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Naga Folk Tales

First Published : 1988

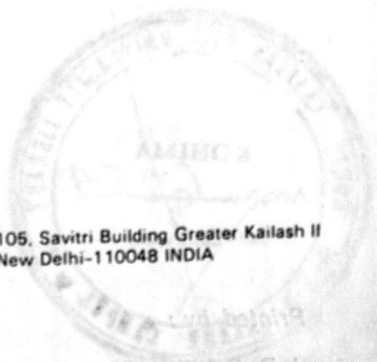
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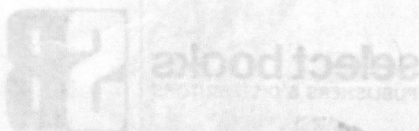
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To my loving mother
and father who
early influenced
my philosophy
of life.

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Foreword

It is eminently fitting and appropriate to reflect rich cultural heritage of our people, their aspirations and sentiments through their true depictions and portrayal by R. Luikham in his book-NAGA FOLK TALES which is a rare repository of the tribal folk culture of India.

The author has beautifully penned down the legendary folk tales of Naga people which have been handed down from generation to generation by simple oral communications medium only. Now they are available through print media for all generations to come. These original lingering folk tales are so intoxicating that the rigours of the modern day challenges have not diminished the folk traditions of the Naga People.

These folk tales are rooted in the concrete traditional values of the Naga people. They cannot remain any longer in silence in our times of scientific communications.

The author has brought about certain insights of the understanding and commitment of the various Naga tribes which are hitherto unknown to the rest of our great country and its teeming millions. These beautiful Naga folk tales have been re-told with the fulness of human dignity among themselves.

It is also important to bear in mind that Naga Folk Tales have made a significant contribution to the Naga community which is at present shifting from the traditional values of the by-gone days for historical developments. So in this context, it is more stimulating that the author has inspired the readers to re-think about the yearnings of the common people, their conflicts, contradictions and temporary misunderstandings.

Nevertheless, these tales are the integral part of beautiful people of Nagaland in a setting of a mild and peaceful environment with a definite sense of struggles and challenges as an integration into every level of life and reality in a spirit of openness and love, suffering and hope, oppression and liberation within the framework of our historical memory.

This book is a good starting point in the realm of communication to share our reality and to express ourselves in our cultural backdrop of traditions and values.

Brojendra Nath Banerjee

Introduction

For the last few years, I have been thinking of compiling folk tales and folk lore of the Nagas. There are hundreds of stories handed down from generation to generation by oral story telling. With the introduction of Western education, traditional story telling in homes and dormitories has, in a way, been adversely affected. Original folk tales and folk lore are, therefore, fast disappearing and the time when nothing can be retrieved is fast approaching.

As a child, I used to enjoy listening to the stories narrated by my grandmother, my parents, uncles and aunties by the fireside. I used to listen to them with rapt attention and my imagination would capture the looks of the characters or the landscapes involved. Equally, I loved to listen to the biblical stories of characters like Jacob, Joseph, Moses, David, etc., which mostly my mother used to narrate. This has formed

part of the sweetest memory of my childhood. In fact, story telling by the fireside has always been an integral part of Naga traditional life. Although attempts have been made by some individuals and also by the Government of Nagaland to compile such stories, the scope is so large that one will readily admit that nothing much has been achieved in this direction. Undoubtedly, there exist unlimited possibilities of collecting and compiling hundreds of folk tales from various Naga Tribes living in four contiguous different administrative units of Nagaland, Manipur, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. My present endeavour is, therefore, to reproduce popular folk tales and folklore so that younger generations are not denied the childhood pleasure of listening to such story telling. There are about two dozen Naga Tribes spread over these four administrative units but the present compilation comprises stories drawn from Angami, Ao, Lotha, Sema, Chekesang, Maring, Zeliangröung and Tangkhul. It is hoped that subsequent compilations will represent more tribes.

The Nagas were hitherto known to the civilised world as naked head hunters and savages. It is an admitted fact that once the obnoxious practice of head hunting was part of their life. This was the time when they were fighting among themselves for supremacy and suzerainty over one another. Although there were cases of head hunting during the British regime, this practice was much more prevalent before the British fully established their rule over the Nagas in 1866. Some writers have recorded that the Nagas hunted human heads for frivolous reasons to keep human skulls as trophies. There can be nothing more mischievous than this claim. Although at that time, no formal education system was in existence except the dormitories, which had a disciplinary effect on the impressionable minds of the young people, the Nagas followed a code of justice and morality.

The sequence of action that would ultimately result in the chopping off of human heads was in this order. If any village

had wronged another village, messages were sent to the aggressor with a view to finding a peaceful settlement. If peaceful means were not heeded, the next step was to kidnap a few children from the aggressor's village to compel him to come to terms. If such settlements took place, the aggrieved party would either receive some bushels of paddy or a few cattle depending upon the seriousness of the aggression. If, however, such attempts failed, the next measure that could be expected was head hunting to make things even. Although there were stray cases of head hunting for frivolous reasons, ordinarily, therefore, head hunting was resorted to only as the final measure of justice, or on the battlefield.

It must, however, be admitted that it was only through the ceaseless efforts of the pioneering missionaries from 1842 onward that Christianity was introduced in North East India and it was only Christianity that tamed the Tribals. Although it is said that some evangelists had gone to Ao area to preach the gospel on earlier occasions, it was only in 1876 that Rev. Clark established his headquarters at Malungyimchen and later at Impur to carry on permanent evangelical work. In the case of Angami area, it was Rev. Rivenburg who came to communicate the Good News to them in 1881. Similarly, it was in 1896 that Rev. Pettigrew came to Ukhrul to spread the gospel amongst the Tangkhul Nagas. It was through this three-pronged evangelical initiative that Christianity gradually spread to all Naga areas of the erstwhile Naga hills, Manipur, Assam etc. Although the Central Government and respective State Governments have taken steps towards the overall development of the Tribals, it is an established fact that none had contributed as much to the ushering in of the new era of enlightenment as the foreign pioneering missionaries had done. They were instrumental in

transforming the lives of many through the amazing saving grace and tender *mercy of the living God.* *

Regarding some of the illustrations used in this book, readers specially from outside India may think that they have been adopted from comics on American Indians. The truth is that the illustrations pertain to original Naga costumes and facial structure and are not adopted from anywhere else. However it will be pertinent to clarify that there are ethnical and spiritual similarities between the Nagas and the American Indians. There is a belief that hundreds of years ago, the American Indians from North India migrated to the Americas through the land connections that existed between Asia and America. This can be deduced from the striking physical resemblance between the Nagas and American Indians; their cultures; their hair style, head wear; costumes and their common belief in the "Great Spirit", the Supreme God. This of course is an area where more research is needed to establish the ethnical connections between these two groups of people who appear to belong to a common ethnical root. The other similarity is the spiritual gravity that seems to attract the Nagas and the American Indians, namely, their fascination for the Christian faith. Just as a number of Naga people have found a new life in Christ, the American Indians too have found Christ. Lastly, just as the Naga people are being subjected to the illusion of the materialism of the West, the American Indians also face the same problem. Yet there is a strong desire on the part of the young American Indians as it is in the case of the Nagas to preserve their culture. Culture and religion are the two faces of the same coin of men's civilisation. In its preservation lies real progress. The experience of the Naga people can be a

* "How beautiful upon the mountains,
Are the feet of those, who bring
happy news, of peace and salvation....."

very valuable example to other Indian sub-cultures that still miss the true faith for the salvation of their souls.

I am also concerned about certain trends among sections of Naga society (or for that matter any other North Eastern Tribe) of adopting Western culture, good or bad, in disregard to their own culture whether it be in the form of traditional art, handicrafts, folk songs, etc.,. There is a danger of being carried away by the glitters of Western civilisation. There are pitfalls which must be avoided. Many learned Indians even feel that there are already cracks in the seemingly unflinching Indian civilisation. Therefore, if Naga society should progress in the right direction, its members must develop an in-depth identification with their own culture and its innate qualities. It is against this backdrop that I am bringing out this first volume in the series entitled "Naga Folk Tales" so that the younger generation may peep into the corridor of the past and realise that Nagas have inherited a distinctive tradition and culture of their own. In fact, the Nagas can rightly be proud of the fact that their basic culture has always been and still is one of open hospitality, charity and truthfulness which is sadly missing in more advanced societies. They need to retain such culture with all the zeal and resources they have at their command. They must also sink tribalism, which is the biggest impediment on their way to development. They must also stop worshipping power and money.

Readers will find that I have in general used an indirect narration for all stories with the exception of one, in which I adopted direct narration extensively to achieve a better effect. The readers will also observe from the present compilation that while some of these folk tales are very fascinating and yet are based on actual human experiences, some others are more of legends or fairy tales than anything else. My present endeavour is to select some popular folk tales and make them available for all readers in general throughout this country and for the young Nagas, in particular so that

they may acquaint themselves with their traditional values, culture, customs and beliefs. Let me hasten to add that some of the stories that I have brought out in the present compilation were skeletons; flesh and blood have been supplied appropriately without distorting the original structure of the stories. I also find that folk tales and folk lore of the same origin differ in content from tribe to tribe and region to region. The sources of these stories are my own memories, the skeleton stories available in Hutton's and Mills' books and my own collection through well wishers like the late Saphei Luithui, Y. K. Shimray, Nobert Panmei, Chumbemo Lotha, Guu Phizo and N. Luikham.

While going through the folk tales, one will invariably have a glimpse of the traditional way of life, culture and customs the Naga ancestors had. Some of the stories would also throw light on the concept of God, evil spirits, their religious beliefs and practices. The Nagas, in general, believed that there existed a "benevolent god" and an "evil god". Broadly speaking, the benevolent god would more or less correspond to the 'Almighty God' and the 'evil god' to the Devil or Satan as we understand them today. They also believed that there was life after death but that life after death was inferior in quality to the earthly life. The belief was that the source of light after death was not the sun. It was some other source which was less bright than the sun. There was night and day too. Another belief was that whatever desire one could not fulfil on earth, he could do so in the life after death. This is contrary to what they now believe as Christians. Their concept of God, their earthly life and life hereafter is now clearer to them. They have no more confusion in their understanding.

Another feature the readers will discover is that the Nagas were highly superstitious and mortally fearful of evil spirits and ghosts. Besides offering prayers to 'benevolent god', even appeasement sacrifices were offered to the evil spirits to terminate continued misfortune. In fact, some of

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the stories will give clear indication that the ancient Nagas were in many ways under the domination of dark forces. Although with the introduction of Christianity, superstitions are fast dying out, I believe that an intimate knowledge of the past would help one to get rid of possible mental complexes and spiritual blind spots. The breaking down of such structures has been made possible because of their unconditional acceptance of Jesus Christ as their Saviour. Their love and devotion to the living God is so intense that in every village, the Church is built at the most prominent place and is almost always the best, biggest and the most honoured building. This is also in general true with the Mizos, the Khasis, the Garos and the other East India Tribals.

Many battles have been fought and won at Kohima including the fiercest one fought in 1944. Now another battle is being fought on the same soil which is between the forces of darkness and the forces of light. Although the forces of light have clearly scored a victory over the forces of darkness, the battle is not altogether over. The Naga people need to relentlessly carry on the fight individually and collectively to score complete victory over the structures of superstition and any other evil influences.

I would like to think that availability of books on the traditions and culture of the Tribals for general reading in the country will also help break down the barriers of cultural or ethnic prejudices that stand today between the privileged and under-privileged as well as between different regions and different ethnic groups. With the disappearance of prejudices, better understanding and appreciation of the diverse cultures is bound to emerge paving the way towards more cohesive society and national integration.

I wish to thank those who have helped me in collecting stories and who have encouraged me in bringing out this book. Miss Lynda Johnson, Mrs. Kathleen Nicholls and Miss Peimi,

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my niece took much pain in going through the manuscripts and made improvements and many useful suggestions. Paothan, my youngest son also made a number of sketches which were later improved upon and refined by Miss Sano Tseikhano. Shri A. K. Misra faithfully transcribed the stories and retyped them endlessly without losing patience. I am grateful to all of them. Some of my friends and well-wishers also made useful suggestions. I am thankful to them too.

Finally, I wish to express my gratitude to those foreign missionaries dead or alive without whose tireless and persistent efforts, the North East Tribals would not have been what they are today. The result of their sacrifices have borne rich fruit of which the author claims to be one. Above all, I am grateful to the only living God, the Creator Jesus Christ and His redemption for mankind to whom be the honour and glory now and forever.

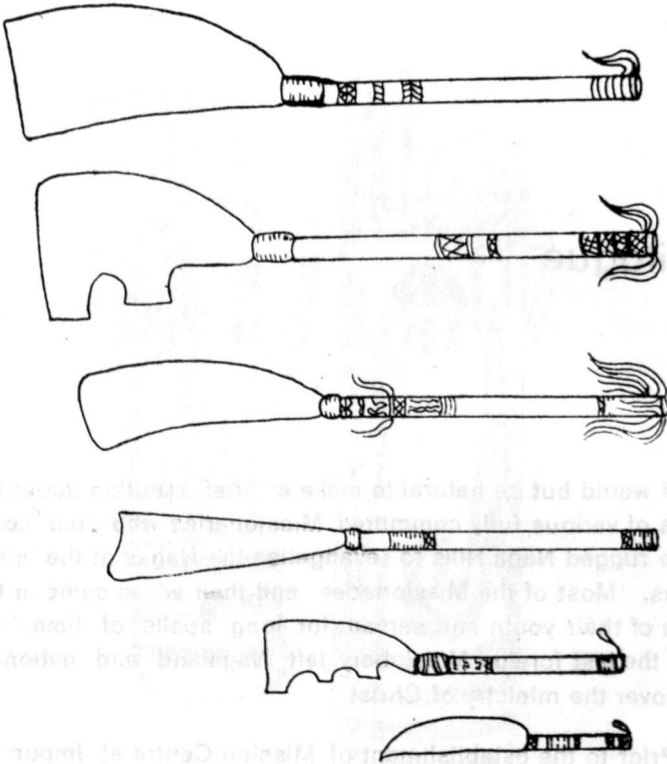
R. LUIKHAM



Epilogue

It would but be natural to make a brief mention about the works of various fully committed Missionaries who had come to the rugged Naga Hills to evangelise the Nagas at the initial stages. Most of the Missionaries and their wives came in the prime of their youth and served for long spells of time. By 1954, the last foreign Missionary left Nagaland and nationals took over the ministry of Christ.

Prior to the establishment of Mission Centre at Impur by Rev. E.W. Clark, one Shri Godhula, a committed Assamese Evangelist went to Ao area and established his Evangelistic Centre at Malungyimchen and started working there from 1871. The first Ao convert was a person from Merenkong village and was baptised in 1851. The efforts of Shri Godhula bore fruits when nine Ao Nagas were converted subsequently and baptised at Sibsagar in Assam valley. Rev. E.W. Clark went to join Shri Godhula in 1876. Mrs. Clark assisted them



in every possible manner. From then onward, conversion picked up momentum and old traditional customs such as drinking of rice beer, participation in religious sacrifices and rituals, community sleeping at Morung etc. were given up. When Dr. S.W. Rivenburg joined Rev. Clark, educational work and medical relief were added to evangelistic work which had already started. To co-ordinate all this work effectively, the Mission Centre was moved to Impur in 1894 which was more centrally located. The Ao Nagas accepted the new religion particularly finding that their belief in one 'Great Living Spirit' and also the end of the world by hail fire from heaven were in agreement with the scripture. In 1891 the number of conversions shot up to 211 which in turn became 579 in 1901. A school was opened to train Pastors and Evangelists with the arrival of Rev. S.A. Perrine in 1898. Later when Rev. and Mrs. Haggard and Mr. and Mrs. Dowd joined Impur Centre, the number of schools and students grew much larger. In spite of the fact that intermittent village feud persisted, the conversions were progressive after the missionaries started functioning in a well-organised and co-ordinated manner. It was obviously clear that the Christians started doing much better than their counter-parts. This was possible because a better organised and regulated life-style replaced the traditional social system. This became an additional attraction to the Christian Faith.

Among the Angami Nagas, Rev. C.D. King started evangelising from 1878 onward. He established his Centre and built a church at Kohima in 1883. Thereafter, he was joined by Dr. Rivenburg and the two started preaching the gospel in a planned manner. Rev. W.E. Witter came a little later but he went to Wokha to work among the Lotha Nagas from 1885 onward. Mrs. Witter devotedly and effectively assisted her husband winning many souls to Jesus.

Rev. M. Bronson established a Centre at Namsang village in the Konyak area as early as 1842. It is said that some

Konyaks were converted as the first Christian converts after long and tireless efforts. He also taught them how to cultivate tea. Not many details are, however, available about his work.

Unable to win any soul from amongst the Meities with whom he worked initially in Manipur valley, Rev. W. Pettigrew came to Ukhrul in 1896 to work among the Tangkhul Nagas. It was at Ukhrul that a real live drama was enacted. The local Tangkhul Nagas did not like that a white man should come and disturb their social life in any way. Therefore, they secretly took a decision to kill him and one night his canvas camp was surrounded by selected youths who had vowed to kill him. When he heard unusual noise and the war cry around the Camp, he instinctively knew that some people had come to kill him. He came outside opening his song book and started singing at the top of his voice. At that moment, he must have thought that he was being killed and he must meet his death singing. Was that not a good way of meeting the Lord? Strangely enough, however, those youths with raised spears could not release their spears. The spears stuck in their palms as if they were glued. After seeing Rev. Pettigrew's face glowing with unusual light, the young people asked each other to take the initiative but none could do so. In a matter of minutes, all the young people vanished in the adjoining jungle leaving him alone. This was reported to the Chief and the latter was surprised to hear that a man's face should ever give out light. It was taken by him that the Christian God was stronger than their god. Apparently there was a spiritual fight in between the living God and the gods of the Pagan Nagas which ended in the defeat of the latter. After this incident, the Chief of Ukhrul who was the biggest Chief among the Chiefs of Tangkhul Nagas, started sending young people to the school which Rev. Pettigrew had subsequently established. Soon it bore fruits as a number of Tangkhul Nagas were won to the Lord. Mrs. Pettigrew also helped her husband in training the housewives and teaching the young students'

who ultimately became the first Pastors, Evangelists and Teachers to spread the gospel and also to lay the foundation of Secular education. In 1907 the number of Christians became seventy, which multiplied quickly thereafter. Indeed spiritual awakening had just started and one will soon see how practically the entire Naga society has been brought to the Lord.

The era of peace and enlightenment started ushering in only after these pioneering Missionaries came to work among the various Naga Tribes. Today approximately 80% of the Nagas spread over four administrative units viz. Nagaland, Manipur, Assam and Arunachal are Christian and the remaining 20% still stick to their old traditional religion which is fast dying out. Over 90% Nagas of Nagaland and Manipur are Christians. Many people believe that the conversion of the Nagas into Christianity became much easier because of the fact that they believed in 'one Great God' or 'the Great Spirit' as it was in the case of American Indians. They found much similarity in the new religion which taught that there was only one God who was the creator of heaven and earth. They also believed that there was an evil god who opposed the good work of benevolent god. All these were found in the scripture in terms of the living God and Satan. Today, the Nagas who were warring among themselves before the advent of Christianity, are united by their faith. It is only because of Christianity that Communism has failed to make any inroad into Tribal communities like the Nagas, Khasis, Mizos, etc. Today Nagas have the Bible practically in all major dialects.

It was love that drove the pioneer Missionaries to the roadless Naga hills to tell the love of Jesus. It was only love that made the unlovely lovable. It was love that moved the seemingly unmovable Nagas. It was love that penetrated into the hardened hearts. It was love that brought hope to the hopelessly lost. The love of the Cross did the miracle. Seeing the sacrificial love of the Missionaries who had denied

every worldly pleasure, the lost souls were reclaimed and the prodigals returned to the Father. The love of the Cross was sufficient to forgive the unforgivable. Yes, Jesus' love was sufficient to change the course of life. Their way of life was downhill leading towards destruction but now it is uphill towards salvation. Praise the Lord! Hatred was replaced by love, destruction by hope, defeat by victory, strife by peace, division by unity, hell by heaven and death by life.

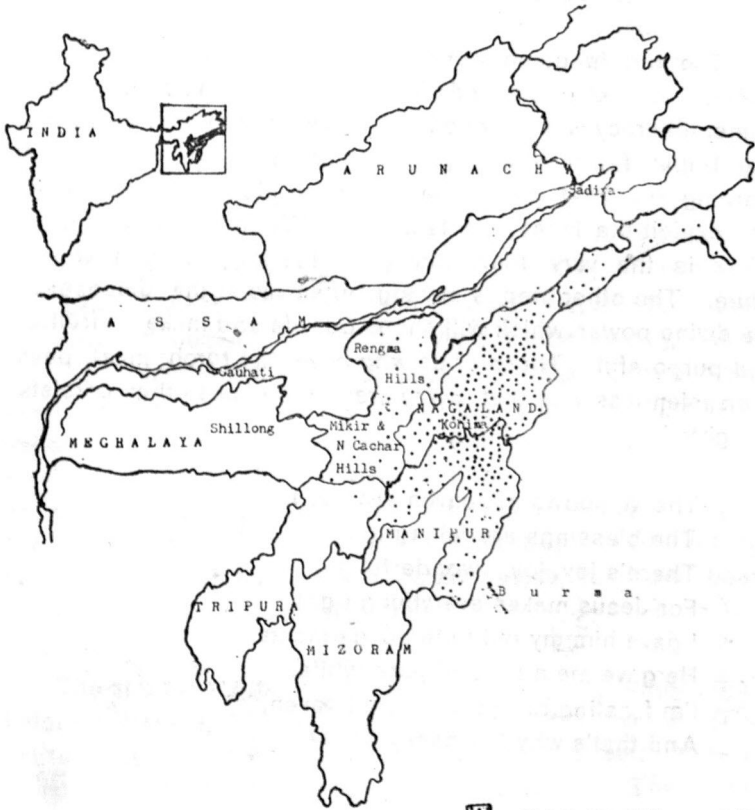
They were fighting among themselves and now they are at peace with one another. Revenge was their supreme law and today love is their supreme command. Theirs was a decaying society but now a new forward-looking society has emerged. They do not have much of past history but they do have tremendously bright history in the making. Jesus' love has re-shaped their outlook as the people have been reborn. The old is gone and a new era has been ushered in. The dark clouds have rolled away and the sunshine has taken its place. There is hope everywhere and the hope is borne out of their new life. Everything is changing towards the better. The prospects look bright and nothing seems to be alarming. Every detail seems to have been planned towards the ultimate goal.


The sun seems to look brighter and shines longer than before. Water seems to be tastier and the air purer. The entire topography seems to have been washed and renewed afresh removing the blood-stained ground. The stars seems to convey messages from above. The river seems to utter assurance of victory. The birds sing songs of joy and happiness. Could anyone remain sorrowful in the backdrop of such a situation? No. None need to be. Things are changing rapidly towards progress and happiness. The objective is clear and victory is certain. Simply one needs to march on with head held high and eyes transfixed on the cross. Victory is sure and resurrection a reality.

As I write this, my heart goes to the people of Mon and Tuensang area and also those in Tirap Frontier Division where the message of Good News is yet to be fully established. We need to work hard towards achieving acceptance of the Lord by those living there.

The old is going out yielding to the new. The young society is taking off and God willing, in a few decades to come, illiteracy will be wiped out. We need to look forward to the bright future which is ushering in. The only note of warning is that one need to take his appointed stand, and exploit the laden talents in him. We need to work hard. Work is the very foundation of achieving anything worthwhile. The other step is placing ourselves at the disposal of the divine power which will shape our life and make it fruitful and purposeful. Those of us who have the torch must pass it on relentlessly so that every area of darkness that persists is lighted up.

The Windows of heaven are open
The blessings are falling today,
There's joy, joy, wonderful joy,
For Jesus makes everything right.
I gave him my old tattered garments,
He gave me a robe of pure white,
I'm feasting on manna from heaven,
And that's why I'm happy today.



 Distribution of Naga population

NAGAS IN CEREMONIAL DRESSES



Rengma Naga



Rongmei Naga



Mao Naga



Angami Naga



Lotha Naga

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Chakhesang Naga

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 NAGALAND CAMPUS



Kongyak Naga