

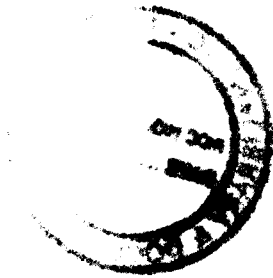
THE NAGA IMBROGLIO

(A Personal Perspective)

Charles Chasie

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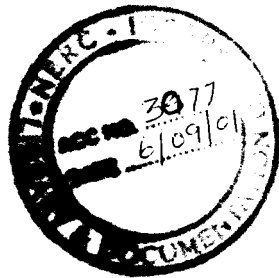
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INTRODUCTION

The present work was originally intended as an essay on contemporary Naga society in the form of an autobiography. However, unfamiliar as I was with the art of book-writing, instead of merging and fusing together the two topics into a wholesome new product, what turned out was a perfect job of mingling two seemingly insoluble ingredients still retaining their original properties!

Therefore, the autobiographical part has been removed. What is presented here are events of recent Naga political history and their fall-outs on society. Nevertheless, this is not a history book nor is it, strictly speaking, a commentary on the history of the Naga people. This is more of an attempt to expose the moral-psychological underpinnings of a nationalistic movement that seems to have been misunderstood by most people, including some of those involved, and the undercurrents that still play important roles in the continuing "drama". The problem is complex; the solution, difficult to see without "statesmanship of the humble heart" on the part of those playing principal roles. In the meantime, the Problem threatens to make victims of all those who have been caught in this spiralling vortex, like an unknown black-hole that sucks everything in. The effort is to try to make people, including Naga leaders, "understand".

Readers, especially those who frequent the halls and corridors of academia, will find that this work follows no "method" of presentation. It is, in great part, an informal letter — I have even used the first person, as well as personal stories, in several places and the dividing lines for some chapters have totally disappeared — primarily addressed to the Naga reader hoping that this would provoke discussion and debate within Naga society, especially at this 'crucial' stage of Naga history when everyone is clamouring for Peace through settlement of the Naga Problem. Largely due to this, I have not hesitated to write about happenings, or possible happenings, without giving too much thought to how the story would ultimately unfold. The reader will also notice that quite often, I have veered off from the main topic under discussion and included certain "nuggets" that, I perceive, may be of interest to him. For the same reason, I have included the chapters on Naga Cul-

ture and the Christian Church because the Solution has to be “wholesome”. At the same time, the “address” is not to the Naga alone. It is as much an appeal for statesmanship, and vision, among the leaders and thinking persons on mainland India. Therefore, I have simply allowed my pen to run freely, unhindered by any considerations of how I ought to present my work.

Readers will also notice that I have not commented upon the roles played by various Naga leaders. This is because the Naga story is still unfolding. Many of the protagonists are still alive. Even the actions of those who have since passed away continue to affect everyday life. It would, therefore, be premature to make any kind of assessment or to pass judgement on any of their actions. That must be left for another time and for writers in the future. To make any kind of comment at this stage would only result in further bad-blood and division of Naga society. But one can be sure that history will not allow anyone to go without the stamp of its verdict.

This book is intended for quick and convenient reading even by those who are very busy — also the reason for the long list of appendices at the end. Naturally, I have not cluttered it with details which others, before me, have already covered. For those interested in further reading of the Naga Problem, a list of suggested readings are provided at the end which I hope they will make use of.

I should like to think that what has been presented here would be of some use to policy-makers, as well as research persons and others, since no one else has, so far, done much work on what has been attempted here. Many, Nagas and non-Nagas alike, have written about various aspects of Naga history and, especially about the “Naga Problem”. But few have made attempts to study, to analyse and to present the moral-psychological under-currents, or the basis and the values, that keep Naga society ‘ticking’. It should be kept in mind, however, that what is presented here are the views of one individual. I must also say that although I reject the basic premise of Marxian Thought, as will become evident from a quick reading of this work, there are many good things in it that I agree with. And the present work is proof of my agreement with one of its dicta : That philosophers have explained the

world in different ways; the point, however, is to change it. This was where Marxism found dynamic ideological feet and shook Religion at its very foundations.

How does one change the world (society)? In "Japan: The Decisive Decade", the author, Basil Entwistle, suggests that the secret of Japan's rise to economic super-powerdom, after the crushing defeat during the World War II, lay in the values that went to underpin democratic values. What does Democracy really mean? It means (i) Transparency and Accountability (ii) Basic minimum service to society and (iii) Primacy of the individual conscience. When one of these conditions is missing, Democracy gets subverted.

But, of the above three conditions of Democracy, I would place "primacy of the individual conscience" above the others. When this one condition is respected, the other two should follow. When this is so, changing the individual becomes the key to changing the society and the world. Too slow? Of course, it is slow. But what is the alternative answer? There is the story of the Reverend, running a Charity and providing free meals. One day, he was in a hurry for an important appointment. So, rather than feeding each person individually, he went up to the belfry, asked the hungry to gather below, and poured whatever milk he had over them. This was where Marx also, in my opinion, went wrong. Sure, structures are important and essential. But Man and Structures must go together to provide the ideal combination, as advocated by Jens Wilhelmsen in his book, "Man and Structures". Structures (systems if you like) that ignore Man can only become meaningless. And Man (or society), without the right Structures, result in a lot of injustices.

"To applaud an idea is futile; to change society is what we are meant to do. We have condemned the lie but we have not established integrity" said William Porter, Chairman of the Advisory Council for the International Communications Forum (ICF), while giving his opening address at the first Russian conference of the Forum in September, 1993. In Naga society, despite so many claims, and the desire of many others, to make Nagaland a "Christian State", we are yet to "condemn the lie"; much less establish integrity. Christian or not, the survival of

a society depends on its ability to identify and pursue the Truth as we each are given to know the Truth. Christ will not save us just because we are using His name — in fact we may turn His wrath onto ourselves for defaming Him! Only a relentless pursuit of Truth, as we honestly believe, will save us and our people.

How do we identify whether we, as a people, are doing the will of God? It is enough to look at our society and see whether our people are happy or not; whether their lives are fulfilling and fruitful. If not, then, it cannot be what God intends for any people/individual. It is time for the Naga Church to concentrate on transforming Naga society rather than only thinking about sending missionaries outside : the Mission, in desperate need, is here. If we do the will of God, the Mission will automatically “prosper”. We don’t have to talk about it. People will come to witness for themselves. If we do not do the will of God, however much we may proclaim that we are doing the will of God, nothing will happen. The “bell” is tolling for the Church, and for the Christians, in Nagaland! We should stop hearing and listening only to the bell that we keep ringing for others! Introspection and Meditation, not just Missionary Activity and Preaching, are the needs of the hour. Human as we are, we may keep on committing mistakes — if you are like me! Motives are important, however misunderstood by others. And chances are, there will always be someone, oftentimes someone dear to you, who will misunderstand you. The question is whether we succumb to such misunderstandings and make ourselves “victims” or we keep on going, regardless.

Destructive, and extreme, as some of my opinions may seem, in this Introduction and in the rest of the book, my intentions are positive and constructive. Because, like Cecil Hourani, former adviser to President Bourguiba of Tunisia, I believe that “on the understanding of the errors in our past may be built the new society of the future”. Like him, I have no recrimination against anyone, individual, group/faction or government. Time and history will, no doubt, provide their own judgement. My endeavour is to help build a climate of honest self-criticism and free expression in our society, which has lacked these qualities for quite sometime, because from them, I believe, will emerge the necessary kick-starts and launch-pads that will

propel our society from its present state of disarray “to a new vision of ourselves and the world we would like to build”. Alexander Solzhenitsyn, in his Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech, said that “one word of Truth outweighs the whole world”. My effort here has been to present the truth as I see it. Others may think my opinions and observations are right, wrong, exaggerated, inadequate, generalised etc. I do not dispute their right to their opinions. But I, certainly, wish they would also share theirs`.

A final point. There may be times when our people's anger may be roused by feelings of others manipulating us, and using us, against our own people. There may be times when we feel like doing our worst to our perceived enemies. But, in our situation, we usually end in fighting our own people because most of us have prostituted ourselves to what we could gain for ourselves, to our pride and ego, or to whatever other “feelings” we might be having for the time-being! Moreover, we have no “vision” or have inadequate visions for our own people. Status, Appearances and Money have played havoc in our society, even with those who have the greatest of respects from our people. Naturally, their sense of right and wrong have been vitiated even if they do not, sometimes, realize — With everyone of us, today, it is all only a question of degrees. And, where our leaders are concerned, because they keep genuflecting to Delhi, their sense of pride and ego may have need to be “re-charged” with stepping all over our people and demanding “loyalty”, which frequently end in treating our own people despicably. Loyalty, of course, can only be offered by the giver and cannot be imposed upon.

I wish every reader the realisation of the primacy of his or her conscience and individuality. This is the real basis of humanity and, through it, we might discover the purpose of the universe. No doubt, in the process, many of us will keep stumbling and falling. But we could also discover that there is purpose and meaning; that we do matter. Anything less is a betrayal of the God who created the universe and the creatures who inhabit it.

In the course of preparing this work I have become greatly indebted to so many people, much of the time because of my own

inexperience as a writer. I would, nevertheless, like to take this opportunity to thank some of them. My sincere gratitude to Niketu Iralu, member of the Nagaland State Commission on Education; Thejao Vihienuo, Officer on Special Duty, Nagaland University; Buno Liegise, Department of Education, Nagaland University; S. Aelavanthara, Department of English, Nagaland University; Niu F. Whiso, Head of English Department, Kohima Science College, Jotsoma; K. Peseyie, former Director of Information and Public Relations; and many others, including several serving bureaucrats, whose help and encouragement, in various ways, have meant so much to me as a novice-writer. A few had to even put up with every draft I made, often sacrificing their own schedules! Some names have not been mentioned for fear of causing embarrassment. But, I owe so much to all of them.

My heartfelt thanks to Professor Udayon Misra, who so kindly took the trouble to photocopy his article, "The Naga National Question" and post to me so quickly at his own expense; to Bendanganshi, the Oxford University Press, B.G. Verghese -- from whom I also learnt the proper way of quoting earlier works! -- Mhiesizokho Zinyu, Asoso Yonuo, M. Alemchiba, and others whose past works have been of such help to me.

Finally, my very special thanks are reserved for Homen Borgohain, that literary giant of Assam, who cared enough to befriend me and urged me into serious writing. But for his proddings, and encouragements, I might never have entered this field. I hope his faith in me will be justified someday.

Needless to say, the present theme was chosen by me and all opinions, the way of presentation, as well as mistakes committed, inspite of efforts to avoid them, are my sole responsibility.

Kohima
May 1999

Charles Chasie