

The Naga Movement: A Brief Chronological Understanding

Subham Dutta

Email: sam.d652@gmail.com
Assam University, Silchar

Abstract: *Northeast India refers to the easternmost region of India comprising of states of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura and new inclusion is Sikkim. The Northeastern region is linked to the Indian mainland by a 21 kilometer long land corridor passing through Siliguri in the eastern state of West Bengal, called the 'chicken's neck.' Nearly "the entire boundary of the region is an international border: China to the north, Bangladesh to the southwest, Bhutan to the Northeast, and Myanmar to the east.. This region is also known as the cultural mosaic of India with numerous culture and communities and races. Many of which are in the struggle to protect their identity and territory. One of such is the Nagas, the known residence of present Nagaland. Like other communities of the region they are also having similar problem but their issues and problems are very much different from the others. In this paper an attempt is made to discuss the Naga Movement in its chronological order.*

Key Concepts: *Northeast India, Nagaland, Greater Nagaland, Nagalim, Identity, Identity Movement*

I. WHAT IS THE QUESTION OF THE NAGAS?

The Nagas Maintain that their rights were in existence before the Nation States came into being and can continue to exist independently. The Nagas hold that the British aggrandizing thematic was based on a policy of managing frontiers solely to safeguard tea and forest economy. So the main theme behind the Naga Movement is the question "we, the Nagas were historically never a part of India then why we would be part of Indian union". This is one side of the issue another side is that Assam had an Inner Line System to protect the Nagas. The area after the Inner Line was not defined and is known as outer line. Now the question of Phizo was that although Indian union had included the areas under the British but what about those living in the Outer Line areas, and Phizo was the man who was born in the Kachin province, the Northernmost state of Myanmar.

II. WHAT DOES GREATER NAGALAND MEAN?

But Muivah's vision of Greater Nagaland was including the Naga inhabited areas of neighboring states of Assam, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh and some portions of Burma (Myanmar), which is considered by them as their rightful claim. The map of Nagalim released by NSCN-IM, claims the Karbi Anglong and North Cachar District of Assam (Dima Hasao) and some parts of Golaghat, Sibsagar, Dibrugarh, Tinsukia, and Jorhat. It also includes Dibang Valley, Lohit, Tirap and Changlang districts of Arunachal Pradesh and some important parts of the four of the seven districts of Manipur – Temenlong, Senapati, Ukhrul, and Chandel. The Greater Nagaland or the Nagalim slated to be an independent state. The proposed Nagalom spreads over approximately 1, 20,000 sq. km. in contrast to the present State of Nagaland that has an area of 16,527 sq. km.

III. BEGINNING OF THE NAGA MOVEMENT

1886 was the beginning of the British annexation of Naga Hills, after the annexation of Naga territories, all the competing sub-tribes of Naga group came under a united administrative control of the British power. They did not however, accepted the new British rules. The Nagas had their own customs and traditions. They had their own administrative system, i.e. it was their Traditional Self Governing Institutions or the Traditional Political Institutions to which the Nagas were only loyal. This was perhaps the first stage of Naga identity formation.

Moreover, during the First World War a good number of Naga soldiers were taken by the British to fight for them. After the war they came back with new western ideas about the society. After their retirement from the army they formed an organization called the Naga Club in 1918 it was the first Naga civil organization. It was an organization of the Naga middle class. It did a lot in arousing political consciousness among the Nagas. The idea of Naga as a community was developed by this. Before the existence of the Naga club the sense of identity consciousness was not there among the Nagas.

However in this regard we can mention another factor that contributed to the Naga movement, the factor was the Government of India Act of 1935 designated the Naga Hills district as an “excluded area” where laws applicable to the rest of British-controlled India would not operate and the Nagas could continue with their own traditional ways of life with little interference from the federal or the provincial government. In a way we can say that this further made the Nagas conscious about their distinctiveness

IV. THE NAGA MOVEMENT IN THE COLONIAL PERIOD

Insurgency in Nagaland is the one which is ethnically organized. The first problem of insurgency surfaced in Nagaland (which remained divided between Assam and the Northeast Frontier Agency) in the early fifties, albeit the aspiration of Nagas not to join India after the partition had been expressed earlier in 1926 to the British administration.

In 1929, the Naga Club, an organization of 20 Naga tribes, presented a memorandum to the Simon Commission. The memorandum clearly articulated a separate political administrative unit for Nagaland containing both sides of the hilly border region between India and Burma, i.e. the Northeast Indian states of Nagaland, Manipur, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh and Burma’s Sagaing Division and Kachin state and at that time the Naga Hills were under the Chief Commissioner’s Provenge of Assam.

The British rulers who were fully cognizant of the Naga pride and independent nature had kept the Naga Hills away from the mainland and administered it as an “Excluded Area with an Inner Line Regulation.” According to this system, no ‘outsider’ could enter these areas without a valid permit from the district authorities. The British policy of segregating the Northeast tribes and their tribal lands from the rest of India created a ‘frontier within a frontier’.

With the aim of uniting the Nagas, C.R. Pawsey, the last and then Deputy Commissioner of the Naga Hills established an institution in April 1945, called ‘The Naga Hills District Tribal Council’ (NHDTTC). It was the first ever Naga political organization. In the first meeting of the NHDTTC at Wokha in February 1946, a conference of representatives of individual tribal councils changed the original name of the NHDTTC to Naga National Council (NNC), which was to spearhead the Naga movement. In October 1946, the Nagas fearing the entry of Parties passed a resolution as per which no member from any party except that of NNC would be allowed to enter in the Naga Hills without the permission of the NNC.

However, the 1929 memorandum was failed. The memorandum urged both the Government to set up an Interim government for a period of ten years. Subsequently, the sub – committee of the Advisory Committee on the aboriginal tribes visited Kohima to seek Naga opinion on May 29, 1947. The committee made it clear that it was impossible for them to recommend the proposal for ten years interim government to the Constituent Assembly.

But the contradiction was that Mountbatten in a private letter mentioned that he had clarified from Assam Governor, Andrew Claw that although NNC was a self constituted body it did have a representative character. He agreed that the Interim government had to be a continuation of British rule but it was not given.

In the midst of all these, Sadar Patel visited Kohima on May 27, 1947 to find out the wishes of the Nagas. But it did not bring any positive results. So, Sri Akbar Hydari, ICS, the Indian Governor was sent to Kohima on June 26, 1947 to impress upon the Nagas.

After a series of meetings with the members of NNC and the Deputy commissioner Pawsey, the Governor Hydari expressed his full sympathy for the Nagas and a Nine Point Agreement. The agreement recognized the rights of the Nagas to develop themselves according to their free wishes. As per the agreement the Naga government would be given full legislative, executive and judicial power and the Governor of Assam was made especially responsible for the Naga people for a period of ten years. As said by Aliba Imti, the then Secretary of NNC, it was the foundation stone of their cherished goal.

V. NAGA MOVEMENT FROM 15th AUGUST 1947 – 1988

With the independence of India on 15 August 1947, the Nagas, in accordance with the Hydari Agreement, became part of the Indian Union. By 1947, the NNC had become the nerve centre of Naga tribes, not only in the Naga Hills, but also in Manipur and Burma, as an all Naga political organization. The rapidity with which the NNC gained acceptance of the Naga tribes is an outward manifestation of the inner feeling that already exists in the minds of the Nagas.

On the morning of 15th August 1947, as a part of boycott of independence celebration, the Naga boys pasted posters on the walls, trees and rocks of Kohima. Some of those read, “Indians, it is better to go from Nagaland without any delay”, “Nagaland is for the Nagas”, “Naga people want peace”. Here we can feel a sentiment of anti India among some section of the Nagas, but the good thing was that the Kohima police who was now under the Indian Administration did a better job by removing all those posters.

In May 1951, when India rebuffed the NNC demand to hold a plebiscite in Naga Hills, the NNC proceeded with a 'referendum' the same year without any agreement from the Government of India and claimed to have got overwhelming support because in the referendum 99 per cent were in favor of sovereignty. Phizo went to New Delhi and requested Prime Minister, Nehru to meet their demand for a sovereign Nagaland. The request obviously was rejected. But it was rejected, and considered NNC as coming within the 6th schedule, Phizo on his return started mobilizing the different rival sub-tribes of Nagas with the slogan of “Naga nationalism.

It needs to be mentioned here that the Nagas had boycotted the 1st general elections held in 1952. Phizo created a secretive government known as Naga Federal Government (NFG) in 1954 coupled with a Naga federal army of around 15,000 armed guerrillas.

But the things went totally wrong. After the murder of T. Sakhrie, the moderate Naga leader, in January 1956, NNC came increasingly under the control of militant leaders like Phizo. It is mention worthy here that Phizo was considered as one of the most vibrant leaders of the Naga movement. During India's freedom struggle, Phizo had fought on the side of the Indian National Army led by Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose for Japan against the Allies. The Naga militants formed the Federal Government of Nagaland (FGN) in 1956 and initiated armed insurrection to carry ahead their struggle for independence. Within a few years the Naga movement, which was initially strong only in the Naga Hills district, spread to Tuensang Frontier Division and to the Naga inhabited areas in Manipur. To contain the growing militant activities, the Indian government deployed the army and enacted several 'black' laws such as the Assam Maintenance of Public Order (Autonomous Districts) Act 1953, the Assam Disturbed Areas Act 1955, Armed Forces (Assam, Manipur) Special Powers Act 1958 etc., equipping the armed forces with more and more powers to deal with insurgents. Taking advantage of the special powers assigned to them, the armed forces resorted to violation of rights by committing acts of rape, murder, arson, loot etc.

Despite the actions against it, the NNC chose to continue its struggle. The formation of Nagaland in 1963 as a separate state within the Indian Union under the Ministry of External Affairs could not satisfy the militants' urge for freedom. Later in 1964 responding to the appeals of Naga Peace Mission, NNC agreed to a cease-fire agreement with the government of India and engaged in negotiations with Indian state for about 18 months.

In 1972, declared NNC an unlawful organization and enforced a ban on it along with some other militant outfits under Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act. The state government's harsh measures against the insurgents forced them to come to the negotiation table. Some of the rebel leaders who had joined political parties facilitated the dialogue. As a result, on 11 November, 1975, the Shillong Accord was signed.

The accord was however, rejected by more hardcore leaders in NNC like Isak Chisi Swu, Muivah and Khaplang. Phizo's failure in taking a clear stand over the accord and his continued silence disappointed the three leaders. Therefore, they left NNC and formed a new party, Nationalist Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) in February 1980, with Isak Chisi, K.K. Khaplang and T. Muivah as chairman, vice-president and general secretary, respectively

VI. BEYOND 1988 PICTURE

However, in 1988, ethnic divisions led to a split within NSCN into two groups, one led by Isak and Muivah called NSCN (IM) and another by Khaplang named NSCN (K). This split was a glaring example of how 'intra-state' and 'intra-ethnic' tribal rivalries dominate much of insurgent politics in Nagaland. Despite the fact that NSCN (IM) continues to struggle for a sovereign Nagaland, a ceasefire agreement between the Indian government and NSCN (IM) leaders in was established in 1997. Although the initial agreement was only for a period of three months, the cease-fire was extended periodically to facilitate talks. In 2003, during Vajpayee's term as the Prime Minister for the first time, the self-exiled leaders of NSCN (IM) – Isak Swu and Th. Muivah – came to India to hold discussions with Indian leadership.

In 2004 after the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) took over power at the centre, at the invitation of Dr. Man Mohan Singh, the then Prime Minister of India, Isak Swu and Th. Muivah visited India and had talks with political leaders, ministers and top government officials. The Naga leaders spent almost six months in India

getting feedback from their own people and negotiating their demands with the government of India. The Indian government treated the NSCN (IM) leaders, not as terrorists, but as political representatives of the Naga nation. But the issues did not come to an end rather it continued in the form of insurgency.

VII. MOVEMENT FROM 2014 - ONWARDS

In this context we can say the things got a bit changed after the formation of NDA Government in 2014 at the center. In August 3 2015, with an aim of ending insurgency in Nagaland, government signed an accord with key outfit NSCN (IM) which Prime Minister Narendra Modi described as a "historic" step to usher in peace in the state. The pact was signed in the presence of the Prime Minister, Home Minister Rajnath Singh and National Security Adviser Ajit Doval by the outfit's leader T Muivah and government's interlocutor R N Ravi at the PM's residence.. However, khaplang group did not stop carrying out the attacks on the Indian Arm forces from their bases in Myanmar, for example: Two IED explosions on 15 – 16 April, 2015 at Lerie Colony, near CRPF Camp in Kohima District. Ultimately end came when NSCN (K) agreed to the cease fire agreement on March27, 2015. But the activities of NSCN (IM) is still on and the most notable and the recent one was the incidence of Namtok Tea Estate in Changlang district of Arunachal Pradesh where the NSCN (IM) group demanded Rs. 4 crores from the management.

VIII. CONCLUSION

Nevertheless, the Government of India now needs to take “conclusive political measures” in the regional security perspective. Temporary compromises such as periodic extension of ceasefire are always susceptible to breakdown. At this juncture, the role of Naga civil society and local community groups is extremely important who by building pressure groups can push the government and various insurgents’ factions to end the stalemate. The current political environment is so laden with suspicion and distrust that resolving differences between the competing insurgent outfits is the biggest challenge. However new concepts and theories are coming up , one such in the “satellite sovereignty”. If things goes in that way than the entire region could be a political lab for political experimentation.

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