

Remembered Naga Heroes/ Heroines of ohe Legendary Khezhaheno Village of Nagaland

DR LUCY ZEHOL

Department of Anthropology,
North Eastern Hill University, Shillong, Meghalaya

When speaking of remembered heroes from the past, we generally find that the images of warriors as well as the great head-hunters come to the minds of the people in this legendary Naga village. Leadership was often attained when a person was able to show his courage and prowess by counting the heads taken. Some people including the colonialist writers considered the Naga head hunters as 'uncivilized' or extremely 'barbarous', creating an image of horror. Head hunting was not senseless killing of the enemy but a tradition connected with the tribal principles of heroism, justice, honour, pride, and recognition, and the victim's head was a trophy of honour and bravery. Among all Naga groups, the average of female beauty was considered extremely low, even being described as 'exceptionally ugly' by the colonists in their monographs. However, for the Nagas their women described as heroines, were not only known for their external physical beauty but for their special spiritual powers as well. Special mention may be made of the role women played as *demi* (negotiator) between warring villages. Profiles of some heroes/ heroines from the remembered past of the village of Khezhakeno are presented here:

Tiyilhou: A champion in taking the heads of his enemies, Tiyilhou's bravery echoed in and around the village. Even during broad day light, he would dare to venture into enemy turf and return back with the victims' heads as a trophy. In memory of this great warrior, a monolith was erected and to this day the monolith proudly stands.

Azo: Standing tall at a height of uncharacteristic eight feet, Azo was referred to as a man with gigantic stature. He was so tall that he could even place his elbow on the village gate and would often blow his horn. He is believed to have gone riding on a huge buffalo for collecting tax. People paid tax with a currency called *sheh*. Villagers revered and respected Azo. He left people in awe. Even neighboring villagers paid tribute to him in cash or kind for gaining his favour. His eminent stature in village matters automatically made him a very capable leader.



Azo was also a warrior. He is referred to as one of the greatest warriors that ever lived. He was fearless. He wrestled bears and tigers with bare hands and was practically invincible. People believed that the secret of his strength was derived from the large amount of food he consumed. He would eat three times a day. Each meal comprised of a piglet, a huge rooster and a kilogram of rice. He owned the area of Ezako, with paddy fields and woodlands measuring approximately six acres. He died of poisoning by enemies.

A formidable terror to his foes, Tiyilhou dared ventured into his enemies' turf even in broad day light and returned with heads as trophy.



Mr. Vihon Nendi

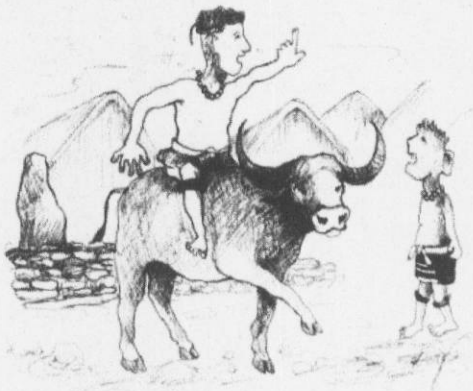
Standing tall at eight feet height, Azo place his elbows on the village gate and blew his horn.



Mt. Vitilhou Noudi

Kajüso: Kajüso and a companion were great warriors (*yikrü*) after Tiyilhou and Azo. There was an occasion when the two barged into the

Azo moved around on the back of a huge buffalo to collect taxes.



Mt. Vitilhou Noudi



Khachulo Zehol

neighboring enemy's village and returned with seven baskets of slain heads. Together they revenged the Mao warriors who had destroyed their paddy fields and killed men and women of different ages in their absence. To confuse his enemies, it is said that he would move out of an enemy village by walking with his toes pointing towards the enemy village.

Kolade: Kolade was known for his prowess with the spear. A great son of the soil, he is said to have defeated the greatest Mao warriors with just a spear. Upon returning to his village with the prized victim's head, he was accorded great honour and accolades.

Solhou Sova: Sova was brave and unpredictable. His popularity spread like wild fire in and around the village. Even neighbouring villages were frightened of him. It was believed that he possessed a special ability to remain out of sight even in close proximity and he could kill and collect the victim's head from this proximity. He was so skilful in his moves that they even said, 'neither an eagle nor a tiger could hide but Sova would'. Whenever news of his arrival reached enemy villages, they would immediately station their best warriors at strategic points around the village. There was a time when he was caught unaware by his enemies but he managed to survive by pretending to be dead.

On another occasion, he was overpowered by Mao warriors. To ensure that he was dead, they pierced a spear through his mouth. But he suddenly jumped up and made his escape by climbing the tallest tree. It is said that he would treat his wounds with the burnt feathers of a huge rooster that he had feasted on. Sova was believed to be invincible and people had full faith that he could escape death. Unfortunately, one day while returning from the field, he was ambushed and killed by his enemies.

Pfhüza: Known for his sportsmanship, Pfhüza was another great warrior. He defeated the wrestlers of neighboring villages.

Pirha: He was considered a great warrior. On one occasion, enemies came and attacked the village. The villagers in desperation requested him to save the village. Unfortunately, his mother had died that day and he asked the villagers to wait till he buried his mother. After he buried her, he rushed to the enemy camp with a rice pestle. Due to his prowess, the enemies were compelled to retreat from Khezakeno.

Beautiful and outstanding women

Kovie-o: Kovie-o radiated the kind of beauty that was discussed from one generation to the other. She was so beautiful that people

remembered and talked about her splendour for seven generations.

Akule D/o Ravo: She was gorgeous and said that while visiting Kohima, the rich man's son asked for her hand in marriage.

Dze-o: A special woman, Dze-o, was believed to be close to the heart of the creator. She was believed to possess some supernatural power in foretelling.

Tarünie-o: Tarünie-o was a foreteller. She foretold the future of the village. Prior to her death, she told the villagers, that, in case of drought, they should come to her grave and sing:

*"Tarü dzedze
Ishe no no, Eshe no no
Solhuo le medzüsa pha bou"*

Belief was that, when the villagers came and sang the song, the heavens would open wide and pour down rain.

Kevechü-o, Zonie-o and Zode-o:

Women were born with special powers that were not just limited to external physical appearance. Nyiepi-o, the spirit associated with wealth and riches was believed to be possessed by some fortunate women. It was believed that if a woman owned nyiepi-o, her family would be very rich and was referred to as;

"Nou-u ki mi nyiepi-o mepfe-e chüta"
(Your family looks as if you own Nyiepi-o)

Very few blessed women could see nyiepi-o, the spirit. Those who claimed to have seen nyiepi-o were Kevechü-o W/o Tirilhou Pfüdzü and Zonie-o W/o Michirodzü. Zode-o W/o Chepuyie owned nyiepi-o and she was believed to have the gift of drawing milk from her thumb.

Demi (Mediator): Women also played a significant role as mediators called 'demi' during head hunting days. It was rare to find a villager volunteering to act as mediator between two warring villages. On such situations, women played a commendable role as negotiator and mediator. They mediated and initiated for peace between the warring villages. Besides their diplomatic role, Demis were also the only ones who could carry the head of a slain victim to the bereaved family of enemy villages. Their role was so important that it was tabooed for warring villages to slay or kill a Demi (*Demi pi-o yie kü nyü*). It was through their role that ushered in between the warring villages. Some of the Demis who are remembered to this day are:

Kaponie-o : She mediated between Khezhakeno and Mao-Maram villages.

Sova was believed to have a special ability to remain invisible to his enemies that enable him to easily kill and collect enemies' heads.



Mr Vilalhou Noudi

Tarünie-o : She mediated between Khezhakeno and Poumai villages.

She-o : She mediated between Khezhakeno and Lanumi or Nenumi (i.e., Poumai) villages.

Conclusion

In the wake of Christianity which has brought education and modernization in Nagaland, the people's history and tradition contained in folklore are being marginalized and almost pushed to the brink of extinction.

This collection of short narratives of exploits and accomplishment

of Naga heroes (warriors) and heroines and their legends are descriptions of the ideal Man and the ideal Woman of the Nagas in the pre-colonial era. The heroines in the narratives are idealized and they serve as an example of virtue, to be emulated. It is a matter of great pride, the



Heavenly Zolung

Women played a special role as negotiator and mediator. They acted as spokespersons known as 'Demi' who mediate for peace between warring village



Mr. Vilalhou Noudi

highest form of honour to be praised in songs and narratives. The most interesting thing is that the Naga cultures seem to have a balance between focus on Men and on Women that cannot be said for many other cultures. To prevent electronic

media to eclipse communities that are based on oral tradition, the new generation needs to be sensitized through the documentations of such tales and other means. This is a humble attempt towards it. ❀