# **Socio-cultural and Political Impact of Colonisation on Naga Hills**

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**Abstract:** Naga people, inhabitant of Naga Hills for centuries, had rich cultural heritage, social norms, established system of governance and defined belief system. These Naga communities, were affected the most in India by colonisation due to their simplicity, straight forward nature and ethnic unique lifestyle. Colonisation, which was coupled with domination, economic exploitation, destruction of local political systems at every place in the world did more harm in these Hills as, even the Naga identity, indigenous religion, self-sustaining way of life, language, handloom, handicrafts and local traditions were also hurt badly. Despite their well-developed religious beliefs, political and socio- cultural systems, they were dubbed as backward, pagans, animists, barbaric and head-hunters, which was direct attack on their pride and self-confidence, deliberately done to segregate and isolate them from the main stream Indian identity.

Key Words: Beliefs, Colonisation, Ethnic, Indigenous, Naga People

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## I. INTRODUCTION:

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The Nagas, who are inhabitant of Nagaland, have occupied the region called the Naga Hills for centuries. Theories are floated about the migration and settling of these communities in the present areas but none of these theories have any basis which can substantiate the claims that they are not the original inhabitants of these hills. These theories are mostly creations of certain assumptions based for understanding from outside, with meagre understanding of the area, their people, history and system of ancestry. Similar stories and myths are created about the origin of the name Naga, again with many explanations and assumptions. It is generally assumed that the plethora of communities who are called Naga have something in common, which distinguishes them from the many other communities in North East. However, the origin of the term Naga and other issues related with this is not an isolated case but is true for any other race or community in North east or India. What we know for sure is that before the advent of the British in Naga Hills the inhabitants of these hills knew themselves by their respective communities (tribes) only. The name Naga however was not in common use among these communities. It was in the last century, after the occupation of some parts of the hill range in the present Nagaland, the British colonialist called the hill areas as Naga Hills, and then onwards the term 'Naga' was widely used for all these communities which were settled in this range. We do have information about various communities which were living in Nagaland peacefully and contended with life, before colonisation. Angami, Ao, Sema, Zeliang, Chakhesang, Chang, Khemungan, Konyak, Lotha, Phom, Pochury, Rengma, Sangtam, Yimchunger, Zeme and Rongmais are the major communities of Nagaland. All of these communities were having certain lifestyle which was compatible with nature, environment and their surroundings. Like any other place in India or elsewhere, these communities had certain social norms, regulations, language, beliefs and rituals, having some similarities and few diversities and differences. They also had certain areas of influence, which kept on increasing or decreasing, and had love hate relationships with neighbours, may be Ahoms, Kacharis, Tripura kings, Manipur kings or other hill people living around them. These relationships did not had any changes on the socio- cultural life, customs, beliefs, faiths even when a particular community got defeated or had to accept the dominance of others. These communities had harmonious relationships, sometimes matrimonial also, reciprocity in friendships, barter system in trade and compatibility with environment because these all people were honest, hardworking and simple people. The colonisation by British and subsequent developments changed Nagaland drastically, in every aspect of life, socially, culturally, politically and religiously; may be the change which they may not have witnessed for centuries.

#### **Colonisation of Nagaland:**

The initiation of colonisation of Nagaland started with the contact of the Nagas with the British forces in the early eighteenth century. The British were looking for expansion of their area of influence to Berma (Present Myanmar) and China. The British first came in contact with the Nagas during the strategic survey of road communication between Assam and Manipur. This road was essential for British to continue their opium trade with China. British also required labourers for the construction of roads in hilly terrain for which the labour of plains area was not suitable. In January 1832, Captain Jenkins and Pamberton led 700 troops with 800 coolies from the Manipur valley via Popolongmei, Samoogudting and the Dhunsiri to MohungDjiooa on the Jumoona River. They had to fight their way through the whole Kutcha and Angami Naga country as Naga people resisted the unprovoked attack. British continued to have their winning streak due to better equipment, fire power, numbers and backup. Due to better resources, British proved to be better head hunters as compared to brave and ethical Nagas and were able to subjugate a large part of Naga area. The Naga Hills district was created in 1866 by the Government of British India. Initially, its headquarters were located at Samaguting. In 1875, the Lotha Naga region was conquered by British and annexed to the district. An administrative centre was established at Wokha; subsequently, this centre was shifted to Kohima in 1879. In 1889, the Ao region was fully annexed and added to the Naga Hills District as a subdivision. The boundaries of the District were further extended to include most of the Sema Naga territories (1904) and the Konyak Naga region (1910). The speciality during all these expansions was that English never allowed these communities to get united and most of the time they could manipulate support of these communities against each other, both as fighting soldiers and mostly as labourers. In 1912, the Naga Hills District was made part of the Assam Province. The Government of India Act 1919 declared the Naga Hills District as a "Backward Tract". The idea was to segregate this Naga area from rest of India so that they continue to use this area as their colony, because demand for independence or dominion status for India was gaining momentum. The area was to be treated as an entity separate from the British Indian Empire.(Shikhu, InatoYekheto. 2007) so that they continue to exploit the simple and good natured Naga. Naga were aware of the designs of the British and used to raise their voice from time to time. In the early 1930s, some of the communities in the region rebelled against the British rule under the leadership of HaipouJadonang and Rani Gaidinliu.Mr.Jadonang was sentenced to death on fabricated charges and martyred. Rani Gaidinliu continued the Naga struggle for independence from British. As per the Government of India Act 1935, the area was made an "Excluded Area", administered by the Governor of Assam. The Deputy Commissioner of the district, CR Pawsney, established the Naga Hills District Tribal Council in 1945, which later evolved into the Naga National Council in the 1945. When the Constitution of India was first released in 1950, the Naga Hills District was placed in "Part A" category of tribal districts as per the Sixth Schedule. The Part A areas were supposed to be governed by the Government of Assam in collaboration with the Autonomous District Councils. Subsequently, the Naga Hills District, along with the Tuensang Division (then a "Part B" area in the North-East Frontier Agency) were made a new administrative unit under the Ministry of External Affairs in 1957(Datta-Ray & Agrawal, 1996). Ultimately, as per the demand and aspirations of the people, this administrative unit was up graded as a full-fledged state called Nagaland.(Datta-Ray & Agrawal,1996).

#### The Impact of Colonisation:

It is rational to think that main purpose for Britishersto come and have trade with the countries like India was to improve their own economy and livelihoods. But, besides monetary prospects, another significant reasons/motivations for all European colonisers was an inherent desire to colonise, subjugate, dominate and full with ideology of "western supremacy". This idea is often referred to as "the white man's burden": a selfproclaimed responsibility of the west to subjugate and civilize any other person, who does not fall under the category of the "west". Purpose of domination and colonization for Naga hill was also similar. They not only succeeded in controlling most of the Naga Territory, but also successfully colonized various aspects of the Naga society like culture, politics, economy and education. They have since become an inseparable part of Naga history. The strategic location of the area and its mineral and natural resources, besides tea, made the hills economically attractive to the colonial state. There was a process of cultural construction which transformed the indigenous social fabric of the region. There was a process of cultural construction which transformed the indigenous social fabric of the region (Mishra, Sanghamitra, 1998). Colonisation, whether it was in Asia, Africa or elsewhere had devastating impact on natural resources, native talents, social, economic and political systems. The countries with rich indigenous culture were often killed to prove the dominance and Maoris of Australia and Indians of America are the examples of British cruelty. One of the major negative impacts of Colonialism was slavery. The traditions and cultures of the indigenous people were trampled and berated by British. The Europeans, especially the British used the divide and conquer policy. The Britishers sowed the seeds of separateness and secessionism in the region. Their policy of gradual segregation of the tribals and non-tribals, hills and the plains; segregation of the tribal population by introduction of the "Inner Line Regulation", creation of "non-regulated", "backward" and "excluded" areas/tracts was able to break centuries of historical, cultural, social and religious continuum and connectedness, The colonial theories/myths - the myth of race, core-fringe conflict, isolation - colonial mis-interpretation of history and culture further deepened the impact. The lies of exploitation and hegemony increased the suspicion of the segregated population. Like rest of India, colonial education and left ideology - as in Manipur - weakened nationalist feeling. Non-participation in freedom movement in many areas due to segregation was an added factor. Over and above, there was a colonial design, such as the Coupland Plan to separate the hills of India and Myanmar, and to make it a Crown colony( Kumar, B.B.2006). The British colonies, everywhere in the world, were ripped off their culture, language,

natural beauty and gems given to them by God. India and Nagaland were no exceptions to all this and British followed the same, pattern, policies and principles while dealing with Naga people. The major areas of impact of colonisation of Nagaland are given below.

#### A) Economic Exploitations and destruction of Handicrafts/ Handlooms

To understand the economic exploitation of Nagaland and its negative impact on its economy, we have to study the overall situation of India and economic relationship with British. We are aware that British resorted to the economic exploitation of India, looted the wealth and destroyed the local industries. British rule shattered the Indian economy and Naga Hills were no exception to that. The British, during the 16th and 17th centuries, were in a bad shape. In the early 17th century, says Mill, Britain was, "oppressed by misgovernment or scourged by civil war, (with) affordable little capital to extend trade, or protect it". (Lajpat Rai, 1928). India was also one of the major trading nations in the 18th century. In fact, India had a monopoly in the supply of high quality finished textiles and spices. In 1750, her trade amounted to about 24.5% of the total world trade. (David Clingingsmith&Jeffrey G. Williamson, 2004). According to British economist Angus Maddison, India's share of the world economy went from 24.4% in 1700 to 4.2% in 1950 (Maddison, 2001). There are evidences and data available which demonstrate that the rise of England was during the period from 1800 to 1947, and growth of India had fallen during this time while growth of England multiplied many times. British used Indian raw materials and retuned the manufactured goods at a much higher values. We all are aware that the farmers were forced to grow crops, sometimes even poppy for opium, at a much lower price than the cost of cultivation. Indian industries, handlooms, handicrafts etc. were systematically destroyed. India's share of global industrial output also declined from 25% in 1750 down to 2% in 1900. (Williamson, Jeffrey G. & David Clingingsmith, 2005) and Britain replaced India as the world's largest textile manufacturer in the 19th century. (Broadberry, S.; Gupta, B., 2005). That Britain engaged in a policy of de-industrialisation of India for the benefit of British exports, leaving Indians poorer than before British rule began. The one of the reasons for exceptional growth of England and Europe may be the so called industrial revolution, but England used India as a source of capital for funding this revolution, as a source of raw material and as a market for its products. Thus the local handicrafts and handlooms were systematically destroyed by British and rich traditions of local handicrafts and handlooms of Nagaland also suffered. In the words of Macaulay, "..... Treasure flowed to England in oceans; and what was lacking in England to make the fullest possible use of the mechanical inventions made by Watt and others was supplied by India. The influx of Indian treasure added considered to England's cash capital......" (LajpatRai, 1928).

Naga hill people had traditionally been living in self- reliant villages and leading a contended life. They had well developed systems of governance and trade, mainly barters and exchange, and were simple, honest and straightforward people. Each village possessed highly skilled artisans who were proficient in weaving, wood craft, cane craft, embroidery, metallurgy etc. The evidence of creativity, proficiency and skills of these ancient artisans are still visible in the artefacts, handlooms, Handicrafts, implements, Jewellery, weaponry produced by them even today. This rich Culture and heritage was systematically destroyed by British and these talented artisans and other Naga people were used as labourers or mercenaries to support their war and expansionist activities. Naga lost the main essence of its indigenous textile culture, the main pillar of its ethnic identityand pride. Every Hill community of Nagaland has its own designs and colour combinations, different motifs and designs of textiles, which always had a special significance and relationship with the rituals and religious life of the people of Nagaland.

#### B) Destruction of Indigenous culture, lifestyle and governance systems

British tried to destroy the unique traditions, cultures and languages of all communities of Naga hills as their concern as a successful colonisers was to create slaves/ labourers/ mercenaries who were able to understand English, British culture and could help in pursuit of their gaols of winning more lands and subjugate more nations/ communities. Naga people were easy targets as they were pure, honest, god fearing, brave and simple people. So they were first mesmerised by the new inventions of industrialisation, convinced about the superiority of western culture and subsequently creating inferiority complex about the Naga culture and pride. The narrative for virtues and valour of Naga people in wars, which made British win countries after countries, was shifted to new narrative by designating them as head hunters. Naga people, living in a sustainable manner, a life style of harmony and peace with nature, which the whole world is appreciating today by struggling to save; were termed as savages, pagans, under developed, uneducated and un cultured. This all was created to create insecurity and confusion in the minds of these innocent hill people. In the culture of the Naha hill People, humans are deeply connected with nature; the two are equal and interdependent. They have traditional beliefs system of guarding and protecting the environment in order to respect the ancestors and secure the future. Their traditions and belief systems often mean that they regard nature with deep respect, and they have a strong sense of place and belonging. This sustains knowledge and ways of life that match up well with modern notions of nature conservation and the sustainable use of natural resources, which the world is rediscovering now.

Colonisation had brought a wave of cultural genocide. This could not destroy their forest wealth but the cultural wealth, acquired through centuries of experimentation and compilation, became casualty. The Naga society has started realising their mistakes made in adopting to the so called modernisation and leaving their traditional agriculture, dress, costume, beliefs, language and identity. N.C. Zeliang, President ofZeliangrongHeraka Association claims that "Genuine cultural identity of any society is comprised of indigenous religion, native culture, language, glorious history of forefathers, art and crafts, rites and rituals, traditional village institutions and customary laws. We work to enhance every component of Naga identity. ...... Unfortunately, the disrespect to law of the land, violation of customary laws, dereliction of government duties, neglect of social responsibilities, embezzlement of public money, behaving as a mafia don, disrespect of Naga religion and traditional festivals and gasconadors and impostors posing as the spiritual awakener and savior of the soul are being considered as symbol of progressiveness and advancement" Zeliang, N.C. (2005).

Naga villages were following a system of 'Village republic' as administrative system was well developed and followed rule of law. Every village was headed by a village head/ chief who was either elected or hereditary. Where ever it was hereditary, merit did also count and village council will have the last say. Administration of a Naga village was indigenous, independent and participatory. All people had equal rights. Villages were large and everyone participated in all the activities of the village. Administration was just and equitable. The administration of the village was in general by the village chief-in-council, except in some tribes. Chieftainship was therefore, a very important factor in Naga polity. The village chief was a judge, administrator and commander, rolled into one, but he used to take decisions after collective consultations with unanimity. British, who were keen to have their puppet as chieftain, first tried to interfere by putting up alternative chief and when this did not work, diluted the system by creating a parallel power centre with the name 'dobashi' who had authority to decide criminal and civil cases. This demoralised the chieftains.

#### C) English Education- A tool of Subjugation

In their pursuit of colonisation of India, British adopted the language route to enslave the minds of the Indians and thus introduced English education. The indigenous education system, which followed different strategies in the different part of India, was based on the requirements of local life styles, indigenous skills, mainly village based; considered as a hindrance in colonisation by British. This system of education once referred to as "A beautiful tree" by Mahatma Gandhi was dismantled and destroyed. British literature, art, culture and language was introduced to have an army of English speaking Indians, for the service of British Empire who will be alien to their own culture and traditions.T. B. Macaulay argued in his "Minute on Indian Education" (2/2/1835) delivered in the British parliament that the British had to do their best to create a class of individuals in India, who would be Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, opinions, morals and intellect. He dubbed Indian culture, arts, languages, etc. as primitive and useless (Macaulay, 1835). The same pattern was followed for Nagaland also and an impression was created that Naga People are barbaric, illiterate, uneducated and uncultured. It was because no efforts were made to understand the Naga traditions, culture and intricacies of languages. British followed this policy of dominance by language to the fullest. In a paper presented to the parliamentary committee on education in India in 1853, Charles E. Trevelyan, an officer of the there will be no reaction because there will be no pressure; the national activity will be fully and harmlessly employed in acquiring and diffusing European knowledge, and naturalizing European institutions"(Travelyan, 1838)English started working to replace India's indigenous education system and chain of schools, seminaries and other institutes, funded by Indian taxpayer's money were established to achieve goals of colonisation. In Nagaland also, the education system tried to convince the young minds that their forefathers were fools, lunatic, barbaric, without education and any culture. They were able to brainwash and pollute few young minds who started negating their cultural traditions and beliefs.

Eminent social scientist and Expert on North East and Nagaland,Mr.B.B.Kumar, who headed Indian Council of Social Sciences Research, claimed that it is true that North-East region, like rest of the country, has immense linguistic, cultural, social and religious diversity. But there are also strong threads of unity, which the colonial scholarship and its continuing tradition highly ignore. Ignoring the fact of unity and cohesiveness weakens the sense of belonging and thereby strengthens alienation in a region suffering from bottleneck psychology. The uniting factors, if listed, are numerous. However, some of them need mention. As for example, almost all the languages of India follow 'SOV' (subject, object and verb) pattern, except, of course, Kashmiri and Khasi. Score-system of counting supposed to be the trait of Munda languages. But even many Naga dialects, such as Chang and Sangtam, and a language like Bengali exhibit the trait. Languages of different families have inclusive and exclusive plural of first person. Lexical borrowing is numerous. In reality, there is need to study Indian languages taking India as a 'Language Zone' (Kumar,B.B. 1994). It clarifies that there was an attempt to delink the culture and languages of Naga people from other Indian languages, not to develop or rediscover them but impose English so that with the passage of time these beautiful Naga languages become relics in history.

D) Loss to Indigenous religious beliefs, faiths, Conversions and collateral damages:

Religion is one of the effective tools used by British to dominate society and countries. Naga society had to face the onslaught subsequent to the capture of Naga Hills by British after fierce battles. There were systematic attempts to change food habits, dressing trends, affect the thinking process, destruction of native culture, negligence of the arts, destruction of faiths and demoralisation of the subject by colonisers. Colonization was followed by conversions and there were certain harms which came with the process of conversion. A lot of Naga social reformers tried to save the indigenous traditions and religious beliefs. The Naga could understand that English, as a colonisers want to separate them from rest of India and convert them to Christianity. Many attempts were made to preserve the pride and culture of Naga and these movements took the shape of freedom movement accompanied by religious revival movement. Jadonangrevived and initiated traditional religion called Heraka (pure). Heraka believes in the supreme God and life after death. He saw the hardship being faced by the people who at that time were being drawn towards Christianity by government supported Christian missionaries, seeing it as a threat to the indigenous religion, wanted to re-establish the traditional religion. This annoyed the English and he was hanged for false charges of murder even when he was not at the scene of crime. Rani Gaidinliu, being a strong willed girl, was associated with Jadonang by the age of thirteen. After the murder of Jagonang by Brithish, Gaidinliu took over the leadership in the freedom movement in the hills. She stood up against the unjust rule of the Whites and fought to attain freedom from harsh and oppressive rule of the British. The social aim was to unite the Zealiangrongs (Zeliang, Zeme and Rongmais) and preserve their culture and customs. On religious grounds, She wanted to preserve the former cult of religion called Heraka (pure), for which she was jailed by British (IlianeubeHaihing and Manu Sharma, 2018).

Meyawati Walling, an old person of Ao community, follower of indigenous religion Limapur, living at Longkhum village of Nagaland, in his interview to Eastern Mirror clarified that there is one Creator of every one; and his simple prayer to Creator every day is that he may grant him truth, help him remember and bring the well being.( Aier, Imrongkumba, 2019) If this is the philosophy of the indigenous religion, how and why these Naga communities were dubbed as religion less, animist and ignorant people. The concepts mentioned by Mr.Meyawati are the concepts and tenants of few well known faiths of Indian sub-continent like Jainism, Buddhism, Sikhism etc. India always had been and existed as a fusion or synthesis of various Indian cultures, with diverse roots and faiths; and Nagaland was also one of these. Meyawati Walling further said that there are certain rituals and ceremonies which are celebrated by Indigenous people. This is true of all the faiths existing in India then why few communities from North East like Naga Hill people were identified and segregated to be called by various derogatory names. LanushashiLongkumer, Professor at Nagaland university, argued that it is wrong to name old indigenous religion as Animism" becauseNaga had a religion and Limapur itself denotes that Naga had a concept of God: a creator, a supreme- being and controller of our destiny." (Aier, Imrongkumba, 2019).

SashikabaKichutzar, an Associate Professor at Eastern Theological college, Jorhat admitted that advent of Christianity resulted in the decay and destruction of indigenous religion or faith. There was antagonism between the new Christian converts and followers of old indigenous religions. (Aier, Imrongkumba, 2019). This is against the basic principles and culture of India because India always considered that faith united people. Indian concept of religion or Dharma is different from the western definition of religion. For Indian, religion is a way of life. There is a freedom to have different faiths and there exist no animosity or antagonism between two faiths. As was mentioned above by Mr.Meyawati, Indians believe in the concept of one Creator. The mis-match caused by outside influences is the main reason for the unrest in Nagaland as well as in North east india. It is established that such coercive forces, allurements and other socio-political circumstance have an impact on religion, religious conversion or religious beliefs. Nagaland was not any exceptions as British had used the brutal force and coercive tactics in other colonies like Australia (Maories, the indigenous people were killed, converted and subjugated). Circumstance dominates and shape the theology and beliefs of a people who exist amid such turbulent socio-political situation. Impact of socio-political turbulence on Nagas has devastating effects and there is a correlation between the height of political violence and the rapid conversion to Christianity. The long history of colonial violence and suppression coupled with the undermining of Naga cultural values and practices by the process of proselytization created an atmosphere conducive for conversion to Christianity and shaped the Nagas' theological choices (Thong, T. 2010).

# **II. CONCLUSION:**

Colonisation had more devastating and destabilising impact on Naga Hills mainly because due to the geographical proximity to Burma (Myanmar) and China, on which British had expansionist designs, partially fulfilled with annexation of Burma, Nagaland was a convenient route for unethical opium trade. Naga people, due to their simple, honest nature, were used by British as reliable labourers and allies during various army campaigns against their enemies. Economic exploitations, the major reason for colonisation was systematically achieved, industrialisation in England helped, raw material exported which ultimately led to the textile manufacturing, Handicrafts and Handlooms. Indigenous culture, lifestyle and

governance systems were the casualty under British system of dominance and subjugation. The social fabric, the relationships between the communities and also outside the hill communities, with people of plains were harmed with the policy of divide and rule. The self-reliant nature of villages and administrative system based on democratic principles of chief-in-councilwas weakened to make people reliant on district administration, mainly to fulfil their goal of complete dominance. English was introduced to replace the local dialects at the cost of their extinction ultimately. The hidden agenda on educating people in English was to westernisation of the culture and beliefs so that conversion to Christianity becomes easier. English were also looking at creating a separate colony in this part of India so that the same could be retained forever. Fortunately, Second world-war and subsequent events leading to the independence of India changed the course of the design. However, British could achieve the mandate of subjugation partially as Naga people could not develop the script and language due to the nefarious designs. Conversions, which started with coercion, allurements, destruction of self-respect and pride in their own culture, creation of divisions in society for acceptance of other religion by indigenous people has been achieved to a large extent. There is loss of Indigenous beliefs, faiths and rituals. The basic values of acceptance and tolerance of different path or belief has been reduced considerably. The colonisation has been internalized and has caused a permanent damage to the social fabric, cultural values and traditional ethics, which may not be easy to be reversed. It may be possible only with appropriate indigenous education to battle the long-term effects of colonization and develop anindigenous historyso that disintegration of traditional communities, economies, and languages can be halted. At the individual level, there has been a loss of selfrespect and identity; these negative processes or historical trauma are to be handled effectively.

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