

# NAGALAND

## Contemporary Ethnography

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Editor: SUBHADRA MITRA CHANNA



## INTRODUCTION TO THIS SERIES

### **Culture, Structure and Change in North-East India**

The North-Eastern region of India has provided a most fascinating challenge to scholars of various disciplines including anthropology. Some of the distinguished scholarly works in anthropology in India pertain to this region. But that cover a very small segment of the vast changing canvass that is provided by the social, cultural, political and ethnic mosaic of the North-Eastern societies. For this reason, a large number of scholars are engaged in studying this region and some their work is available in the printed form. But, unfortunately a vast portion of its remain confined to a very limited audience due to lack of easy availability or it never gets published. However, there is a great deal of interest in the North-east and more scholarly works on various facets of the North-east need to be presented.

The series "**Culture, Structure and Change in the North-Eastern India**" has been envisaged to bring together the works/ both published and unpublished, of various scholars through a series of volumes. The series will endeavour to bring out the literature that will present the social, cultural and changing perspective of the life of the people. This will be done by publishing monographic studies as well as edited volumes of the region by distinguished scholars.

We firmly believe that the series would fill in a much felt need and would provide a forum to the scholars interested in the North-Eastern region of India to help in better understanding of the region.

The present volume is the first in the series. Initially this volume was conceptualized in terms of a collection of papers on contemporary Nagaland. It would not be wrong to say that while collecting material for and conceptualizing this volume, the whole series finally began to take shape. The fascinating range of material on the North-East and the tremendous

interest evoked in various scholars led to the idea that not a single volume but a series of volumes on the North-East would indeed be welcome to scholars and interested readers.

The areas that we intend to cover are kinship and Family, Economic life, Customary Law, Ecology, Political Organisation, Contemporary Political Situation, Status of Women and several other topics. At the same time we shall be publishing ethnographies covering various regions and communities of this area.

We do hope that the series will fill in a much needed gap in published materials on the North-East and be of help towards facilitating further research and lead to a better understanding of this region.

J. S. Bhandari  
Subhadra Mitra (Channa)



# NAGALAND

## A CONTEMPORARY ETHNOGRAPHY

Ed. : J. S. Bhandari

*Ar. Choo*

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# NAGALAND

## A CONTEMPORARY ETHNOGRAPHY

Editor  
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Delhi University



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## Preface

An academic work, unlike a literary work, needs some justification for its production. It cannot like, a piece of literature justify its existence to a surge of creativity. It is not a child born out of the pure joy of creation but a child that must rationalize the presence in this world. Every academic work must justify the existence as a contribution towards the existing literature in its subject matter. It must have some significance, something to say that adds to the existing body of knowledge—some new data, a new point of view, a new theoretical insight.

The present volume may probably not find it too easy to justify the reasons for its birth. But in all humility the editor would like to put forward a few reasons why she thought such a volume was necessary.

Nagaland is a region which has looked much scholarly and held public interest. The Indian Nation as it exists today is the unification of a vast diversity. Nagaland has been an area totally devoid of external administration till recent times. The Nagas had their own traditional political organization and recognized no outside authority. Their fierce independence has obviously made the process of democratic incorporation into the Indian Nation a somewhat difficult though not impossible task. Today Nagaland is one region in India that is undergoing the most rapid social change as well as a process of total political transformation.

The tribal in this region can be viewed as part of a process of nation building that most nations have to undergo. This region needs a sensitive understanding and an ethnographic endeavour looking at the Naga way of life world facilitate a better comprehension both of the people and their problems.

Nagaland has been a state which has not settled down easily into the Indian Nation. The problems of Nagaland, it is felt, reflects upon global issues of ethnicity and

Nationhood hounding the world today if the present political situation in Eastern Europe, Russia, China, India and Pakistan is any indication. Such a problem it is felt must be given coverage both from the outsider's point of view as well as from the insider's point of view.

Secondly, historical circumstances have segregated the people of Nagaland from the rest of the sub-continent for a long time thus veiling them in a haze of mystery which tends to surround such people about whom very little is known. A glimpse into the day to day life of a people dymystifies them and brings them closer to ourselves.

This volume has made an attempt to present views on contemporary Nagaland, on its political existence on the map of India both from the point of view of the detached observer and the involved insider. Further, it tries to cover some aspects of the daily life of certain Naga communities bringing to light their society and culture.

I must thank all my contributors whose combined efforts have made this work possible. I must also thank Prof. J. S. Bhandari whose help and encouragement at every step contributed much towards keeping up flagging spirits which most editors experience as dead lines after dead lines expire. He also shaped up the view points and ideas which form the focus of this work. My thanks are also due to Mr. Vinay Kr. Srivastava who helped me in the formulation of the initial steps which produced this work. His help and encouragement in fact intiated me to undertake this project in the first place. I must also thank my friend and publisher Mr. Subodh Kapoor without whose initial conceptualization of the idea, it would never have occurred to me to undertake a task such as editing.

I must also thank Mr. Parida for decipherring my handwriting and typing out my hand written material which must not have been an easy task.

New Delhi

Subhadra Mitra (Channa)

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# Introduction

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The following chapters in this volume are devoted to the study of the history of the English language. The first chapter, by [Name], discusses the early history of the language, from its roots in the Indo-European family to its development as a distinct language in the British Isles. The second chapter, by [Name], examines the influence of Old Norse and Old French on the English lexicon and syntax. The third chapter, by [Name], explores the role of the written word in the standardization of the language. The fourth chapter, by [Name], considers the impact of the printing press on the development of the English language. The fifth chapter, by [Name], discusses the influence of the American and Canadian English on the English language. The sixth chapter, by [Name], examines the role of the English language in the world today. The seventh chapter, by [Name], discusses the future of the English language. The eighth chapter, by [Name], discusses the role of the English language in the world today. The ninth chapter, by [Name], discusses the future of the English language. The tenth chapter, by [Name], discusses the role of the English language in the world today.

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# Introduction

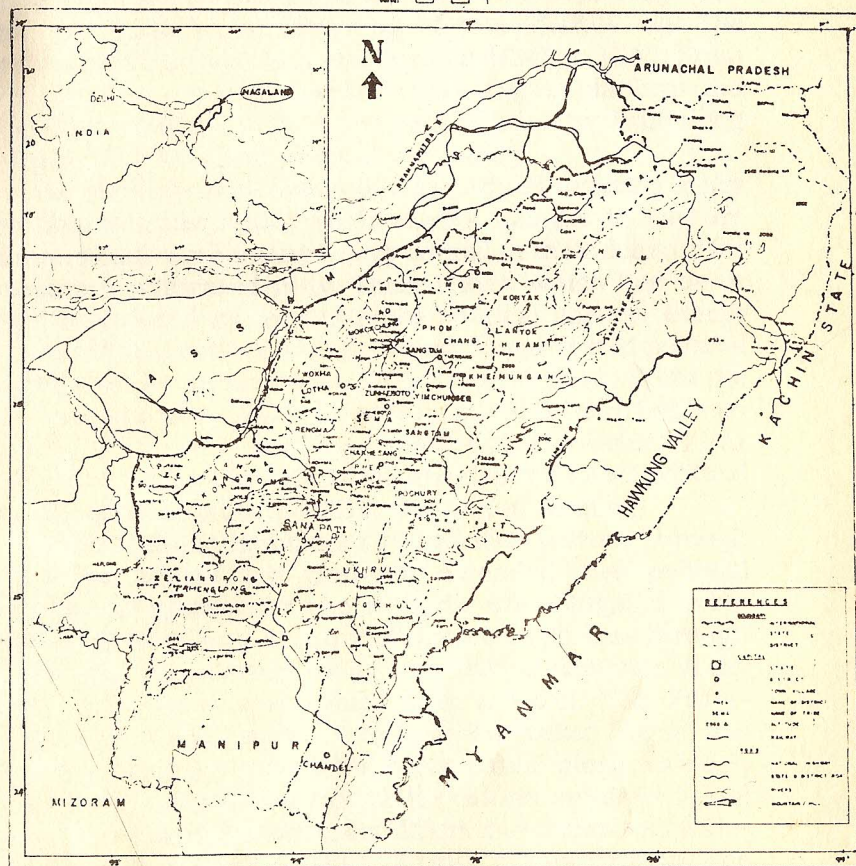
Subhadra Mitra Channa

## Nagaland — Problems of Identity

The first question that arises in my mind while editing this volume is regarding the conceptualization of Nagaland. Apart from the fact that the map of India circumscribes a certain geographical area as Nagaland what else goes into the constitution of its social, cultural and political entity? Can this region be identified as a region inhabited by the people whom we call Nagas. The answer is only partially true, for although this region is predominantly occupied by the so-called Naga tribes, they are also represented in large numbers in adjoining areas such as Manipur, Upper Assam and Burma. Moreover who are these people we identify as Nagas? It is well-known to most people who have even a working knowledge of Indian tribes that the Nagas are not one but sixteen different tribes. Each tribe has its own language, dress, customs and religious practices; even the political organizations differ from tribe to tribe.

The common factors which run through the diversity of cultural forms are predominantly a racial identity which integrates all of them within an Indo-Mongoloid category and sets apart from the predominantly Indo-Aryan populations of India. Their languages likewise can be classified as Sino-Tibetan or Tibeto-Chinese, again distinct from the Indo-Aryan and Indo-dravidian dialects in the Indian mainland. Some cultural features such as the magical properties associated with the human head, which led to the practice of head hunting, the tracing of ancestry from sacred stones embodied in a megalithic culture and the practice of disposal of the dead by exposure on a platform are some important features shared by most Naga tribes. For outsiders, the Nagas were also identified as 'the naked people' due to the reasons of brevity of their dress. Geographically they were identified with the Naga hills; which were always treated differently in

MAP OF NAGALAND



administrative terms from the adjoining Assam plains. The Naga hills was a creation of the British; who did not want to leave even the remote and inaccessible areas unadministered. It was the British, who as reported by Horam (1975: p.14), first christened the Kohima and Kokha hill areas as Naga hills and later included the Ao and Tuensang Naga areas in them.

The creation of the entity of Nagaland formed a point of identification for all the people who were so grouped together. The first symbolic confirmation of this identity was the formation of the Naga National Council (NNC) in 1946. From then onwards the Naga people had a common platform and a common identity which they sought to assert by demanding a separate Nation and political autonomy.

The strongly individualistic and mutually warring tribes who sporadically raided each other's villages to capture human heads were unanimously united in their demand for a separate political identity. These tribes, which had never been subjugated by any external political agency, except occasional encounters with the Ahom kings, feared political subjugation by an unknown Indian Government. From the very inception of the state of Nagaland in 1960, there has been a politically volatile situation. Chaube (in this volume) has traced the political history of Nagaland and its final political identification as a state within the Indian Nation.

While Chaube has traced the various policies through which the British had gradually extended their political tentacles to administer the hitherto unsubjugated tribal territories, a dynamic account of the actual process through which such subjugation took place finds a reference in my paper on Naga ethnographies (this volume). Von Furer-Haimendorf, in his book, 'Return to the Naked Nagas' has given a graphic account of his participation along with J.P. Mills in the raiding of a hostile (to British administration) village. The Nagas, not being conditioned to centralized state-systems, did not take kindly to British administration. The harsh truth is that even today the political assimilation of the Nagas into Indian Nation is not something that has reached into the hearts of the Nagas.

The Naga scholars in this volume have been forth-right in their opinion of the creation of a Naga state and of Indian administration. Sanyü in his candid paper has pointed to

the irrational fixation of boundaries, which has created a state, neither politically nor socially acceptable to the Nagas. Lurstep has given us the area on map of the Nagaland correctly visualized by the Naga people. What emerges from the views of these Naga scholars is that today the Nagas are sure of their identity. They are also aware of their collective demands. There has been an emergence of an "ethnic consciousness". The "consciousness" has emerged in a negative rather than a positive sense. It has been the unfortunate history of the creation of most Nation states that, unwilling minorities have been forcibly incorporated into larger bodies. The ruling ethnic group is either a ruling majority or a dominant minority. The problems faced by the minorities have often been the cultural dominance of the ruling ethnic group coupled with political subjugation and marginal participation in Nation building activities. Many times even when there is no material oppression such groups have a feeling of psychological alienation, a feeling precipitated quite often by physical and cultural characters different from the mainstream population.

Many tribal populations had a history of political autonomy and quite a few of them were unused to any kind of centralized political authority. The fiercely independent, nomadic pastoral tribes of Iraq and Iran are a case in point. Beck (1989) has traced the social and political history of the Qashqai tribals through several regimes in Iraq and has described the continual confrontation between the tribals and the rulers. Similar problems have been faced by Russia, China and other Nation states as well. One would not do justice to the great variations in economy, political history and ecology to trace common factors in these various situations. However, two factors that are predominant in all cases are firstly the non-feasibility on part of any Nation state to relinquish their border areas or any part of their vital resource bearing areas to independent ethnic minorities, and secondly, the irrationality under the present global situation for the political existence of small independent units.

The feelings of frustration felt by such marginal populations and the political imperative of integrating them into a larger entity is a situation of impasse. The best of intentions have not led to easy solutions. The Naga political

underground, the continuous violence, the constantly volatile situation in that area are harsh realities of the Indian political scene. As anthropologists the best that we can do is to demystify the people to the world at large. To bring them closer and let everyone feel that under that mysterious veil of exoticism are a people, whose aspirations, values and sentiments are a precious asset which is cherished by them and is a part of our common Indian heritage.

To most outsiders, the Nagas have been some kind of an exotic people, generally associated with practices such as head hunting, exotic dances and beautiful shawls. The earliest and the most abundant material on the Nagas has been by the British, most of them administrators, who had likewise documented the Naga way of life as if it was something of museum value. They were viewed from the outside as a strange people with some bizzare way of life. Very few anthropologists have worked on the Naga tribes in recent times, though now some literature is coming out. (Jacob; 1990 Horam; 1989)

A majority of recent publications on Nagaland have been cursory with little real insight into the minds of the people. With the exception of M. Horam and a handful of other scholars, Nagas themselves have been curiously reticent about their own society and culture. The political situation itself has prevented most people from venturing inside Nagaland for indepth field studies.

As I have elaborated in my paper (this volume) the classical ethnographies were curiously biased. Moreover the time period they dealt with is long since past. Today, we have a new Nagaland and the way of life, ideas and values of people have changed. Not only have the Nagas changed, the others have also changed in their relationship to them. A new generation has come up for whom the Nagas are no longer exotic tribals inhabiting far off places but there may be a Naga friend next door; a classmate, a co-worker and simply any one is likely to meet on the streets. Over a period of time a large number of Nagas have come to occupy schools, colleges, and offices in many parts of India. The distance between non-Naga and Naga is no longer as great.

On the other hand the modern Naga has his/her own conceptualization of his/her identity as a Naga; which may

be quite different from the earlier one. The continuing political turmoil in Nagaland does not assuage the fear that the Nagas still want to assert their own independence.

The problem of Nagaland is no different from the problems faced by any nation state which is historically an amalgamation of a number of separate social, cultural and political identities. Each of the ethnic groups which do not constitute the ruling ethnic majority/minority whichever the case may be, feel deprived on one ground or the other. Their very minority status leads to a feeling of paronia of being over-run or subjugated. This feeling is heightened when communication links are weak as has been the case of Nagaland, for historical reasons of political and geographical isolation. Given the political entity of the nation state and a world map where super-powers are constantly trying to engulf smaller entities, the solutions to this problem do not seem forthcoming. The peaceful and isolated existence of small communities is no longer possible for political economic reasons of a global competition for resources and power. An independent Nagaland may only be a dream of the Naga people for simple lack of feasibility. But on the other hand it is important to understand the mind behind the dream.

In the year 1986 a group of young scholars and teachers from Department of Anthropology, Delhi University visited Kohima for the purpose of studying social and cultural aspects of Naga life. These students went without any colonial bias and also caught the Naga society at a crucial turning point in history. As Majumdar (this volume) has clearly pointed out in her description of a Naga village, the rapidly changing village is soon going to disintegrate all such features as mark it out as a typical Angami Naga village. Taking change to be a normal course of human life, the sudden acceleration in change makes one realize that may be after a decade one will not be able to describe an Angami village because none would exist. Sanyü, a Naga scholar himself has vividly described the accelerated changes taking place in Nagaland today. Change itself is a part of any social life but the dangerous thing as Sanyü points out is uncontrolled change, a change that is taking place at a rate that is destabilising. The younger generation of Nagas are not getting enough time to readjust to a new way of life. Moreover, many of them

are yet groping for a true identity. While few would like to go back to their ancestral ways, the search for an alternate model has led them farther away than closer to the Indian mainstream. As has been discussed by several authors in this volume, such as Joshi, Mathur, D'Souza and Sanyü, missionaries and Christianity have played a tremendous role in shaping the emerging ethos of Nagaland. The younger generations are more influenced by western culture than Indian. In fact even at the time of Independence, the Nagas were politically inclined towards the British, than towards the Indians. Even today few Nagas, if any, favour Indian dress, language or culture. This western identification has created further problems for the integration of Nagaland into the Indian Nation.

Theoretically and methodologically almost half of the papers in this book may be treated as village studies but not, as was the colonial practice, the study of a total village, in its entirely but different aspects of the village, done with reference to the total village as a backdrop to these activities. Since all the students in 1986 have worked on the same village, a putting together of these diverse topics would provide an integrated picture. The fields of interest are also a reflection on current theoretical interests in the discipline especially two papers, one on women by Mehrotra and the other on ethnomedicine by Joshi are areas on which little coverage was given in traditional ethnographies.

The authors have taken care to integrate the traditional ethnographic method of in depth fieldwork and minute observational details with current theories in their respective fields. Another divergence from the traditional ethnographical method has been to see contemporary Naga society in light of the multiple outside influences. The 'primitive isolate' of the classical anthropologists no longer exists. Even though one must for sake of a proper understanding concentrate on the micro-level, the micro-social system is only an analytical abstraction of a wider network of relationships and influences. Each of the papers in this volume has in one way or the other, incorporated the network of communication, political alliance and effects of modernization on contemporary Naga life.

In my own paper on classical ethnographies I have criticised the ethnocentric and colonial view taken by the earlier ethnographers. In this volume, care has been taken to include also the points of view of those who have a very close emotional identification with Nagaland; either being born a Naga as in the case of Zimik, Lurstep, Sanyü or being adopted into Naga society as D'Souza. There has been a new trend in anthropological methodology in which the earlier subject/object dichotomy has been obliterated to favour an interpretative approach. The fieldworker and the field are no longer viewed as separate. The subjective consciousness of the fieldworker is an important aspect of analysis as well data is seen not as external to the observer but as internal to the subjective experience of the ethnographer. Lurstep's understanding of the Naga political situation from the point of view of a member internal to Naga society is an important contribution towards understanding the Naga as they identify and understand themselves. It may be possible that some people may not agree with his views, but it is important to record the cognition, the externalization of the internal self of a Naga, which is all the more important as it involves a person who is a trained anthropologist.

Though not born a Naga, D'Souza's long period of work in Nagaland which includes his M.Phil and Ph.D. work and where he is living for the last decade or more, has internalized a large portion of a Naga self. This is all the more so as he is adopted into a Naga family and is regarded as a member of the tribe. His paper on the emergent self of Nagaland provides an insight into the conflicting value systems of a changing Naga society and the emergence of a new self-image of the modern Naga which is not an amalgamation but a creative emergence. D'Souza ends his paper with a prayer, perhaps because he is a priest or perhaps because he loves Nagaland.

Another's insider's view is provided by Sanyü, himself a Naga scholar. He is able to combine the objectivity of a social scientist with the sensitivity of a son of the soil to dissect the current situation in Nagaland. In tracing the history of creation of the state of Nagaland, he is able to politically analyse the mistakes made by the central government, especially as viewed from a Naga's point of view.

Zimik, in her paper, has given a keen evaluation of the changing agrarian scene in Nagaland. She has shown how a misunderstanding of the traditional agrarian structure of Nagaland and hasty decision-making is having its adverse effects on the economy. The influx of a monetary economy and the commodification of land has been aptly dealt with by her. In fact changes in agrarian structure is the backbone of much of the changes taking place in Nagaland today. Whereas Sanyü and D'Souza have dealt with the ideological and cultural aspects of change, Zimik's paper fills in the much needed gap by providing the material base of change in Naga Society today.

An interesting addition is Jacob's paper on the Cambridge Video Disc. Since the title of this volume was Contemporary Ethnography, it seemed an appropriate conclusion to end the volume which had began with an exposition on classical ethnographies with the latest technology in ethnographic material. The Naga Video Disc also summarises some crucial ethnographic feature of the Nagas. Jacob's own book Nagaland, is already out. His paper gives a brief summary of the contents of his larger work. It also introduces the readers to a novel technique and contemporary methodology.

In this volume we have included basically two types of papers, data based and analytical. The data based ones are a rich compilation of ethnographic details on various aspects of life in a Naga village. Interestingly enough, at this level, when we are talking about ethnomedicine, women or social history of a village, it is not methodologically possible to talk of a unified entity 'Nagaland'. These papers are all contextualized in a particular tribe the 'Angamis' a particular region — Kohima and a particular village — Jotsoma. At the level of cultural description it is not possible with methodological honesty to talk of a Naga society and culture in general. Yet it is possible to talk of a Naga self, a Naga world view and hopes and aspiration of the people of Nagaland in general as has been brought out vividly by the three papers on Naga values (D'Souza), political issues (Lurstep), political and social change (Sanyü). This is the real contribution to an understanding of contemporary Nagaland that we want to make through this volume. The cultural details are specific to each Naga Community, although much of it can be

extrapolated to a general understanding of Naga life. Zimik's paper, for example, summarizes an overview of Naga agrarian structure, the mode of cultivation, inheritance and man-land relationship being some of the things common to all the Naga people. Similarly, Mehrotra's understanding of Naga women, Joshi's description of ethnomedicine, Mathur's paper on Naga religion and Marwah and Srivastava's description of the Khel Gate, though based upon data from a single village, can be generalized at some level to give us an insight into the Naga way of life viewed in a broad spectrum.

The coalescence of Naga sentiments, aspirations and values is an entity called Nagaland which cannot be understood as a geographical or political entity. It is a people, an identity that we are talking about when we talk of Nagaland. It does not matter if there are cultural differences or political disagreement. As long as a large community identify themselves with this symbolic entity Nagaland — it has an existence. They may not agree with the political boundary drawn on the map, they may not even subscribe to the same way of life. But they have an identification, a sense of belonging to the name 'Naga'. It is this reality that we talk of when we talk of Nagaland.

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## ABOUT THE EDITOR

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**Series Title :** Culture, Structure and change in North-East India.

**Editors :** J.S. Bhandari,  
Subhadra Mitra  
Channa.

Nagaland is one of the prominent states of the North-Eastern Region of India. The abode of several well known tribes—it has evoked both scholarly and administrative interest right from early British times. Much ethnographic documents exist with regard to Nagaland but contemporary Nagaland is in a state of tremendous flux in social, political, religious and economic spheres. Comparitively less material is being generated about the changing aspects of Naga life. This book is an attempt to fill in a void in this regard.

The editor of this volume has made an effort to bring together some original articles on Nagaland which cover various aspects of life in the region, dealing with diverse topics such as village structure, religion, ethnomedicine, material culture, women, agrarian structure, political consciousness and social change. Some of the articles are based on first hand field data collected from an Angami Naga village. Other articles are based on the varied field and theoretical knowledge of the authors.

An attempt has been made to bring out the point of view of Naga scholars with regard to the politico-economic status of Nagaland. The emerging Naga consciousness with regard to their own position within the Nation state of India is an important highlight of this volume.

The book also focuses on the evolving methodology with regard to ethnography from classical to the modern era; including one article on the latest video disc technology and consequent shift in methodology.

The book should be of interest to all scholars interested in tribes, the North-Eastern region, anthropologists and sociologists as well as political scientists and development planners.

**Rs. 350/-**