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## Sovereignty Question and Culture Discourse: Interrogating Indo-Naga 'Framework Agreement' in relation to Naga Movement

--- N. K. Das

### *Abstract*

This article tries to decipher the key features of the 'Framework Agreement', the Indo-Naga Peace Agreement, which is said to be based on spirit of equality, and situate them in historical trajectory of earlier parleys, which were often disrupted. The article discusses briefly the major landmarks of Naga movement in historical sequence and the flexible relationships of the Naga leaders with Zeliangrong and Frontier Nagaland movements in order to gain the larger perspective pertaining to current peace parleys. It assigns greater space to historically evolved notion of Naga sovereignty and territorial-integration questions and positions them within the projected model of 'shared sovereignty'. Since the agreement has explicitly acknowledged the primacy of culture as entrenched in the unique history of the Nagas, a critical evaluation of culture discourse vis-à-vis Naga nationhood is provided, demonstrating chiefly the indigenous scholarly perspectives.

*Key words: Indo-Naga (Framework) Agreement, Naga Movement, Naga Territorial Integration, Sovereignty, Zeliangrong Issue*

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### **Indo-Naga Peace (Framework) Agreement, 2015: Challenges of Dialogue and Cooperation**

The Indo-Naga Peace (Framework) Agreement signed by R.N. Ravi, on behalf of the Government of India, and Thuingaleng Muivah, on behalf of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland - Isak Muivah (NSCN-IM) on August 3, 2015 in New Delhi, marks the culmination of over 80 rounds of negotiations spanning over two decades. Unlike past treaties, the 'framework-agreement' acknowledges the 'unique history and culture of the Nagas' and promises to restore 'pride' and 'prestige' of the Nagas within a confederacy to be characterised by the 'shared sovereignty'. Naga leaders, it appears, have reconciled to affirm allegiance to the Indian Constitution and leave aside the demand of 'Nagalim' ('Greater Nagaland'). The chief negotiator R.N. Ravi has explained that, 'Both sides have

acknowledged the universal principle that in a democracy, sovereignty lies with the people'. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who was present during the signing of the agreement, has appreciated the 'spirit of equality, respect, trust and confidence' behind the agreement (Nagaland Post, 2015, August 4). Though the text of the agreement remains secret, media reports quoting government and NSCN-IM sources indicate that the idea of a pan-Naga government with 'non-territorial' jurisdiction (covering all Naga territories) is the core issue under active consideration.

This article aims to decipher the key features of the 'framework' agreement and compare them with earlier discourses, which had remained inconclusive. It also discusses the main signposts of Naga movement, particularly the prickly issue of Naga sovereignty, which is integral to the Naga national question. The article explains briefly the major episodes of Naga movement, including related Zeliangrong movement and Frontier Nagaland movement which have shown plasticity. Since the agreement has explicitly acknowledged the primacy of culture as entrenched in unique history of the Nagas, a critical evaluation of culture discourse vis-à-vis Naga nationhood is provided, demonstrating mostly the native scholarly perspectives<sup>1</sup>.

In view of the unusual delay and the increasing concerns of Naga people, over eighty senior members of the NSCN-IM, had issued a joint statement on May 13, 2017, assuring the Naga people that,

The Framework Agreement does not betray the principle of the Nagas and it will protect the rights of the Nagas and promote and strengthen harmonious interdependent relationship between two nations. It has turned the politics of confrontation into the politics of dialogue and cooperation; it has turned the threat of our future into protection of our future. It will rebuild the damaged psychology; and broken relationship of the two people.

(The Morung Express, 2017, May 13)

A Naga leader has further clarified that the framework agreement is 'A Preamble' which would form the basis on which 'a final solution to the uniqueness of history and political rights of Nagas will be reached'. The leader also stated that 'the Shillong Accord of 1975 and the 16-Point Agreement of 1960 will not mark out

the basis to decide the political and historical rights of the Nagas' (Gokhale, 2015).

### **Shared Sovereignty and Pan-Naga Hoho: A Probable Alternative for Nagalim**

In a statement published in 2016, before his demise, Isak Swu, NSCN Chairman had said that,

The framework agreement is based on the uniqueness of Naga history; which means Nagas are a free people and they have never been a part of the Union of India... Both parties agreed that the sovereignty of the Nagas lies with the Naga people and sovereignty of India lies with the Indian people. However, with a view to solving Indo-Naga political problem both the parties agreed to share sovereign power for enduring and peaceful existence of the two entities.

(The Sangai Express, 2016, March 1)

The above statement definitely indicates an explicit shift from the original stand of NSCN-IM. It appears that such a turning point had taken shape in 2006, when the NSCN-IM had rearticulated its objectives and submitted a 'Framework' for constructive negotiations. In this framework the concept of 'asymmetric federalism' was proposed and the demands for full independence and sovereignty were toned down. The NSCN leaders sincerely acknowledged the Indian government's difficulty and were convinced that the Indian Parliament cannot discuss something against its own Constitution, to settle the Naga issue. At this stage when the parleys were underway, as per one media report, the NSCN-IM had insisted that 'the control over petroleum and natural gas, coal and other minerals should lie with the Nagas through "absolute right" over these resources' (Bhushan, 2015).

Soon after the signing of the historical agreement, Naga leader Muivah had addressed the Naga people's consultative meeting at Chumukedima. He clarified that there would be Naga integration but areas that cannot be brought under it would be covered by the 'Pan-Naga Hoho', which would be an independent entity, a statutory body with executive authority, separate budget and negotiating power (The Telegraph, 2015, August 26). Muivah further said that the negotiating

parties had agreed to share ‘competencies’ in deference to the Naga people’s wish to exercise their sovereign rights. Naga regime and the Government of India would jointly explore and exploit mineral resources. The NSCN-IM leader said the Framework Agreement was signed hurriedly as the condition of Isak Chishi Swu, the chairman of the group, was fast deteriorating. Muivah restated his appeal to all dissenting groups to forget and forgive and find common ground for a solution (The Telegraph, 2015, August 26). Marc Gangmei has tried to construe some fine points of the agreement. He says that Indian Parliament has to approve the important pacts (including pan-Naga-regime), which should satisfy the Nagas. Gangmei cautioned the Nagas that seeking at this stage any ‘full sovereignty’ will only put the Nagas in chaotic Dark Age with bloodshed within Nagas<sup>ii</sup>.

In what could cause multiple reactions, Muivah, announced at camp Hebron on March 22, 2017 that Framework Agreement recognised the demand for territorial integration. ‘...The Framework Agreement will safeguard the present and the future of the Nagas’ (Times of India, 2017, March 22). This is the first time that Muivah had spelt out the crux of the hitherto closely guarded ‘framework agreement’. Should the centre agree to integration of all Naga inhabited areas, the neighbouring Manipur stands to lose more than 80 per cent of its geographical area. Muivah’s claims had created widespread protests in Manipur and Assam (ibid). Prime Minister Narendra Modi, however, in an election campaign speech at Imphal a few days later had assured the people of Manipur that the Naga peace deal does not contain anything that can harm Manipur’s territorial integrity. The ministry of home affairs clarified that no decision is taken to carve out a Greater Nagaland with territories of states adjoining Nagaland (Times of India, 2017, March 25).

People of Manipur and Assam have variously reacted to media reports pertaining to Indo-Naga agreement, which is still under discussion. In recent past, an ‘unofficial’ document had indicated that separate development authorities shall be constituted to execute the development programs in seven Naga inhabited districts of Manipur, two Naga inhabited districts in Arunachal Pradesh and one Naga inhabited district of Assam, that is, Dima Hasao district (Firstpost, 2018, March 27).

According to one report, the present Framework Agreement has taken note of a ‘twenty-point charter of demands’ presented by the NSCN-IM beforehand. The government till date has not conceded to any of them. Some of the supposed

proposals/demands of NSCN-IM under ‘shared sovereignty’ regime are as follows:

- An Independent Constitution, with defined co-federal relationship with India.
- Defense – A joint defense for the security of both countries. A ‘no-war’ policy would be declared in Nagalim territory. India would take the lead in handling the External Affairs matters that do not directly affect the Nagas.
- Police and Judicial matters – the creation of local police and judicial system.
- Immigration – The Restricted Area Permit would be repealed so that Nagas and Indians can freely travel between both nations and the world.
- Currency – Use of the Indian Currency.
- Trade – A joint Economic Development Council of India and Nagalim would be formed to promote trade, investment and joint ventures.
- Natural Resources – Nagas will own completely.
- Separate Flag.
- Permanent UN Representative.
- Joint Foreign Affairs (Naga Studies Group)

Several stipulations based on unauthenticated leaks are made which indicate about a separate constitution, a flag for Nagaland and facility of separate passport for the Nagas. One leak has even indicated that ‘Nagaland would have a UN representative though the Foreign Affairs and Defence would be a joint subject and the Pan-Naga Government will cover all Naga inhabited areas (Guruswamy, 2017).

### **Naga Movement/ Naga Insurgency and Creation of Nagaland**

Naga insurgency, regarded as the oldest unresolved armed conflict in the world, is termed as the mother of all insurgencies in Northeast India. Naga insurgency however is part of a protracted and wide-ranging Naga movement, which encountered many ideological cleavages and factional outgrowth in its long history. The Naga defiance and initial encounters since 1832 with the British had displayed the Naga urge for liberty. A nominal British administration that was installed pursued the ‘indirect rule’ policy whereby Naga headmen and *dobashis* were nominated as intermediaries between village polity and colonial rulers (Das, 2012). In this backdrop, the early Naga ethnic assertion was expressed through formation of a Naga Club in 1918, which had explicit British patronage (Das, 1982). This club’s first political initiative was submission of a ‘Memorandum’ to

the British Statutory Commission (Simon Commission) on January 10, 1929. The memorandum stated that '(Naga) Hills should be withdrawn from the Reformed Scheme and placed directly under British Government. Before, we had intermitted warfare with the Assamese and Manipuris. They never conquered us... We are afraid new taxes will be imposed and foreign laws may supersede our own customary laws. We pray that the British Government must continue to safeguard our rights' (Das, 1989, pp. 262-263).

The Naga Club became Naga National Council (NNC) in 1946 and in the same year it submitted a four-point memorandum to government seeking 'local autonomy' within Assam, with a separate electorate (Ramunny, 1988). By June 1946, A. Z. Phizo had returned to Naga Hills after his release in Rangoon (ibid). As Phizo's meeting with national leaders in Delhi could not yield any result, some NNC members with Phizo, declared their own independence on August 14, 1947 (Das, 1982). Despite Phizo's declaration of 'Naga independence', no hostile situation occurred. During a convention held on 16-18 February 1950, Visar Angami was made the NNC President, who proclaimed that 'The Nagas are strongly determined to fight constitutionally for the liberation of their mother – Nagaland' (Ramunny, 1988, p. 49). In 1951, Phizo organised a plebiscite in the Naga Hills. He claimed later that 99 percent Nagas favoured Independence. According to Ramunny, the villagers were fed with oversimplified information. Viewed objectively, the plebiscite was definitely a marker of protest, which was in its initial stage. In September 1952, Phizo went underground and his 'extremist' supporters formed a minority side (Ramunny 1988). Through launch of armed resistance in 1954, Phizo established the 'Free Government of Nagaland' on September 18, 1954. Armed aggression had started growing. Alongside, rift between Phizo's extremist group and the moderate Nagas had gradually widened leading to inter-faction assassinations. In 1956 the NNC declared formation of underground 'Federal Government of Nagaland'. A document issued on this occasion declared Nagaland to be a 'Sovereign Republic' and claimed that this has been so from time immemorial. Soon afterward, Phizo left India and ultimately reached London on June 20, 1960 (Das, 2011). Armed aggression and clashes continued in 1950s and 1960s. A sharp division within the Naga underground in 1968 led to formation of the Naga Federal Government (NFG) on one side and Revolutionary Government of Nagaland, formed by the 'dissenters', on the other. The 'Revolutionary' extremists tried to capture the entire underground bloc and wanted a dialogue for a peaceful Naga settlement (Singh, 1972). By 1955 Indian armed forces had been deployed to quell Naga

insurgency. Massive insurrectionary belligerence led to setting in motion the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act in 1958 which nonetheless resulted in reported human rights violations and highhandedness of armed forces (Das, 2011).

In the meantime, a group of Naga leaders, including Hokishe Sema and S.C. Jamir, discarding the idea of 'armed resistance', came out opting for path of dialogue. Such pro-dialogue leaders formed the Naga People's Convention (NPC) which organised three Naga Peoples' Conventions (NPCs) during 1957 and 1960. In its very first session held at Kohima from 22-26 August 1957, the NPC proposed for a larger administrative unit by merging the Naga majority-Tuensang division of North-East Frontier Agency (NEFA) with Naga Hills District. Prime Minister met the NPC delegation on September 25, 1957 to discuss this issue and at last the Government of India agreed on December 1, 1957, to carve out new 'Naga Hills and Tuensang Area' (NHTA) (Ramunny, 1988). Third NPC meeting was held in Mokokchung from 22-26 October 1959, where a ground-breaking Sixteen-Point Resolution was passed. In July 1960, a delegation of the NPC met the Prime Minister Pt. Nehru and the Sixteen-Point Agreement was formally projected. The government agreed to the proposals, which inter-alia provided for formation of a separate State for the Nagas within the Indian Union to be known as 'Nagaland' with a Governor and Secretariat, a Council of Ministers and Legislative Assembly. The state of Nagaland was finally inaugurated in December, 1963.

The NNC rejected the formation of 'Nagaland' state and depicted the Sixteen-Point Agreement as a complete 'sell-out' of the Naga political cause. Formation of the state of Nagaland was followed by the constitution of the Peace Mission. The church leaders such as Rev. Longri Ao actively supported Mission initiatives. The Peace Mission's credible success was to sign the first ever Cease-Fire Agreement on September 6, 1964, which was binding for the Naga Federal Forces and the Indian Army. Since militancy had recommenced, peace talks were resumed during 1966-1967, mostly in New Delhi. The NPC was formed again at the initiative of the Church leaders and a Liaison Committee was formed, which succeeded in convincing underground leaders, who participated in five rounds of talks. These talks resulted in the 'Shillong Accord' signed on November 11, 1975. The Nagas who signed represented the NFG and NNC and they surrendered arms and personnel. Shillong Accord was reached with the India-based NNC, which



did not enjoy support of Phizo. Sections within the NNC were thus divided over the ‘acceptance of the Indian Constitution’ as enshrined in the Shillong Accord.

The NNC leaders such as Isak Swu, Th. Muivah and S. S. Khaplang rejected the Shillong Accord and they later formed the National Socialist Council of Nagaland, breaking away from the NNC on February 2, 1980. By 1988, the NSCN further split on ‘tribal lines’ into two different factions – the NSCN (K), under the leadership of S.S. Khaplang (a Burmese Hemi Naga), and the NSCN (IM) under the leadership of Isak and Muivah (from Sumi and Tangkhul). The NSCN-IM’s manifesto emphasised the principle of ‘socialist-democracy for economic development’ with a spiritual pledge: ‘Nagalim for Christ’ (Shimrah, 2015).

Since Khaplang supporters had killed a number of Tangkhul supporters of Muivah, the National Naga Hoho (apex body of all Naga tribal councils) on November 7, 1988, declared Khaplang as a ‘national criminal’ and expelled him. The leadership of Isak Swu and Th. Muivah was reaffirmed (Ao, 1993). After the split, the NSCN-IM gradually built its base around Kohima and in the Manipur Hills among the Tangkhuls, while the NSCN-K, under pressure from the Myanmar Army in the Hukwang Valley, moved to the more-friendly Konyak and Ao areas in the Tuensang and Mokokchung region of Nagaland (Verghese, 1996). The entire Naga insurgency has been dominated by inter-tribal rivalry and a struggle for hegemony. The NNC President, Adino Phizo, in a letter to Hoho President, M. Vero, said that ‘Naga society has been festered with tribalism’<sup>iii</sup>. Therefore, in order to achieve reconciliation, the NSCN-IM faction had suggested that, the Naga National Council (Adino faction) should publicly declare their rejection of the Shillong Accord, having failed to do so earlier. Secondly, the NNC (Merupfu faction) should recognise the IM group and stop calling themselves the ‘true NNC’ (The Pioneer, Delhi, 2001, August, 5).

The ethnic divide created through the splintering of insurgent groups runs counter to the goal of forging a larger Naga identity. In this respect, the Naga Hoho President, M. Vero, has rightly observed that:

There is no example in history of a divided people solving any of their problems. Nagas must resist the divisive tendencies within themselves and stop blaming one another. Is it possible for the national workers to solve the Naga issue on their own when they

are not able to solve their own differences first? Can the accepted constituents show more imaginativeness towards settling the Naga issue instead of only retaining power for as long as possible? And finally, can the Naga NGOs and public learn to be more open and neutral instead of pleasing or siding with one or the other of the underground groups?

(Reasoning Together, Naga Students' Federation, Kohima, 2001, pp. 4-5)

### **Sovereignty, Nationhood and Naga Integration: Diverse Perceptions and Fallacies**

Sovereignty is a hypothetical covenant. It means a state's lawful control over its territory and authority to govern. Using such yardstick, in historical perspective, it may be problematic to apply the phrase 'sovereignty' in relation to Naga people whose pre-colonial era polities were strictly confined within 'village republics'. No 'tribe' existed beyond a village or a cluster of villages and even where chieftaincy prevailed (Konyak Naga), the chief could enjoy only some nominal authority. According to the People's Republic of Nagaland, however, the entire Naga inhabited areas – the Nagalim – is a 'sovereign nation' occupying a compact area of 1,20,000 square kilometres of the Patkai Range that lies at the tri-junction of India, Burma and China (OPIS, 1998). Nagalim was apportioned between India and Burma after their respective declaration of independence, without the consent of the Naga people. The Naga territory under India is subdivided under four administrative units, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur and Nagaland states. The Eastern Nagalim which Burma claims is placed under two administrative units, Kachin State and Sagaing Division (formerly Naga Hills). Nagalim, however, transcends all these arbitrary demarcations of boundary (OPIS, 1998).

The British incursions during 1830s were resisted by the Nagas. To do so, local inter-village alliances were established. Before Naga Hills became a District of Assam in 1881, the Nagas had no treaty with the British. How the Nagas reached a treaty with the British is best illustrated in the following piece by Imchen:

The independent Nagas fought the British from 1833 to 1879 in defence of their sovereignty. Finally, by [the] 27(th) March, 1880, an accord was reached with the British as per Naga customary practices. A circle was drawn on the ground and the

representatives of the British and the Nagas got into the circle. A cat was brought whose head was held by the Naga representatives; the British representative held the body and the cat was sliced [at] the neck. That was to signify that there would be no more fighting between the parties and whichever party was treacherous to the other party...would meet the same fate as...the cat. Since then, the British were verbally allowed to establish military bases in the land of Nagas as their friends and guests; there was no question of surrendering [Naga] sovereignty.

<https://www.culturalsurvival.org/publications/cultural-survival-quarterly/nagas-people-without-state>

The above citation is Federal Naga General Mowu Angami's version of the outcome of the Anglo-Naga war. Old writings suggest that initial Naga-British wars were all localised and involved a few villages. The Nagas in British era were divided and placed within Zeliangrong and Rengma areas, Naga Hills District, Eastern Frontier outside British India and Burma and the Nagas under the native state of Manipur. Over the years, this colonial legacy has been subjected to a number of interpretations (Imchen, 2009). Along with 'house-taxes', deceptive 'official' ethnic-names were hoisted on Nagas (Das, 2011). Some seventeen groups in Nagaland, seven groups in Manipur and three in present-day Assam are declared as the Naga 'scheduled tribes'. There are more than 15 Naga tribes living in Myanmar. Imchen and Das have compiled the basic ethnographies of Naga 'tribes' and non-Naga 'minorities' of Nagaland (Das & Imchen, 1994).

Naga 'nation' has been variously conceptualised as a political paradigm, as also a myth and an invention. Fact remains that, nowhere in the recorded Naga tribal accounts, do we notice any unity among people called Nagas today. Even the term 'Naga' including its various offshoots is foreign, a derogatory term intended to stereotype the people (i.e. 'Nagas') inhabiting in the hills, between the valleys of Assam and Burma/Myanmar (Salikyu, 2018; Das, 2011). Naga scholar Salikyu has argued that:

We have managed to invent a nation that is riddled with divisions; and instead of inventing a unified and all-encompassing identity, we have 'tribes'... where our first and foremost loyalties go toward our own tribes. It is, therefore, not surprising that the issue of 'sovereign nation-state', which is the fundamental basis of Naga

Nationalism, has been sidelined... it has been 'given up,' as one of the essential preconditions for the ongoing Framework Agreement. ([http://epao.net/epSubPageExtractor.asp?src=news\\_section.opinion.s.Opinion\\_on\\_Manipur\\_Integrity\\_Issue.Naga\\_Nationalism\\_and\\_Naga\\_Integration\\_By\\_Saliky\\_Sangtam](http://epao.net/epSubPageExtractor.asp?src=news_section.opinion.s.Opinion_on_Manipur_Integrity_Issue.Naga_Nationalism_and_Naga_Integration_By_Saliky_Sangtam))

Some Naga leaders have been vehement critique of the idea of Naga sovereignty and Naga nationhood. S.C. Jamir, a former chief minister of Nagaland, is in the forefront of such critics. Jamir published a booklet, 'Bedrock of Naga Society', on behalf of All India Congress in 2002. He wrote that:

Demand of Naga Sovereignty is a myth and state of Nagaland is a reality. The fundamental assumption underlying the notion that statehood compromised the sovereignty of Nagas is that the Nagas were a separate independent entity from time immemorial. Nagas were never an independent nation. A political entity pre-supposes the existence of a definite political structure. It also demands that the political structure would be a monarchy, a democracy, an autocracy, an oligarchy, a dictatorship or any other structure that is universally accepted by political scientist. Nagas lacked these criteria. (Jamir, 2002)

He further wrote that:

We were actually a group of heterogeneous and diverse tribes living in far-flung villages... Each village, was practically an entity in itself. The main 'contact' between villages was through the practice of headhunting. Internecine warfare was the order of the day. There was no trust or interaction between different tribes. In these circumstances, the question of a unified 'Naga nation' did not arise. No one can ignore such historical evidences and rely on emotional outbursts alone. (Jamir, 2002)

Muivah and Neiphu Rio later condemned S.C. Jamir for bringing out the booklet which describes Naga sovereignty as a myth and conceded the Sixteen-Point Agreement, which gave birth to the state of Nagaland, as the 'final solution' of the Naga issue. Jamir is also criticised for his political philosophy to 'Indianize the Nagas', for decades. Sometime in 2006 Jamir said, 'Mother India is inviting

all Nagas to come. So Nagas must come with one mind. If we continue to fight, we have no future and the future Nagas will blame the present Nagas' (The Morung Express, 2006, April). A rejoinder published in Eastern Mirror, Nagaland claimed, 'S.C. Jamir was a stakeholder of the sixteen-point agreement (1960) that had divided the Nagas... It has become a strong weapon in the hand of the colonial government of India, which fights Nagas through Nagas and kills Nagas through Nagas... Finally, the government of India and NSCN as two entities signed the second cease-fire agreement on August 1, 1997 for political talks at the highest level without any pre-condition. The government of India recognised NSCN as the legitimate organisation of the Naga people'. (Eastern Mirror, Nagaland, 2015, January 12)

Fact remains that on account of continued insurgency and perpetual and frequent 'peace parleys' stretching over numerous decades, many Nagas including the younger generation have been tired and shattered. Today, as a whole, the strength and spirit of Naga nationalism is at low ebb. Today, Naga National Movement continues to survive through the involvement of some Naga militant outfits and some Nagas outside Nagaland, who are aspiring to gain from an eventual 'greater Nagaland'. Describing this gloomy picture, a well-versed commentator argues:

Unfortunately, some of the Naga tribes, who are well ahead than others, are enjoying the fruit of India's independence and are backsliding from the Naga national cause. Many educated Nagas of Nagaland do not want to talk about Naga National Movement anymore. They do not want to contribute anything to sustain the Movement. They do not want to sacrifice themselves, their family and their tribe for the greater cause of Naga nation. They are quite satisfied with the 'provision of India', that meets their daily basic needs, and whoever disturbs this 'provision' is condemned.

[\(http://mattersindia.com/2014/12/present-situation-of-nagaland/\)](http://mattersindia.com/2014/12/present-situation-of-nagaland/)

In June 1994, Zeliangrong historian Gangmumei Kabui stated that, 'The Naga bourgeoisie have a stake in the insurgency. They say to New Delhi: give us more money to solve it. This is happening in Manipur also' (Far Eastern Economic Review, 1994, September 6). In order to restrain insurgency the Central government is pumping crores of rupees into the state every year. This has pampered many Nagas to live an easy life. Today the Naga youths are more lured towards easy life. The self-reliant economy of the state is dwindling and the

young generation today is not willing to work hard both physically and mentally. Majority of Naga educated youths do not want to go out for competitive exams but only depend on state government for job. This 'dependency syndrome' needs to be curbed as it will lead to the total collapse of the state's economy<sup>iv</sup>.

### **Disjointed Early Negotiations and Ordeals of Current Indo-Naga Peace Parleys**

Idea of a Peace Mission was floated by the Church leaders in the early 1960s. Thus, a Peace Mission was formed with Jayaprakash Narayan, Michael Scott, an Anglican pastor, and B P Chaliha, the then chief minister of Assam. After six rounds of talks, the Peace Mission was abandoned in 1967. Peace Mission was instrumental however in reaching a ceasefire agreement, effective from September 6, 1964. Since severe militant activities had been unleashed, a massive counter-insurgency operation was launched. Simultaneously, constant attempts were made to persuade the militants to give up violence. Even after the creation of the State of Nagaland in December, 1963, NNC remained uncompromising (Das, 2011). The fresh phase of peace process started when NSCN leaders Muivah and Swu met the then Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao on June 15, 1995 in Paris. They met the then Prime Minister again on February, 1997, in Zurich, and a ceasefire agreement was signed in 1997. From August 1997 onwards, several rounds of talks were held in India and abroad. The rival NSCN faction led by Khaplang had agreed to a truce with the government and began peace talks in 2000. Khaplang, however, ended the truce by 2015. The government declared the NSCN-K as a terrorist organisation in November 2015<sup>v</sup>. A failed attempt was made by some disgruntled Zeliangrong youth to form the Zeliangrong United Front (ZUF) in 2011.

For the first time, the Centre and the NSCN-IM held peace talks at Kohima, on June 1, 2010. Despite best efforts, peace talks remained inconclusive. Questions of 'sovereignty' and the integration of all Naga areas remained the most difficult issues to be resolved. On part of India they posed constitutional and legal challenges. The NNC factions and Khaplang faction had continuously defied the centre. The major active (Naga) militant groups in Nagaland/Manipur include Federal Government of Nagaland-Non-Accordist (FGN-NA), Federal Government of Nagaland-Accordist (FGN-A), NSCN (K), NSCN-R, Non-Accordist faction of NNC (NNC-NA), NNC-Accordist and Zeliangrong United Front (ZUF) (firstpost.com, 2017, May 10). The NSCN-Khaplang faction has

rejected any form of engagement with the Indian government. Khaplang, before his demise, had brought together various militant groups (ULFA<sup>vi</sup>, NDFB<sup>vii</sup>, PREPAK<sup>viii</sup> and UNLF<sup>ix</sup>) to create Western Southeast Asia (WESEA) Alliance, including Northeast (Debu, 2015). The NSCN-Khitovi-Neokpao views the ongoing peace process as an arrangement for the Nagas of Manipur alone. The NSCN-Reformation had earlier supported the agreement. Its stand is unclear. Similarly, factions of the NNC, the Manipur-based Zeliangrong United Front (ZUF) and the Manipur Naga Peoples' Front (MNPF) have all expressed their divergence with the current format of negotiations. Likewise, Eastern Naga Peoples' Organisation (ENPO), Naga Tribes Council (NTC), Against Corruption and Unabated Taxation (ACAUT), and Zeliangrong Baudi (based in Manipur) have all reservations about the framework of the talks (Chhonkar, 2016). There are intrinsic disagreements between the Sema, Angami, Ao, Lotha and the Konyak Naga Hohos on many issues. The fact that Mr. Muivah is a 'Tangkhu' Naga from Manipur also affects his leadership claim (Narayanan, 2015). Muivah however has asserted that Framework Agreement recognises the legitimate right of the Nagas to integration of all Naga territories (The Indian Express, 2017, November 27).

In a major development, to unite all Nagas numerous civil society organisations and Church leaders had launched a Naga national reconciliation move in 2001. In an unprecedented move in 2012, thousands of Naga youths had protested against the militants in Kohima. The Forum for Naga Reconciliation (FNR) had convened a huge meeting during February, 2012 where leaders of three major 'underground' factions shared the stage without hostility (Lotha, 2012). During 2013-2016, the relative peace achieved in Nagaland was credited to the signing of the 'Lenten Agreement' on March 28, 2014, between several factions, under the banner of FNR. FNR has appealed to the NSCN-IM and other political groups to grasp the 'rare opportunity' (of Framework Agreement) together and not to resort to any kind of provocation. The FNR also called upon the churches, Naga Hohos, civil society organisations and all the Naga people to remain alert and vigilant. FNR expressed concern that this 'rare opportunity' is in real danger since a section is portraying the negotiation only as an Indo-NSCN(IM) and not an Indo-Naga settlement<sup>x</sup>.

Since the authority of NSCN-IM to represent all Nagas has been questioned from time to time, the NSCN-IM clarified that:

It is acknowledged by all that NSCN is the authentic organisation of the Naga people, not a 'faction' as supposed by some. No one should doubt that NSCN is the embodiment of the Naga national trust inasmuch as NSCN is built upon the rock of the national decision. (Singh, 2015)

It is reported that hectic efforts were made between December, 2016 and October 2017 and later on to persuade some of the dissenting groups to join the peace parley. Thus, in an important development, six major Naga groups, such as the NNC, GPRN/NSCN (Government of People's Republic of Nagaland), FGN (Federal Government of Nagaland), NSCN (Reformation), NPGN/NNC/NA (National People's Government of Nagaland (Non-accord) and NNC/GDRN/NA (Government Democratic Republic of Nagaland (Non-Accord)), regarded as the most important stakeholders in the fight for the rights of the Nagas, agreed to come forward to make the peace talks 'more inclusive'<sup>xi</sup>.

The above settlement with six groups is going to be a major boost in attaining the final settlement. However, a few hurdles still remain which need to be sorted out. They are the peril of demand of 'Frontier Nagaland' within Nagaland and indecisiveness relating to the Zeliangrong movement, which has presence in three states. They seem to have theoretically accepted the validity of current peace parleys, yet they have kept voicing their concerns rather loudly.

### **Demand of 'Frontier Nagaland': A Challenge to Nagalim Theory**

In Nagaland, the demand for creating a separate state made up of the four underdeveloped eastern districts of Tuensang, Mon, Longleng and Kiphire has been made since early 2010. The Eastern Nagaland Peoples' Organisation, ENPO, which is spearheading the 'Frontier Nagaland' movement, passed a resolution in September, 2018 to intensify the agitation. These eastern districts were merged with the Naga Hills district to form 'Naga Hills Tuensang Area' in 1957. Under the new state of Nagaland (1963) this region was given special status, for 10 years, and was governed through its own regional commission. In 1973, the region was merged within Nagaland fully. A public rally under the aegis of the ENPO was held on September 14, 2018 in Tuensang town to re-affirm its demand for a separate state of 'Frontier Nagaland' (The Morung Express, 2018, September 15). The rally which was attended by the six federating tribal bodies



along with respective village council associations, GBs associations, frontal organisations, ENPO executives, and advisors, unanimously reaffirmed the earlier resolution adopted on August 24, 2012 and its continued stand on 'Frontier Nagaland'. It was also resolved that the entire public under the aegis of ENPO shall continue to firmly reject any form of economic package<sup>xiii</sup>. The ENPO is the apex body of the Konyak, Chang, Sangtam, Khiamniungan, Yimchunger and Phom Nagas. These tribes have expressed resentment over appalling neglect of their region.

In its Editorial dated November 27, 2016, The Statesman asserted that:

Even as the people in Nagaland are patiently looking forward to seeing the logical conclusion of the protracted peace talks, the cry for a separate 'Frontier Nagaland' is becoming louder. The NSCN(IM) leadership is not known to have commented on the issue so far. It will be interesting to watch how the Centre handles this issue before coming to terms with the NSCN(IM) leadership because a separate state carved out of Nagaland is certain to harm the conception of Greater Nagaland.

(Editorial, The Statesman, 2016, November 27)

### **United Naga Council (UNC) and Zeliangrong Movement of Manipur: Auxiliary Faces of Naga Movement**

Compared to Nagas of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, the Nagas of Manipur are proactively involved in the Naga Movement. Manipur Naga situation however needs to be perceived in the backdrop of the Zeliangrong Movement and formation of the United Naga Council (UNC) of Manipur. The formation of United Naga Council in 2003 in Manipur indeed shows a more contemporary coalition of Naga tribes of Manipur. UNC has adopted a constitution on February 16, 2003, emphasising the need to preserve and promote Naga culture. The Preamble of the UNC Constitution strongly asserts that:

We, the Naga people in the present Manipur State, having resolved to organise ourselves under United Naga Council to uphold the solidarity and unity of the Naga people, to protect our land, our identity and our history, to preserve and promote our culture and traditional heritage and to secure all round growth of our people,

do hereby adopt this (Amended) constitution in our council assembly on this 16<sup>th</sup> day of February, 2003 (Kaba, 2013, p. 153).

The Zeliangrong movement, which had commenced its journey as an anti-British resistance in 1930s (Mukherjee, Gupta & Das, 1982; Kabui, 1982), had sided with Naga underground leaders periodically, especially during 1954 to 1957 and on later occasions. Scholars have generally relegated the Zeliangrong movement to the margin, without realising the critical connectivity between two ‘movements’ and historical circumstances of their ideological underpinnings. The Zeliangrong Movement led by Haipou Jaduanang and Rani Gaidinliu was launched in 1925 in order to defy unjust colonial laws, to protect traditional religion and to establish an independent Naga Raj (Mukherjee et al, 1982). Local scholar Marc P. Gangmei regards this movement as ‘Naga-Raj Movement’ led by Jadonang (Gangmei, 2015). Naga Raj for Jadonang was mainly a notion of unity among the Makam people (Makam is a term used for collective identity among all Zeliangrong tribes). Jadonang stated that the Meiteis had their king and hence Makam people should also have their own kingdom, the ‘sovereign’ Naga-Raj (Das, 1996). Rani Gaidinliu, after death of Jadonang, accelerated the Zeliangrong movement and developed her version of Heraka theology alongside the notion of Naga Raj, which epitomised the Naga nationalism (ibid).

The period from 1954 to 1957 is regarded as a period of preparation by the Zeliangrong people to be a part of NNC launched movement, as the Zeliangrong segment. It is claimed that Naga movement reached the land of Zeliangrong in 1957 (Pamei, 2001). The banner of Zeliangrong was used earlier in 1954 under the leadership of A.Z. Phizo in NNC. Before that period, the members of Zeme, Liangmai, Rongmei and Inpui had joined the Naga movement under the banner of NNC, as a separate group. Phizo wanted Gaidinliu to be part of the greater cause of the Nagas and not just be a campaigner of the Zeliangrong Nagas. Gaidinliu’s dilemma was partly caused by the realisation that the Naga movement was more of a Christian movement than a freedom movement (Kamei, 2004; Pamei, 2001). Gaidinliu had started articulating the idea of homeland for her people after 1960s, when she realised that the ground breaking sixteen-point agreement had ignored the Zeliangrong people (Das, 1996), even though NNC had branded the sixteen-point agreement as a surrender. Gaidinliu actually visualised the arbitrary trifurcation of the Zeliangrong people in Assam, Manipur and Nagaland without their consent as humiliation and injustice (initiated by British and continued by the postcolonial government). Gaidinliu submitted a memorandum demanding a

separate 'Zeliangrong Administrative Unit' to Smt. Indira Gandhi in New Delhi on February 22, 1966.

Rani Gaidinliu later met Rajiv Gandhi in February 1988, and submitted a memorandum to him urging for establishing a development council for the Zeliangrong people. Anthropological Survey of India (ASI) was asked thereupon to study the problems of Zeliangrong area, which resulted in submission of a detailed report prepared by this author after visiting the contiguous Zeliangrong areas in all the three states, on behalf of ASI. Those days Gaidinliu was camping in Halflong where she allowed the author to discuss the Zeliangrong issue with her and other leaders. Along with detailed 'ethnography', a detailed map depicting all Zeliangrong villages in contiguous areas of three states was also prepared by this author, with the help of ASI cartographer. Prof. G. Kamei met Dr. K.S. Singh (DG, ASI) and applauded him for the effort, although the contents could not be divulged as the reports were to be forwarded to the PMO, with recommendations. During long discussions in Halflong, Gaidinliu had recited the Gandhi song partly which was translated by Bible translator D. Zeme for the author (vide Das, 1989, p. 242).

It needs to be noted that the Zeliangrong statehood movement was not 'deliberately' against the Naga National Struggle in any way. During the 1960s again, the Zeliangrong people had sacrificed their demand for Zeliangrong homeland when the high power NNC team led by a Kilonser Mr. G. Nganping requested them to give up the statehood demand in the interest of the Nagas<sup>xiii</sup>. Yet again, when the Naga Movement was revived in the late 1980s after a long hiatus following the Shillong Accord, leaders of Zeliangrong People Convention had voluntarily suspended their combat in the larger interests of the Nagas in 1993 (ibid). It is generally believed that in the aftermath of the Kuki-Naga conflict in Manipur in 1992 the NSCN-IM had succeeded in creating a strong support base among the Zeliangrong people. After several dialogues, the collective identity and the name Zeliangrong was recognised by the NSCN-IM. This had further consolidated the Zeliangrong support for NSCN-IM.

Every year August 29 is observed as the Haipau Jadonang Martyr Day by Zeliangrong people. The Government of Manipur and NC Hills Autonomous Council have declared this day as government holiday in recognition of Jadonang's sacrifice for the nation. Speaking on the occasion of death anniversary of Haipou Jadonang on August 29, 2012, Ringthim, a member of the Steering

Committee of NSCN/GPRN, stated that Rani Gaidinliu's aspiration for Zeliangrong integration under one administration has not been fulfilled by Government of India and thus 'It is the bounden duty of the present generation [to] ensure that all the unfulfilled tasks are accomplished lest the present generation be blamed by the future generation'. Such a statement has political implication considering the occasional threats earlier issued by NSCN-IM. It may be argued that any ultimate pronouncement of Indo-Naga parleys has to take cognisance of Zeliangrong phenomenon.

In our 1982 article, we had described Zeliangrong movement as an amalgamation of politics and religion (Mukherjee et al, 1982). Indeed, the evolution of 'Heraka' from original 'Charaa Rek' faith introduced by Jadonang finally got completed with the codification of Heraka doctrines in 1990s. Rani Gaidinliu introduced several reforms and articulated the reformed religion 'Heraka', which means 'religion of a true God' (Mukherjee et al, 1982). It may not be correct to say that 'many of the practices of the Heraka are derived from Hinduism' (Dangmei, 2013). The fact remains that Heraka is a tribal religion essentially and Gaidinliu always regarded it so. It is also true that in the 1970s when Gaidinliu visited New Delhi with her demand for a separate Zeliangrong homeland, she had met several Hindu leaders from All India Arya Pratinidhi Sabha, Sanatan Dharma, Vishva Hindu Parishad, Dayanand Anglo Vedic, and etcetera. In 1979, the Vishva Hindu Parishad invited Gaidinliu to attend World Hindu Meet at Prayag. In the meantime, centre's attempt to glorify Naga freedom fighter Gaidinliu, who was also a spiritual leader, by constructing a memorial museum-cum-library in Kohima under the patronage of Nagaland government has outraged the state's civil society organisations (Hindustan Times, June 14, 2015). Several local Naga leaders in Nagaland have also questioned the very nomenclature of Rongmei and status of this tribe, to which Gaidinliu belonged. Since 2012, Assam and Manipur governments have recognised the Rongmei Naga, but Nagaland government retains the nomenclature Kabui (Das, 1994). Rongmeis thus exist as Kabuis in the electoral roll of Nagaland state<sup>xiv</sup>.

In a rejoinder published in a local daily<sup>xv</sup>, the Zeliangrong leaders have retorted to those who have misconceptions about the Zeliangrong movement vis-à-vis Naga movement as also about true identity of Gaidinliu. In the following excerpt of the rejoinder the leaders pull down such misconceptions. The rejoinder says:

Rani Gaidinliu was not only a Naga but her Zeliangrong people have a large chunk of ancestral land in Peren District of Nagaland. When (she) was fighting against the British colonial forces in the early 1930s, she established her bastion at Poilwa in Peren District... Sadly, she was arrested by the British and sentenced to life imprisonment in 1933... During 1955-56 the Zeliangrong Nagas had joined the Nagas struggle for independence in large scale under the banner of NNC... The divergence between the NNC and the Rani Gaidinliu Army was on complete different perspective. The NNC formed in 1946 with the slogan, 'Nagaland for Christ'. Rani Gaidinliu stood out against forcing foreign religion and she propounded 'secularism' where every religion including the Naga indigenous religion and culture should have a rightful place. She was neither anti-Naga- nor anti-Christian...

### **Civil Society Organisations and New Hopes**

In the aftermath of signing of the historical Framework Agreement, NSCN-IM and the Indian negotiator have been trying to galvanise broad consensus amongst various civil society organisations. It is reported that the Forum for Naga Reconciliation, Naga Hoho, Eastern Naga Peoples' Organisation, Naga Mothers' Association, Naga Students' Federation and the specific Hohos of Naga tribes have been regularly holding consultations with the NSCN-IM and the government interlocutor, R.N. Ravi for arriving at a settlement at the earliest (Biju, 2015). The Naga People's Movement for Human Rights (NPHMR) and Naga Hoho leaders have expressed happiness over the accord. NPMHR, however, has questioned the perpetuation of ASPA which gives the Indian Armed Forces the power to shoot to kill on mere suspicion. Some organisations have shown uneasiness in eastern Nagaland and Manipur, such as the Eastern Naga Peoples' Organisation (ENPO), Naga Tribes Council (NTC), Against Corruption and Unabated Taxation (ACAUT), and Zeliangrong Baudi (Chhonkar, 2016). United Naga Tribes Association on Border Areas (UNTABA) has urged R.N. Ravi to review the issue of historical transference of Naga lands that are still under Assam administration (Morung Express, 2017, July 8).

Naga Hoho is the voice of all Nagas. However, earlier the Ao, Sumi and Lotha Hohos had withdrawn from it. Some Naga leaders argue that Naga Hoho is concerned with major tribes ignoring minor Naga tribes. As per a survey, 50

percent of the Naga people don't know what Naga Hoho is and what they do (The Morung Express, 2016, October 2).

Action Committee for Unabated Taxation (ACAUT) was formed by several organisations under the aegis of the Naga Council in 2013, to check the rampant 'illegal tax' collection from government employees and business community, by militant outfits. ACAUT has apprised the interlocutor on the need to address such grievances. Fact remains that extortion, trafficking of drugs and weapons had often led to inter-insurgent group clashes. It is hoped NSCN-IM will hand over its weapons and relinquish control over the illegal trade<sup>xvi</sup>.

### **Article 371-A, Shared Sovereignty and the 'Realm of the Possible'**

Even after lapse of three long years, no official pronouncements are made about wrapping up of the Framework Agreement. Under this situation, R.N. Ravi, Interlocutor to the Indo-Naga Peace talks, has cheered up the Nagas by saying that they should not give up sovereignty. He said so to media persons after a three hour long closed door meeting with various Tribal Hohos at Kohima in first week of December, 2015. He also said:

Our approach is inclusive and the solution is going to be comprehensive. Inclusive, because it is not just Naga armed groups but it is also the civil society. They are all important stakeholders, hence their views are obtained. 57 representatives of various Naga tribes expressed their views on the current Naga political issue.  
(The Morung Express, 2015, December 9)

Media reports indicate that Mr. Ravi is particularly engrossed in assessing the views of Nagas on the idea of a 'Pan-Naga Government' with 'non-territorial' jurisdiction (Bose, 2015). In a candid statement issued in February, 2016, R.N. Ravi had articulated the notion of shared sovereignty as conceived in administrative parlance. He said that, 'Sharing sovereign power will not be mere semantics or playing with words but that there will be a "genuine devolution" where Nagas will become "almost sovereign like".' On 'what would be the shape' of the arrangement for Nagas outside Nagaland, he said it would depend on how it was negotiated by both the parties. Regarding the crucial issue of integration of Naga areas, Ravi admitted that it still remained in the agenda, while adding that it would have to be achieved through a democratic process. Articulating relationship

between India and Nagas on the basis of shared sovereignty, Ravi said that, ‘sovereignty lies with the people and no country was independent but inter-dependent; yet for Nagas, it would be independent and the relationship between India and Nagas would be on the basis of sharing of sovereign power’<sup>xvii</sup>.

Later, in an exclusive interview with Nagaland Post, on July 15, 2016, R.N. Ravi, Interlocutor, had explained the notions of sovereignty and Pan Naga entity in following words:

The Framework Agreement signed on August 3, 2015 lays down the fundamental principles of our relationship. It fully respects the aspirations of co-existence in an inseparably inclusive relationship on the basis of sharing the mutually agreed sovereign powers. Its details are being worked out. The universal principle of democracy is that ‘People are sovereign’. It is also the core of Indian democracy. There is no question of Nagas giving up sovereignty. Nagas are not colonised people.

He further said:

Sovereign power is an abstract noun. In reality it is a spectrum of powers. Sharing sovereign power means sharing the spectrum of powers between the government of India and the Nagas... “A Pan Naga entity” as a concept of a common platform for the Nagas to strengthen their identity is under discussion. However, Pan Naga Hoho, interpreted as a “super-government” was “inconsistent” with government of India’s position. We are trying to reach a convergence... Naga areas outside Nagaland should have genuine democratic self-governance...

Article 371A of the Constitution of India is specific to Nagaland. We are trying to evolve a system for the Nagas outside Nagaland to be self-governing in their everyday affairs. (As regards) separate flag and passport for the Nagas, these are issues of sentiments and the government of India respects the sentiments; however, these can only be addressed within the realm of the possible (Interview with Interlocutor, R.N. Ravi Nagaland Post, 2016, July15).

### **Culture Discourse: Naga Cultural Traditions and Ethical Values**

The Naga tribes, in general, differ in terms of their language, village-polity, kinship system, indigenous faith, customary law and cultural traits. Each village was self-contained and autonomous. Some Nagas used to visit Assam valley based *haats* (weekly markets) for exchange of goods. Colonial era policies led to movements beyond village and solidarity at larger levels. Naga cultural life is shaped by agriculture festivals and village rituals conducted by shaman-priests to ensure celestial safety. Naga tribes believe in one Supreme Being with many subordinate deities. Each tribe has its own shawl designs. There are artistic traditions and rich heritage of Naga oral literature and myths. They are fast decaying. All Nagas celebrate their own festivals with a pageantry of colour, music and dance. A common feature is that the festivals revolve around agriculture, the mainstay of Naga economy. These festivals hark back to times prior to the advent of Christianity<sup>xviii</sup>. The Nagas have their own set of ethical environmental values and moral standards. The Naga scholar Longchar argued that in the Naga worldview, the land not only holds together the clan, village and tribe, but ‘also unites the Supreme Being, spirits, ancestors and creation as one family’ (Longchar, 1999, p. 123; Thong, 2011). The Nagas had an oral narrative explaining that the spirit, human being and tiger once belonged to the same mother. However, conflict arose among the three and resulted in a permanent hostility between them. Here the animal represents forest realm and the mother symbolises the Mother Earth (Das & Imchen, 1994).

The introduction of Western education and Christian faith, in particular, has brought about tremendous change in the Naga belief systems. Today traditional Naga attires, dances, and other cultural symbols can be seen only during important occasions and in celebrations like the Hornbill Festival. Blind imitation of western culture and varied impact of media and cinema are witnessed in Naga society. A poll in newspaper, Morung Express (June 2008), revealed that 79 percent of the readers find Naga youth of today as confused. Naga youths are ‘becoming more receptive and adaptive’ to western influence. Nevertheless, the events like the ‘Hornbill Festival’ and the revival of the ‘Morung’ dormitory system is seen as an attempt to revive the almost forgotten cultural heritage<sup>xix</sup>.

Nagas in general concede that their cultural traditions and ethical values have drastically perished, especially through Christianisation. Naga anthropologist Abraham Lotha said that ‘In all their enthusiasm to make the Nagas Christians,



the missionaries vehemently buried alive the Naga culture. Christianity in Nagaland is transplanted from America and Europe. Christianity is not nourished by Naga life experiences; it has not grown in Naga cultural soil' (Lotha, 2013, p. 77). Long ago anthropologist Furer-Haimendorf had regretted that rather than bringing the Naga culture and Christianity into harmony, the missionaries set them at opposite poles (Furer-Haimendorf, 1969). Today 90 percent Nagas pursue Christianity. Christianity has in fact become the culture of the people and one who does not profess to be Christian is now considered a 'second class' citizen (Thong, 2011). Lotha has rightly argued that the Christianity has to be integrated into the worldview, social-economic structure, cognitive and linguistic processes of the Naga society (Lotha, 2013). It is ironic that Naga nationalists should base their argument on the 'uniqueness of Naga culture' when most Nagas only ape western culture and do not have a positive attitude towards their own culture (Lotha, 2013).

Nandita Haksar, who as a lawyer had represented the Nagas in courts, said:

It seemed rather ironic that a prime minister ideologically committed to the promotion of a culturally homogeneous India, was talking of inclusive democracy and hailing the unique culture of the Nagas. Much of the Naga culture has been destroyed by the evangelising Baptist missionaries during British regime. They destroyed the old institutions and the administrator-anthropologists stole Naga cultural property which can be seen in museums in Western countries. The Indian education system further helped to erode the Naga culture and destroy the languages; with no place for Naga history in the school textbooks (Haksar, 2015).

### **Concluding Remarks**

The history of Indo-Naga conflict shows that earlier parleys broke down due to the divergent perceptions surrounding 'sovereignty' issue. This time, it appears, a remarkable unanimity has emerged over sharing of sovereign powers. Indeed, the ongoing peace parleys have already achieved a huge success by shifting the Naga discourse from 'exclusive sovereignty' to that of 'shared sovereignty'. In the backdrop of numerous failed peace-parleys, a breakthrough is expected through the current parleys. The positive outcome so far has been that more and more outfits and stakeholders seem to have endorsed the initiative. Comprehensive

peace would need a comprehensive agreement by incorporating viewpoints of all stakeholders in and outside Nagaland. The huge delay in reaching the final accord seems to be on account of this factor. Piecemeal effort and 'shortcut' measures will fail and create further mistrust between the people and the government. There is a desire within the Naga community, various Naga Hohos, Naga civil society, the Church and the Forum for Reconciliation for an ultimate solution. Naga women's organisations and student federations too have welcomed the initiative. The dissenting 'outfits' should not see peace effort from the prism of the centrality of the NSCN-IM.

The Nagas in general are frustrated with more than two decades of peace parleys. They are also upset with the selfishness of the self-serving state politicians. Some straight questions are raised by concerned Naga scholars. Kikon has argued that more than half a dozen newly formed armed groups operate and factional violence is routine. These developments, in her view, make it impossible to imagine any positive outcome from the current negotiations. Kikon says that today, the immediate Naga pride and dignity is not attached only to aspirations for a sovereign homeland, but one that is grounded in seeking employment and supporting the families who lack any avenue to earn an income (Kikon, 2015). These are undeniably very genuine concerns. Some Naga scholars mark out the present miserable conditions as the creation of the state leaders. For decades Indian state has pumped crores of rupees to generate employment, but service opportunities were not created. A Naga scholar has related this serious malady to corruption. Unless corruption is curtailed, the development in the state will go from bad to worse (Ezung, 2012). Corruption is an irony for Nagas that pride itself so much in tradition of honesty. Naga traditional values mixed with Christian principle could have infused a super honest culture but on the contrary, the opposite exists<sup>xx</sup>.

Two-decade-long ceasefire since 1997 has changed mental outlook of present generation of the Nagas, who have matured without experiencing conflict and the brutality of the army. They have nevertheless witnessed rampant corruption and failure of governance mechanisms. They must be hoping that once final agreement is reached and utmost sovereign powers are granted, the life of the Nagas will change as the good governance may then be installed. Will it happen? Nagaland no doubt is all set to emerge as a 'semi-sovereign state', but question remains whether that will automatically ensure justice and good governance for all sections of the Nagas?

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**Notes:**

<sup>i</sup> This review-article is based on secondary source materials and due references are provided to all materials used, electronic and published. If any omission remains the author sincerely regrets the same; and seeks comments for future revision. Opinions expressed in this article are those of author alone.

<sup>ii</sup> <http://nagastudiesgroup.blogspot.in/2015/08>

<sup>iii</sup> Adino Phizo questions Naga Hoho's White Paper  
[www.e-pao.net](http://www.e-pao.net)

<sup>iv</sup> <http://mattersindia.com/2014/12/present-situation-of-nagaland/>

<sup>v</sup> <https://www.timesdelhi.com/2017/06/11/>

<sup>vi</sup> United Liberation Front of Assam

<sup>vii</sup> National Democratic Front of Boroland

<sup>viii</sup> People's Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak

<sup>ix</sup> United National Liberation Front

<sup>x</sup> <http://www.easternmirrornagaland.com/take-naga-society-forward-fnr/>

<sup>xi</sup> <https://thewire.in/189489/centre-to-take-naga-peace-talks-beyond-nscn-im-rn-ravi/>

<sup>xii</sup> <https://thewire.in/government/revealed-rss-draft-plan-nagaland-accord>

<sup>xiii</sup> <https://rongmeiencyclopedia.wordpress.com/2018/04/25/>

<sup>xiv</sup> <https://rongmeiencyclopedia.wordpress.com/2018/10/04/the-first-recognised-naga-tribe-by-the-british-empire/>

<sup>xv</sup> Vide Misgivings about Rani Gaidinliu: A Rejoinder; The Morung Express, 2017, April 9

<sup>xvi</sup> [http://www.indiablooms.com/ibns\\_new/news/](http://www.indiablooms.com/ibns_new/news/)

<sup>xvii</sup> Cited in Monthly Achieves, February, 2016; <https://kharingyoshimrah01.wordpress.com/>

<sup>xviii</sup> <https://www.nagaland.gov.in/portal/>

<sup>xix</sup> <http://www.trunity.net/rongmeinaga/view/>

<sup>xx</sup> <https://www.nelive.in/nagaland/crime/>

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