaped posts, and between the Sema and the Kacharis in the name of the Creator God.[50]

It is possible to envisage widespread cultural horizons and traditions sharing parallel development with contacts and burrowing, resulting in a gradual process of change. Migrations had been there, but this does not require the identification of a single source of origin from which occurred the physical transportation of traits from one area to another. The area characterized by migratory slash and burn cultivation will, after all necessarily, bring neighbouring people into contact with each other, facilitating a process of contact and burrowing. The ancestors of the Nagas did not reach Nagaland at one phase nor did the Naga amalgamation of a customs and beliefs arrive en-bloc. The present arrangement has most probably been created by the interaction of the Naga groups in their present location.

People

The total population of the Nagas as a whole is difficult to ascertain officially. However, in 1993 while celebrating the 'Naga Week' at Kohima in commemoration of UNO declaration of Indigenous People of the World, every Naga tribe participated and noted down the number of each tribe.[51] The calculation comes to about 3 million people. A total number of thirty-four Naga tribes are identified in India, and they inhabit, as stated above, in four States of North-East India.

Family

Family is the basic unit of the Nagas. A family generally consist of a husband and wife and their unmarried children. The father, or, if father is no more, eldest male member is the head of the family. The Nagas generally do not practice the joint family.

Economy

Land, forest and water constitute the main economic resources, and these are owned and managed at several levels, individual and communal. Villages are grouped into *khel* based on lineage and clan. Landlordism and landless are wholly absent.

Among the domestic animals pigs occupy an important place in the economy of the Nagas, other animals such as buffaloes, mithuns *(Bos Frontalis)*, dogs, cows etc. are also domesticated for both food and economic purposes. Earlier many of these were used as items of exchange among the Naga tribes and also certain products such as chillies, ginger and cotton were taken to the plains for obtaining dried fish, salt, cloth etc. Mithun, buffaloes, pigs and cows have great socio-religious significance to the Nagas.

Weaving is an important occupation of the women. All women are expected to know weaving and they produce the necessary cloths of the family. Cane and bamboo works are taken up in wider scale in the villages. Black-smithy had been one of the old occupation of the Nagas.

The Naga houses are built on hilltops mainly for reason of defense. The house have high gable ends with eaves almost touching the ground as precaution against high wind which blows in February and March. The houses are generally made of wood, bamboo and thatch, and some are as long as fifty feet in length.

Food Habit

For ecological and cultural reasons the Nagas are generally non-vegetarians. Meat of almost every kind of animals, different types of insects, worms are their favourite item of food. Rice is the staple food of Angami, Chakhesang, Rengma, Ao, Lotha, Pochury while millet and Job's tears are staple food for other tribes. Several types of tubers, leaves and shoots form items of food along with rice. Chilly is inseparable ingredient of curry and bamboo shoots of different kinds are very popular. Rice beer called *'zu'* is a common drink. However with the introduction of Christianity many have abandoned the consumption of rice beer.

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