

Nagas: More Autonomy And Less Than Independence

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Abstract:

Northeast India is a multi-ethnic diversified region of India. Since past years the ethnic groups of this struggle for their independence to protect their distinct ethno-cultural identity. Among the various tribes Nagas of Nagaland develop a sense of nationalist consciousness to establish their self-determination and freedom. Due to hegemonic role of the Indian state they have been consistently urging their so called demand of 'Nagalim' or 'Greater Nagaland'. Through a carrot and stick policy, the Indian state tried to ensure that majority of indigenous ethnic communities living in the Northeast join the Indian federation. The Nagas, considered by the colonial rulers as backward tribes, however resisted the assimilative policies of the Indian state. By invoking the right to self-determination on the basis of their 'distinct' ethnic identity and 'unique' history, the Nagas defied the Indian state that sought to make them a constituent part of the post-colonial Indian Union. Therefore Nagas have been indulging in the autonomy movement with its many insurgent organisation as well as with numerous peace talks but until the present time there is no solutions of long term Naga's struggle. This paper tries to show the long term self determination and freedom movement of Nagas from the mainland India.

Key words: ethno-cultural, identity, indigenous, autonomy, self-determination.

INTRODUCTION:

The Nagas, an Indo-Mongoloid people, were the inhabitants of Naga Hills along the North East Frontier on the Assam-Burma (Myanmar) borders. They numbered nearly 5,00,000 in 1961 constitute less than 0.1% of India's population and according to 2001 census 1.9 million population with speaking different languages. There are more than 30 tribes constituted Naga identity as they are not only one tribe. Among them some major tribes are Angami, Ao, Chakhesang, Chang, Khiamnungkham, Konyak, Lotha, Pochury, Rengma, Sema, Sangtam, Yinchungru, Zeilang. They inhabited not only within the territory of Nagaland, but also some hilly regions of adjoining states of Assam, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh and some parts of the bordering nation, Myanmar as well. They have different languages, cultures, food habits, dresses, customs, traditional laws, village councils but have the unity in the question of Naga identity. The process of state building constitutes a serious threat to the process of nation-building in India and other parts of South-Asia as well. The issue of ethnic conflicts due to economic underdevelopment, exploitation of resources by centre, protection of indigenous identity and systematic discrimination etc. But Nagaland grievances completely different from it as their grievances all about realizing independent homeland where the "Naga way of life" would be protected which called 'Nagalim-the Greater Nagaland'. To know the present status we have to trace back to the historical process of Naga movement as how identity consciousness had built among Nagas to preserve and protect their unique culture and history.

PRE-COLONIAL PHASE OF NAGAS

Initially Nagas society followed the policy of 'Head Hunting', they were head hunters and the person who had highest cutting head of man, he was the powerful person among them and which he hanged in front of his house. Therefore, hostility existed in Naga society as people were fought and killed each other for acquisition of power. The Nagas lived independent of each other with the village as the political unit of the society but for livelihood they were dependent on the plains. Therefore, they raid Assam even during Ahom period. The Ahoms who ruled Assam from middle of the 13th century, they allowed Nagas to enjoy their tribal autonomy, so long as they lived near them and did not raid Ahom's territory.

COLONIAL PHASE OF NAGAS

In 1826, through the treaty of Yandaboo, British annexed Assam followed a policy of cautious non-interference in Naga affairs. This was followed by the speedy consolidation of British rule in the Naga Hills. The British had the aim that the tribe like Nagas were remain themselves to manage their own affairs. Various Legislative acts like the Excluded Areas Act and Partially Excluded Areas Act put an end to any interaction between the hill tribes and the plains non-tribe population. Meanwhile, the introduction of monetized economy and the spread of education by Christian missionaries created a middle class that enabled them to conscious about their rights and identity. In 1918, Naga Club was formed and in early 1929 they submitted a memorandum which proposed to made 'Crown Colony' that entrusted the power to self- rule whenever Britishers had left India. But the dream of 'Crown Colony' remained as dream only. In 1946, Naga Club was reorganized as Naga National Council (NNC), they demanded full regional autonomy in terms of complete independence. They called for self-determination and acquiring Fundamental Rights. The formation of NNC as the political forum of the Naga Tribes could be considered to be both the origin and the beginning of the modern phase of Naga movement and which introduced the concept of Naga nationhood. The goals of the NNC at that time could be seen more specifically from the point agreement of Hydari Agreement which reached between Government of India and NNC which stress that Nagas should be given the right to choose whether to be a part of the Indian Union or to be independent. As no understand was reached between Government of India and Naga and declared themselves independent on 14th August 1947.

POST-COLONIAL PHASE OF NAGAS

Immediately after independence GOI followed a policy of integrating the Naga areas with the state of Assam and India as a whole. As Naga movement from 1947 onwards has developed through many phases-

At first from 1947-1954, the Naga hills remained comparatively quite and no violence was resorted to achieve their goals. Towards 1949 NNC favoured independence. In 1951, plebiscite held on the issue of Naga 7000 men and women were said to have given their thumb prints. In the same year First General election of independent India took place gave an opportunity to Nagas to

demonstrate their non-acceptance of the Indian Constitution. It was a successful boycott of the election.

In 1959, in the third Naga People's Convention they decided to prepare a separate state within the Indian Union. In 1960, a 16 point agreement was reached between Prime Minister, Nehru and Naga delegation and President Radha Krishnan declared Nagaland as a state within Indian territory in 1963.

The NNC under A Z Phizo declared independence on 14th August 1947, thus transforming NNC into a full-fledged militant political organization. The overwhelming participation of Naga people in the 1964 state assembly marked the two things—a new era for the state of Nagaland as an integral part of India and it led to the gradual marginalization of the NNC as the sole representatives of Naga people. In 1975, Shillong Accord was signed by the underground leaders and acceptance the Indian Constitution and accepted Nagaland as an inalienable part of Indian Union. But this accord rejected by Phizo and which created division within NNC. Thungling Muivah and Isak Swu and Khaplang formed National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) which was later split into NSCN-K (Khaplang, Hemi -Konyak Naga) and NSCN-IM (Muivah-Swu; Thnagkul-Seina-Naga). These two are leading insurgent groups in the region.

In 1994, a resolution took place i.e. integration of Naga inhabited areas in Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh which was vehemently opposed by these two governments. The issue of 'Greater Nagalim' and ceasefire beyond territorial limits have already caused sufficient bloodshed and put the Naga-Kukis, Naga-Meitei, Naga-Assamese in a hostile situation.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS: PEACE-BUILDING PROCESS

On August 3, 2015 a high profile event was presided over by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, signed 'Peace Accord' between NSCN-IM and the Government of India. It was described as key breakthrough in efforts to end the long lasting insurgency as well as political unrest in Nagaland. But it was also mentioned that good beginnings cannot be guaranteed good outcomes. It was more like a Framework Agreement but some major issues did not sort out and also some smaller groups have not been part of the decisive phases of the peace process. Another loophole of this agreement was that it has not been made public. There is no

clarity on the controversial 'sovereignty demand' that was central to the NSCN(I-M) group and did not give solution to the problem of 'Greater Nagalim'. There was need to involve all the stakeholders, including other group, members of Naga civil society and the representatives of neighboring states. After 2015, framework agreement another various talks has been going on between GOI, Nagaland government and rebel groups but no solution comes out. On one hand Centre want to preserve their sovereignty, on the other hand NSCN(I-M) stick on their demand of 'Greater Nagalim' but now they also realize that their demand is out of sync with the reality now.

There were numerous responses delivered towards the agreement like- Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and Manipur government asked for details regarding the agreement. But contrasting the agreement, then Chief Minister of Nagaland, T.R. Zeiliang said that they did not object to any group when United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) and Mizo National Front (MNF) signed pact with GOI.

CONCLUSION

It is said that Nagalim concept similar with British policy of 'divide and rule' as Nagalim also divide Assam. It is due to lack of nationality and emergence of sub-nationality assertion which has shaken the Indian Nationalism with greater magnitude. The movement of Nagas has been the longest insurgency movement in South Asia therefore, it is called as the 'Mother of all Insurgency' though there is no settlement yet.

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