

MEMOIRS OF A NAGA CENTENARIAN



PFÜRON SENTSI

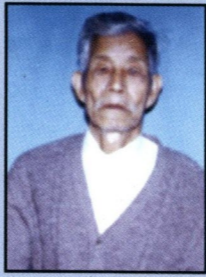
Memoirs of a Naga Centenarian is the lifetime account of Pfuron Sentsi (from the Rengma tribe), one of the last surviving pioneers of the Naga National Movement.

This is a narrative based on the dates of entry of various events in his personal diary, his live statements and the valuable materials found preserved in his possession; which have all contributed greatly in the formation of these memoirs.

As the story of his life and experiences unfolds in print, we are able to get a glimpse of that period in Naga history which many of the present generation cannot even imagine. It is also a revealing study on a broad spectrum of the historical background of the Rengma community and the Naga society in general.

Today the Naga issue has made international headlines, and peace talks are continuing with the Government of India, on a regular basis. It is through old records and books such as this, that one can delve into the background and decipher the psyche of the Nagas. Although this book was completed while Sentsi was still alive, as we readied for press, came the sad news of his death at his village home.

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Pfuron Sentsi was born to Whentsi and Hihale of the Rengma Naga tribe at Phenshunu in 1913. He was converted to Christianity in 1921. After completion of his Matriculation from Jorhat Christian High School in 1936, Sentsi served for two years as an Assistant Teacher at the Mission School, Kohima. In 1938 he joined as an Assistant in the Deputy Commissioner's Office, Naga Hills District. He then became an interpreter and guide to the Duke of Wellington's Regiment (West Riding) during World War II in 1944. In 1945, Sentsi became Joint Secretary of the Naga Hills District Tribal Council (NHDTTC) and in 1948 while he was the Headmaster in a Rengma school, Sentsi was appointed as the 1st Chairman of the Rengma Bench Court. During this time he resigned from his job in the D.C.'s Office due to ill health.

P. Sentsi was a man of great vision who had a profound desire to lead his people from darkness to light. His deep love and concern for his homeland and his people is amply testified by his sacrifices and involvement in the expanding Christian activities, World War II, the Naga National Movement and in developmental works of the then new State of Nagaland.

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Pfüron Sentsi

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I

EARLY YEARS AND EDUCATION

Pfüron Sentsi, the seventh child among thirteen children was born to Whentsi and Hihale of Tseminyu of the Rengma Naga tribe. His father Whentsi belonged to the Kent clan and was a fourth generation descendant of the great warrior Tsüsü, who originally hailed from Tseminyu but had settled in Sendenyu village. The third generation Tsonthonga migrated to Phenshünyu. His mother Hihale belonged to the Kempvünyu clan and his father was the first Church Deacon and remained one throughout his life. All of Sentsi's other ten siblings died at an early age. Out of the three children that survived, Pfüron Sentsi was the eldest followed by Kegwaga and Daniel.

Sentsi was born at a time when no written record of births, deaths, and other events were kept. The year and date of his birth was therefore deduced by counting the *jhum* cycles, as was the tradition among the Nagas. He was sent to study in the Mission School at Kohima in February 1924. That was the year after the eleventh harvest year since he was born. Hence, it went to his school record that he was born in 1913. The day of his birth was just three days prior to the communal clearing of the field path. This particular communal work was usually done once in the middle of the year during the last two or three days of the lunar month end. It falls roughly within the last week of June and the first week of July. It was therefore, assumed that he was born on 1st July 1913. Though Sentsi's family hailed originally from Tseminyu village, for the last three generations they had been settled at Sendenyu and then at Phenshünyu villages. So, Sentsi was born and brought up at Phenshünyu.

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By the time he was born, the British had already annexed a portion of the Naga territory. The American Baptist Mission had also started their activities in some parts of Nagaland. But in the Rengma village of Phenshünyu, Christianity was not heard of; life was not any different from what it had been centuries ago. The British did not interfere much in the conduct of their everyday activities except in banning the practice of head hunting. Sentsi's parents Whentsi and Hihale were very hard working and he fondly remembers spending the whole day with Kenyele who played with him and cared for him till his parents came home from the fields in the evening.

World War I

It was a very clear and fine day; Sentsi remembers seeing his uncle Chenyato coming out of the house carrying his back-basket made of cane and bamboo. When he inquired where uncle Chenyato was going, his mother replied that he was going to the war in the White men's country. As he looked on he saw many other able-bodied men carrying similar baskets leaving their village and proceeding towards Tseminyu village. He later found out that his uncle and his mates were leaving the village to go to a far and strange land called Europe from where their White rulers had come. He was told that to reach there they had to go across the seven seas. Sentsi being very young had never seen such big waters and could not visualize its immensity. Sentsi's uncle and his friends along with other Nagas from different villages had been recruited by the British to work as labour corps in Europe during the First World War. Altogether, two thousand men from different Naga tribes had been recruited (1000 Semas, 200 Aos, 200 Rengmas, 400 Lothas and 200 mixed tribes).

The Labour Corps Return Home

The Treaty of Versailles between Great Britain and Germany was signed and the war came to an end. In 1918, the labour corps from his village returned home during the months of May-June. However, out of the two thousand that left the Naga Hills, all did not come back. Many were said to have died in Europe, and some on their way back to India. Some even died upon reaching

EARLY YEARS AND EDUCATION

Kohima while waiting to get paid for their services. It must have been indeed a very sad homecoming for those poor souls.

The Influenza Epidemic

Following the return of the labour corps from Europe, there broke out an epidemic of influenza. Though a very common and non-fatal ailment elsewhere, influenza took a very fatal turn and dealt a heavy death toll. Apparently the Nagas then had no access to an antidote for the virus. Sentsi recalls memories of daily scenes of mourners in almost every household for months.

The First White Men

Sentsi was nine years old, the first time he saw a white man. It was an awesome experience. He seemed so tall for a man and so very fair that he looked almost white. Later, Sentsi found out that he was none other than Mr. Charles Ridley Pawsey, who was then, the sub-divisional officer of Mokokchung and later became a legendary Deputy Commissioner of the Naga Hills District for a long period. He was on his way to Kohima through Phenshünyu and thence to Sendenyu where he settled a case of land dispute between two villages in the Günyozun area. Sentsi, at that point of time could not visualise that much later in his adult life, the very same person would come to play an important role in his life.

Thirst for Knowledge

In 1919, the Gospel reached the Rengma villages. Rev. Seliezhü Angami along with Vilezhü Rengma used to make frequent visits to the Rengma tribe. He initiated the education of the Christian children and to a great extent convinced the Christian parents to send their children to the Mission School at Kohima. Meanwhile, Rev. Seliezhü took it upon himself to teach alphabets to the younger children. However, there was the problem of lack of books and he also could not remain in the village all the time. But, he solved this problem by writing the alphabets on a sheet of paper and nailed it on the Church wall. Sentsi and his friend Azüto along with the other children were taught their first alphabets from this makeshift school board. This was the year 1922 and towards

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the end of this year Sentsi was sent to Sendenyu along with Vilezhü Rengma so that he could continue with his studies. On seeing the enthusiasm and thirst for learning, the Kohima Mission Centre sent one Khupao Kuki, a senior school boy of Kohima Mission School to Phenshünyu village for two months to teach them during the cold winter vacations. Despite Sentsi's interest to join the Mission School at Kohima, owing to his tender age he was detained at home. Till 1923, he continued his learning from the teacher in the village makeshift classroom.

In 1924, the Christian children from Tseminyu and Phenshünyu villages were taken to the Mission School at Kohima by Vilezhü and were admitted into the lower primary school. This batch of new pupils consisted of Sentsi, Azüto and Wheha from Phenshünyu and Rüşvüyhun, Gwanyüle and Kensenle from Tseminyu. In the following year, the number of Rengma boys and girls in school were increased to eight, followed by Ndayhu and Keyhon from Sendenyu in 1925. For Sentsi, it was the fulfillment of a dream long desired. He fondly remembers the Head Master Mr. Rüzhükhrie and his teacher Khrusiehu, Rev. Zapuzhüle, Lhousuohie, Duosielhou, Rev. Kruneizhü and Thepfüdelie. In 1926, ten more Rengma boys and girls joined the school whose names and respective villages were noted as follows:

- | | |
|--------------|------------|
| 1. Kejwishe- | Tseminyu |
| 2. Jwenle - | -do- |
| 3. Rasüle - | -do- |
| 4. Tesinlo - | Sendenyu |
| 5. Sinole - | -do- |
| 6. Loshüle - | -do- |
| 7. Nthora - | Phenshünyu |
| 8. Wozükha- | Kontsünyu |
| 9. Pakito - | Tesophenyu |
| 10. Nipusa - | -do- |

In 1927, the Government started a lower primary school at Sendenyu and Pfürhilie of Nerhema village was appointed as teacher. The following year in 1928, another school was started at Phenshünyu and Zhadilie also from Nerhema who had already

passed sixth standard was appointed as a teacher. Sentsi continued with his studies in the Mission School at Kohima. Sentsi enjoyed his hostel life immensely though the rules were strict. They had to carry their rations from home and walk for two days to reach Kohima. The going was tough but his determination was tougher.

In 1929, he was detained in the fifth standard. However, being a born optimist, he did not lose his confidence and decided to work harder. The next year, he repeated the same course. At this stage, Sentsi fully understood that failure is the pillar of success for those who are strong in spirit and determined to achieve what they want. In the following year, he was promoted to the sixth standard with very good results. In 1931, he passed the Middle English Course securing a first division.

Meritorious Scholarship Awarded

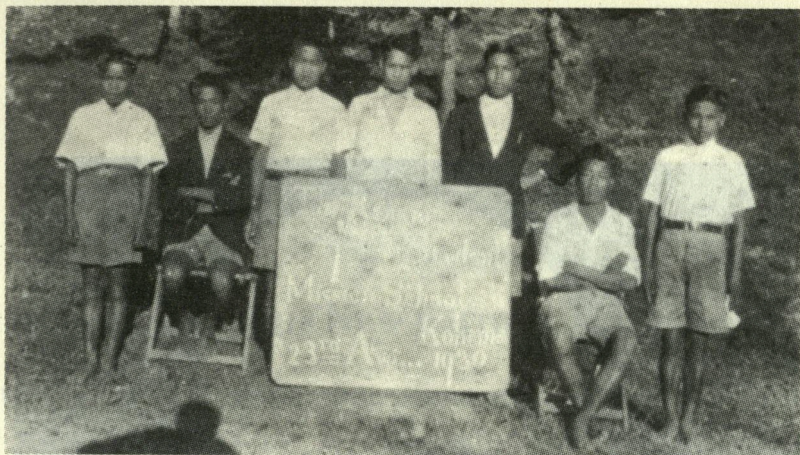
After passing the Middle English course from Kohima Mission School, Sentsi went to Jorhat for his further education. In March 1932, he was admitted to the seventh standard in the Christian High School at Jorhat. After a couple of days of his arrival at Jorhat, Missionary George W. Supplee gave him the good news that on account of his excellent result in the Middle English course, the British Government had awarded him a meritorious scholarship of Rs. 10 per month for the next four years of his high school studies. Sentsi noted that in those days the starting pay of a school *pundit* was Rs. 10 per month. A temporary road *Mohurer* and *Dak Bungalow Chowkidar* were paid Rs. 4 and so a stipend of Rs. 10 per month for a young high school student was a very big amount.

Sentsi's father being a cultivator, money was always a problem. Though they had sufficient food to eat and their limited material needs could be procured locally; money for his tuition fees, books, clothes and other such needs required a lot of money. Therefore, the stipend aided Sentsi to continue his studies at Jorhat for the next four years. Out of the stipend of Rs.10, the school deducted Rs. 7-8 annas for meeting all the necessary expenditures like school and mess fees, for textbooks, etc. The remaining amount of Rs. 2-8 annas was kept in the safe custody of the Principal.

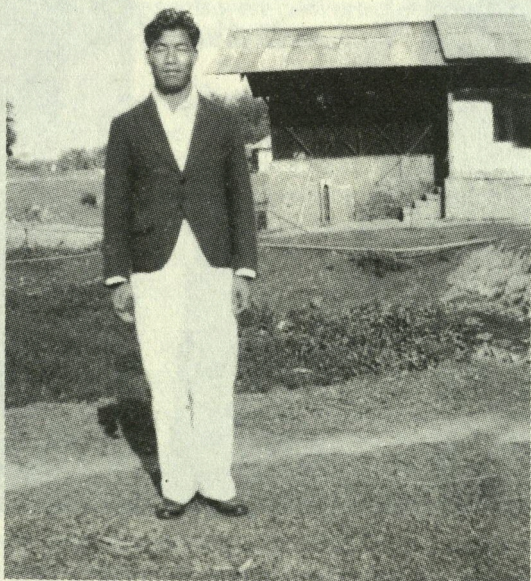
Whenever any contingency needs arose, the required amount was released on request. Whatever amount remained was given to him at the end of the year to cover his travel expenses.

At Jorhat, the Naga students going from Kohima Mission School learned from the Ao students about the formation of Ao Students' Conference Union. Sentsi and his friends from Kohima thought that it was a great idea. So, with the intent of starting a students union at Kohima (division) they called their first meeting in the Kohima Naga Club during the winter vacation of 1934. Sentsi attended this meeting from the Rengma tribe and Benjamin, Jethro, Lhoukuolie, Putsüre, Wesielie and Ketoulhou were all from the Angami tribe. The meeting was also attended by our those days prominent leaders - Mr. Rheichalie- the *Peshkar*, Mr. Krusiehu- the *Asst. Peshkar* and Mr. Rüzühkhrie- the Head Master who were very pleased and encouraged us to continue with more such meets in the future.

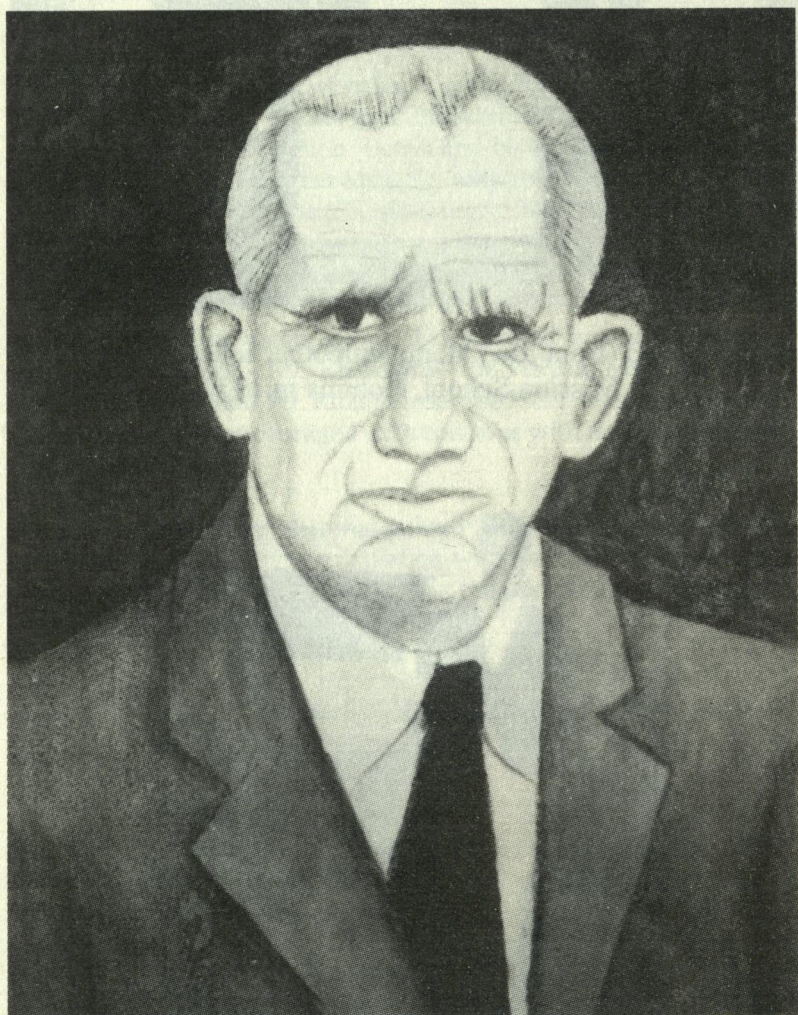
The four years at Jorhat passed away very quickly and in 1936 Sentsi passed his Matriculation with a second division from the Calcutta University, thus getting the distinction of being the first Matriculate from the Rengma tribe.



Sentsi seated (front row) along with other fellowmates at the Mission School, Kohima in 1930.



P. Sentsi (first matriculate from the Rengma tribe) after completing his matriculation from Jorhat Christian High School in 1936.



Sir Charles Ridley Pawsey, D.C., Naga Hills (1937-1947).