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NORTH EAST INDIA
HISTORY ASSOCIATION**



**SEVENTEENTH SESSION
GOVERNMENT AIZAWL COLLEGE
AIZAWL**

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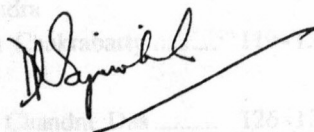
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Preface

The Seventeenth Session of the North East India History Association was held at Government Aizawl College, Aizawl between 3-5 October, 1996. This was the Association's second opportunity to meet in the Mizoram capital. By all counts the session was a success with large numbers attending the Academic Session, particularly the special session on the History of Mizoram. An added attraction of the Annual Conference was the learned lectures of Professor M.M. Sharma, Vice Chancellor of Dibrugarh University, in the second H.K. Barpujari Endowment Lectures. We wish to put on record the Association's appreciation for the hospitality and organization of the Seventeenth Session to the Principal of the College; to Professor Zochungnunga, Head Department of History and this colleagues and studies.

By now the NEIHA proceedings volumes has become a useful reference to historical research in the region. Young researchers have found in NEIHA a platform to discuss this first attempt in writing history. Other members of many years standing continue to see in our Association the need to foster, encourage and stimulate research of the region as a whole or on select themes. The publication of this Proceedings of the 17th Annual Session has been supported by the efforts of our President - Professor J.P. Singh, Professor A.K. Baruah and Dr. M. Sharma in editing and correcting proofs. To them we acknowledge our gratitude. We are thankful to the Indian Council for Historical Research for its generous financial support to the Association. We also thank the proprietor of Kamala Art Press, Shillong for his concern in publishing this volume.

Shillong
1 September, 1997



D.R. Syiemlieh
General Secretary
North East India History Association

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Different Interpretations of Naga Nationalism

Th. Tiba

The land of the Nagas as defined by J.P. Mills in 'Lotha Naga' is bounded by the Hukong valley in the North-East, the plains of Brahmaputra to the North-West, Cachar in the South-West and Chindwins to the East. In the South the Manipur Valley roughly marks the point of contact between the Naga tribes and the Kuki-Chins. According to Mr. Isak Swu, Chairman of NSCN, it is situated between the longitude 95°E and 97°E and the latitude 23°N and 28°N with a population of roughly about three millions in an area about 100000 sq. miles.

The demand for Naga Independence by the Naga National Council (NNC) an organisation representing a number of hill tribes called the Nagas in the South Eastern Himalaya region or the North Eastern part of the erstwhile British India, adjoining Burma (Myanmar) and now the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN), resulted in a violent confrontations between a small number of poorly armed Nagas and the superior forces of the post Independence Indian Government in the early 1950's and in the 1980's when NSCN was formed, till date eluded a comprehensive resolution. The confrontation resulted in a number of often contradictory accounts trying to make sense out of the welter of events and illustrated clearly the pervasive presence of diverse theoretical or ideological orientation, in these projections aimed at shaping our present understanding of the cause of the past.

The bulk of the writings on Naga movement is often superseded by the term 'insurgency' rather than 'National movement'. The word 'insurgency' incidentally reflects the presence of a conscious implacably opposed to the existing order can be broadly categorised into three groups, reflecting their basic orientations in the context of present practical and academic interest. While they do not constitute mutually exclusive categories, they may be categorised as political (strategic), cultural (historical), and Marxist approaches.

The first type of approach can be seen as being constituted of two polar points. The first one reflected a concern with the administrative order and therefore opposed to forces which threaten the legitimacy of the Indian constitution or its territorial integrity. The accounts generally furnished by the non-Naga civil administrators, the police and the military officials resulted in a tendency to depict the ordinary Naga village folks as innocent children of nature tragically led astray by either or both modern, educated or traditional, malevolent leaders for their own selfish ends. Writings by Y.D. Gundevia, K.R. Singh, V.K. Anand best exemplify this genre. The overt alignment of such discourse with the concerns of state however, precludes its categorisation as objective historical discourse.

Accounts by Naga Nationalists and others sympathetic to the cause; the other end of the political (strategic) approach can be seen as countering such approach by presenting a diametrically opposed perspective. These writings which sympathize with the Naga rebels though not necessarily with their aims tend to see Naga society personified by their educated determined leaders cast into the roles of tragic heroes, by the accident of history, misunderstanding, or the perfidy of the British colonist. Nirmal Nibedon, Udyan Misra, among the 'non-Nagas' and M. Alemchiba, M. Horam, Asoso Yonou etc among the Nages represent this perspective.

The cultural (historical) approach with academic concerns, emphasising on ethnicity, Nationbuilding determines what went wrong (isolate factor), seem crucially instrumental in bringing about existing state of affairs. These approaches do not hesitate to apportion blame on both sides involve in the conflict, from a position of assumed distance and objectivity. However, following the works of some notably R. Guha, it would not be very difficult to see through this impassive facade and read in the attempts to investigate and understand the causes, an attempt not very different from the concerns of even colonial administrators that is, to control through knowledge, similar events in the future. The detachment of such studies as an ideological facade is most apparent, when it imperiously assign itself a role as arbitrator diagnose that such aspirations for independence by a rather backward community, does not constitute Nationalism proper, but represent rather immature versions like 'Infra-nationalism', 'proto-Nationalism' and thereby aligns itself with the

more mature nationalism of an establish order. Similar conclusions are also arrived at through an understanding of identity from a narrow modernist and formal perspective, as an imposition from outside. Thus, demand for independence of such flimsy identity can be discarded without much compunction or remorse, or by displacement of such uncomfortable demands, by the authoritative assertion that what the people actually wanted was something entirely different from what they stated to economic, security, autonomy etc.

The attempt to control through knowledge is also evident in some Marxist approaches, which tries to locate the prime cause of such phenomenon in hidden economic factors, at time hidden, it seems, even from the protagonists themselves in the economic structures and corresponding relation of production, of a social formation within a determinate conjuncture, or in short within the structure of colonialism and also post-colonial governance which maintains the same economic structures. These accounts in their indictment of the exploitative structures, tend to place the blame squarely on the entire systems and in the process give the occurrence of revolts, movement/insurgency an air of inevitability. Most of the Marxist approaches align with the rebels in its fight against the colonial government but significantly seems to reverse itself in post independence India, while at the same time expressing sympathy for the helpless victim of history, impelled for reasons beyond their own volitions in a similar displacement as in the earlier approach, attributing autonomy, both cultural and regional, etc as the people actually wanted.

It does not require much elaboration to see that the consciousness of the historical personality is entirely lost in all these accounts, through the focus on another subject. The remaining accounts where the real actor and his consciousness of the events is shunted into the back-ground, for the concern of these various perspectives, in articulating their various political and academic interests.

It is a strategic interest in exposing the manner in which contemporary historical discourse attempts to shape our understanding of the past, that forms the basis of the subalternists' intervention notably Guha, with a projection of recovering the peasant's consciousness of the historical movement of rebellion. This juxtaposing brings into immense relief the distance between real historical events and con-

temporary accounts. The establishment of movement consciousness, in fact, the very attempt itself, reveal the apparent totality of historical discourse.

The Naga movement with a very visible leadership, has largely obscured the fact that Naga society at the time of movement in the initial stage was largely still illiterate. It would be only too natural that the degree of manipulation of voluntary participation on the part of the people would be indexed in the presence or absence of traditional forms of communication and mobilization. And the application of this frame work on concrete historical situations, would perhaps lead to a better refinement of these theoretical tools and made possible the emergence of a highly elusive aspect, which nevertheless forms an integral part of history.

My primary interest in attempting this study is the result of my reaction to the way in which the history of the Naga movement has been constituted at present purely depicting the leaders as tragic heroes anti-social elements, law and order problem and with an emphasis on the formal events like peace talks, negotiations, agreements etc. Aspect which are easily amendable to verification and objectification, but which it must be stressed, remains only a partial account, endowed with false sense of totality. While these account are undoubtedly a part of the history of Naga movement, they remain just the partial accounts.

This attempt at representing of a historicized Naga consciousness of their movement, however does not purport to fill up the void indicated but also remains a partial account. An adequate treatment would require the elaboration of variations in consciousness, in the context of social stratification system and thus this attempt at best remains only an overview running roughshod over many aspects of which perhaps the most important is that of women's consciousness of the moment of rebellion, shaped by virtue of their gender.

The history of the Naga movement in totality should be traced beginning with the consciousness of the 'birth right' or Swaraj as manifested during the British administrative period in Naga country as called by the British, through the outbreak of the rebellion, the hiccup, internationalisation of the issues under Unrepresented National Peoples' Organisation (UNPO) 1993, and till date.

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