

NAGA

IDENTITY

B.B. KUMAR

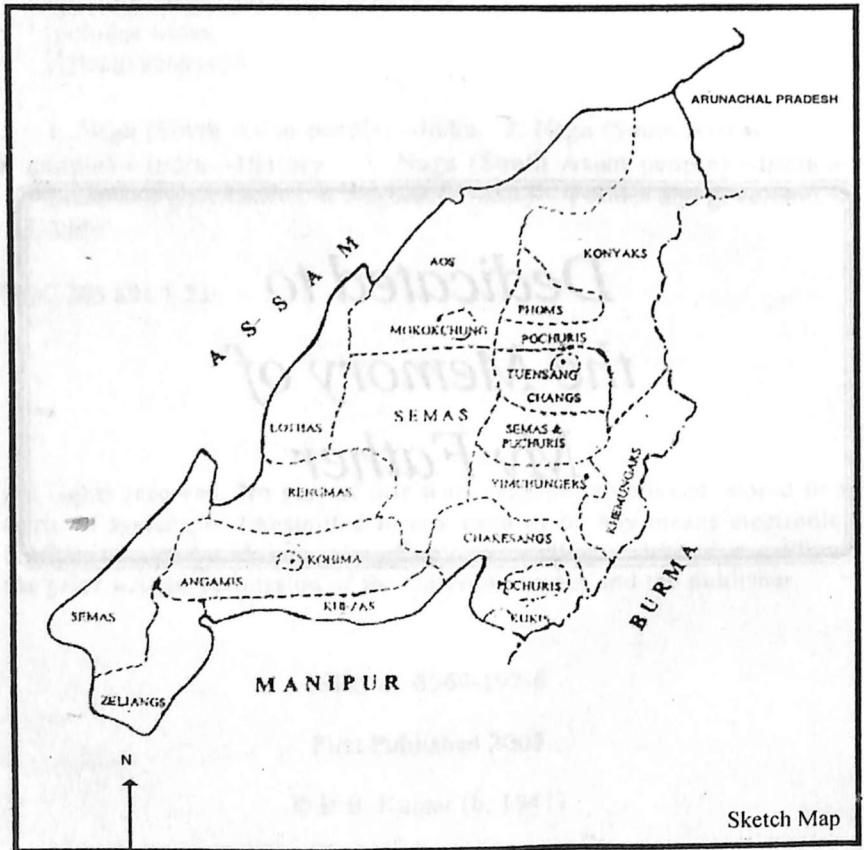


NAGA IDENTITY



B.B. Kumar

MAP OF NAGALAND



FOREWORD

I have great pleasure in putting forward my friend Braj Bihari Kumar's Book *Naga Identity* to the readers. Dr. Kumar is a dedicated scholar and teacher who has lived and worked in the north-east and has brought this book as a labour of love. This book is in the genre of the first account of the Nagas published in English language authored by R.B. Pemberton in 1832 based on his personal experience followed by distinguished scholars and administrators like J.P. Mills, J.H. Hutton, T.C. Hodson, E.A. Gait, Verrier Elwin, S.K. Bhuyan, H.K. Barpujari, N.K. Das, Furer Haimendorf, and scholars and leaders hailing from Nagaland like C.L. Imchen and Hokishe Sema.

To students of history, sociology, politics, administration and religion, the Nagas have invariably invoked both awe and fascination. This feeling is a product of a large variety of imaginations and myths: of the Naga image of 'head-hunters'; of a group of people who would never harm children and women whatever may be the provocation or the need; of their phenomenal attachment to their villages; of their deep sense of humour. This feeling is also shared by all those who have come in contact with the Nagas; be they be Assamese *gossains* or Christian missionaries; civilian administrators or members of the armed forces; travelers or inquisitive visitors; small traders or migrant business houses; road builders or students from neighbourhood.

The Nagas have led a cloistered existence. The process of opening up commenced with the British annexation of Assam in a big way during the nineteenth century led and supported by Christian missionaries. The British encouraged Christian missionaries to play a major role in the entire north-eastern region including Nagaland. Accordingly, various missionary groups hailing from U.S.A., U.K., Germany and several other western countries moved into the region. The American Baptists came to Nagaland and set up their missions

in 1867 to work among the Ao Nagas; in 1879 to work among the Lhota Nagas and in 1880 among the Angami Nagas.

The Nagas were exposed to the outside world for the first time during the First World War, when 2000 of them served in France. In 1918, a Naga club was formed. In 1929, they submitted a petition to the Simon Commission, wherein they desired to be left out from the reform scheme for India. The relevant portion reads as follows:

“Before the British Government conquered our country in 1879-1880, we were living in a state of intermittent warfare with the Assamese of the Assam valley to the North and West of our country and Manipuris in the South. They never conquered us nor were we subjected to their rule. On the other hand, we were always a terror to these people. Our country within the administered area consists of more than eight Tribes, quite different from one another with quite different languages which cannot be understood by each other, and there are more Tribes outside the administered area which are not known at present. We have no Unity among us and it is really the British Government that is holding us together now.” (Memorandum of the Naga Hills to Simon Commission on January 10, 1929)

The origins of the word ‘naga’ or ‘nagas’ is shrouded in mystery. But its popularization is certainly a nineteenth century phenomenon. For a very long time, the Assamese plains people have called them as ‘noga’. The appellation ‘nagas’ has acquired a generic form that includes more than 30 tribes who live in Nagaland and neighbouring states of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and Manipur and the bordering nation-state of Myanmar. The tribes of north east India, however, find mention in the Indian epics i.e. the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* as ‘kiratas’. And this denotes the entire race of tribes and is more inclusive in nature than another generic term ‘Bodos’ which denoted a majority of plains tribes since the medieval period. The Ahoms who ruled over Assam and neighbouring hills for over six hundred years (during 1220-1826) have a separate identity of their own as a ruling elite but they married the girls from among the plains tribes as well as caste-Hindus predominantly of the Brahmaputra Valley and are now an Other Backward Classes (OBC).

The Nagas have shared history with the Assamese, Manipuris, Cacharis and the Singphos. There are certain common traits which

make it difficult to distinguish the Nagas from other tribes of the north-east. Their languages share certain features even with the distant Munda group of languages of people living in Jharkhand. The institutions like morung and head-hunting have wide currency even outside India. While the Nagas have many similarities/common traits with the non-Nagas, the intra-Naga differences are at the same time too many. A study of major tribes of Nagaland (Ao, Angami, Sema, Lotha, Rengma, Chakhesang, Yimchunger, Kalya Kongnyu, Konyak, Chang, Sangtam, Phom, Zeme, Liangmei, Rongmei (Zeliangrong), Khiemungan) would reveal that the Nagas differ in their languages, village-polity, social institutions and usages, physical features, temperament, myths of origin and migration, etc. While asserting Naga identity, the similarities between the Nagas and non-Nagas, and intra-Naga differences are often overlooked. Uncritical rejection of facts has led to certain obsessions, bias, subjectivity and myth-making. Such things have happened specially in the case of the Nagas and generally in the north-east.

The Nagas migrated into the Naga Hills from southeast China and Burma over a long period of time. The Naga legends make us believe that all the Naga tribes migrated from Burma across the Somra tracts and reached a place called Khezekenoma just across the border of Manipur. The name Naga was given to them by outsiders. The Nagas resented the name for long, till political expediency caused it to be accepted. The different Naga tribes never lived as one group. Each tribe lived in one village or more but it exclusively belonged to them. Each village was self-sufficient as demands were limited and by and large maintained its independent character. Any interference, trespassing or encroachments by members of other villages (which invariably meant another tribe) in its territorial jurisdiction usually provoked inter village war leading at times to head-hunting.

My description of the Naga society as narrated in my book *The Problem of Change* needs recalling. It reads:

“The Nagas are not the ‘naked’ people, as is erroneously understood by the word ‘Naga’. Except for the Angami sub-clan, the Nagas are a group who developed strong village institutions under the leadership of a chief and loved their freedom passionately. Stone worship is common among the

Nagas as they believe that they are born of stone. The various tribes of Nagas, each speaking a dialect of its own, had one thing in common and that was their sense of valour. At different periods of history the Nagas have indulged in constant feuds and head-hunting. The Nagas' conflicts with Manipur, the British forces and the security forces in the post-Independence era are well-known. The feud between the Assamese plainsmen bordering Naga territory is almost a constant feature of known history. In their socio-political outlook, while the Nagas accord equal rights to men and women, the women are prevented from participating in politics, fighting and hunting. The political process in Nagaland, in tune with its past traditions, has not sent any significant number of womenfolk to their legislative assemblies. The traditional Naga attitude towards property was one of 'renunciation'. The Feasts of Merit, which bestowed distinction on their donors, was intended to show the virtues of distributing wealth over its possession. While the Feasts of Merit are still in vogue, the attitude towards property has changed. Acquisitiveness is now dominant, and the traditional institution of communal ownership of property is cracking. The process seems irreversible". (pp.30-31)

Language contributes meaningfully to identify formation. The Naga languages belong to the Tibeto Burman family. There are more than eighteen languages spoken by Nagas in Nagaland itself. The prevalence of Nagamese as the language of dialogue among Naga tribes and of the local market is a recent phenomenon and shows predominant influence of Assamese language. The Nagas had a long tradition of visiting the Assam plains and particularly their *weekly hats* (bazars). The rich Christian religious literature put down in Roman script is another feature of Nagaland's linguistic profile. All these reveal great spirit of accommodation in Naga society.

During the Second World War (1939-45), Kohima was a battle ground of the Allied and Axis forces. The journey of the Nagas from a district of Assam to the status of Union Territory and the State has been very quick. The State of Nagaland was inaugurated on 1st December, 1963. The inauguration of Nagaland as a full-fledged state of the Indian Union brought a population of 3.71 lakhs in an

area of 16579 sq. kms. at par with the bigger States such as the Uttar Pradesh with 74 million people and 2,94,416 sq. kms area, with the same privileges and status. Nagaland was the first state in the country with such meagre population and small area. It was not formed on linguistic lines nor it conformed to the criteria of economic viability but purely on political consideration. The state was to run and continues to be sustained mainly on the grants received from the Consolidated Fund of India.

The formation of the new state gave birth to never ending demands for small states in the north-east and elsewhere in the country on ethnic lines. Nagaland was replicated in Mizoram. The insurgency in Mizo Hills district of Assam by the Mizo National Front (MNF) under the leadership of Laldenga, and the formation of Mizoram as a State of the Indian Union, was much on the same lines as witnessed in Nagaland. The demands for the formation of Meghalaya by All Party Hill Leaders Conference (APHLC), and similar demands for the full-fledged statehood in Manipur and Tripura got encouragement due to the creation of Nagaland. Thus the statehood of Nagaland was the fore-runner of the reorganization of the north-east. The same may be said about the insurgency in the rest of the region. The Naga insurgency is the mother of all the insurgencies in the north-east India. Fortunately, the re-organisation of north east India got completed by 1972 and successive governments at the Centre have wisely resisted demands for further division of Assam and rationalization of boundaries of States of the region on ethnic lines of exclusivity denying the logic of a plural society.

The Naga identity formation is a recent phenomenon. Many tribes who call themselves Naga today, were unaware of the term. Many Naga tribes were not included into that category even a few decades ago. On the contrary, even Kukis, Cacharis, Abors and many other communities were called Nagas in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Thus the term 'Naga' was a fluid one. It was a loose term. The Naga identity continues to be an evolving identity. However, politicization of the said identity has led to much myth-making and propaganda. It made the study of the Nagas and their identity necessary in anthropological, cultural and historical perspective to remove the perceptual haziness about the same. The present book is an effort in that direction. Dr. B.B. Kumar sums up his approach as follows:

“..... the Assamese, who called them ‘Noga’, the Indian British Government, and to the greatest extent, the Government of Independent India forged and strengthened Naga Unity and thereby their ‘greater identity’. Ironically, many Nagas who suffer from ‘holier than thou’ attitude, blame them the most for keeping them under separate administrative units. The authors long sojourn as an educator in Nagaland and his abiding interest in the history and anthropology of Nagas and other tribal communities of the area was one of the reasons to write this book. The recent movement for greater Nagaland, viz Nagalim, compelled the author to undertake immediate repeat-study of the history and anthropology of the Naga tribes to update and renew the earlier ones. The present book is the outcome of the same. While the recent identity formation and desire of the Nagas to live together, is a welcome development, the same should not be claimed on the basis of history and anthropology; as facts do not substantiate such assertions. At the same time there should not be clash of competing desires to bring complications.”

Democracy has greatly contributed to forging of a composite Naga identity in Nagaland. Notwithstanding insurgency and occasional boycott, the forces of insurgency articulated the proud and independent character of the Nagas even as the forces of democracy had used the tradition of democracy in Naga society to make it participate in elections. Fortunately, the democratic forces are having now a upper hand. The small group of people who wanted to secede from India are losing support as democratic processes are gradually integrating the Naga people into the mainstream of economic development and modernization. The nation could reasonably be proud of a moderately stable constitutional culture in Nagaland particularly in the backdrop of the earlier insurgency movements and violence.

The growth of the middle class in Nagaland was intimately linked up with the spread of education and was not based either on a landed aristocracy, which never existed, or on commercial activity, which came only with the introduction of English education. Even here the middle class is the dominant group. It comprises the politicians, bureaucracy, businessmen from contractors to shopkeepers, and those belonging to independent professions, such

as law and medicine. The migrant middle class is a product of the massive expenditure on development schemes dating back to the 1960s and consists of contractors, shopkeepers, foodgrain dealers, etc., from North India. They are mainly concentrated in Dimapur, which is outside the purview of 'inner-line'.

The middle class phenomenon in Nagaland has four distinctive features: (1) the absence of a traditional bourgeoisie or capitalist class; (2) the contradictions and conflicts between two easily identifiable groups – the indigenous middle class and the migrant middle class; (3) the control of the indigenous middle class over the apparatus of the State, including the bureaucracy and agriculture, and of the migrant middle class over industry and trade; and (4) the economic leverage commanded by outside business houses.

If 'identity' is to look different, to stand apart from others, the Nagas have a distinct identity in terms of physique, folklores, folktales and world-view. Times have changed them but still they are distinct. And yet at the same time they know interdependence. They have practiced tolerance towards others point of view. They view their future among a community of believers in different faiths and races. Vital fragments of the past still live on in dress, customs, ceremonies, festivals and in their attitudes towards women despite mass conversion to Christianity. The uniqueness of the Nagas lies in their institutions of governance – the villages, the *morungs*, methods and processes of cultivation involving the community, their arts and crafts, their rituals and beliefs; and their lores and tales.

Identity movement should lead to re-creation of memories of tribal life. Unfortunately, not much work is done in this behalf. What is happening is domination of political issues over memories, over stories related to conservation of ecology, over traditional music and dance forms, over common ownership of natural resources.

There are two contradictory forces in operation in Nagaland. One is for democracy, peace and development; and the other for violence, insurgency and extortion. Increasingly the forces of peace are gaining strength and the conclusion of peace with major insurgency groups by the Government of India is bound to herald an era of constructive activity and say of the Nagas not only in their own affairs but in the affairs of the country as a whole.

There should be sincere and imaginative efforts to accord the

people of Nagaland powers that could be given to a federating unit that is possible within the constitutional and parliamentary framework of empowerment. The Nagas have a great sense of realism and once it is clear to them that the Government of India is willing to give them all that they could within the framework of the constitution and powers of parliament, it should not be difficult for them to conclude an agreement to end this long period of strife and uncertainty. The empowerment of Naga people and their democratic institutions of governance would lead to peace and amity among the tribes and in its neighbourhood and unprecedented economic and cultural progress.

For a variety of reasons outlined earlier, Nagaland, the sixteenth State of the Indian Union, occupies a significant place in the national consciousness. The end of insurgency in Nagaland and heralding of peace process and launching of massive economic programmes in that State would release the energy of the people in a constructive manner. In the language of a Buddhist monk (infact of a song) **“The snow has fallen, but don’t be sad, After the snowfall, comes the warmth of the sun.”** The sun is bound to rise not in distant future but in our life-time and illuminate Nagaland and the whole region. The civilisational idea of and democratic realities in India allow regional or local identity to co-exist with national identity without any stress or animosity. A Naga serving in another State or living within Nagaland finds no conflict either of interest or of values in his being a Naga and an Indian simultaneously.

I am sure *Naga Identity* would add to greater understanding that the Naga identity and the Indian identity reinforce each other and support the forces of inclusiveness, dialogue and peace in Nagaland. The book is accordingly commended for wider readership.

Balmiki Singh

26 November, 2004

(Balmiki Prasad Singh)

Guru Nanak Jayanti Day
New Delhi

Chancellor, CIHTS (deemed to be University),
Sarnath and former Union Home Secretary

PREFACE

The Nagas lived in self-sufficient village republics. Most of their villages were located at the hill-tops or on the spurs of the hills. They were well protected against the enemy attack and in many cases, even the sections of the village (*khels*) had their separate defence arrangements. Different clans of a tribe inhabiting a village lived in different quarters (*khels*) of the village. The clan solidarity was the most pronounced phenomenon in the Naga society.

'Naga' is a generic term used for about thirty tribes inhabiting our North-Eastern fringe and across our border in Myanmar. Most of the tribes known as "Naga" today were not aware of the term before the establishment of the Naga Hills district. The Nagas of Tuensang started using the term only after the advent of the administration in that district in the early 1950s and especially after the formation of Naga Hills Tuensang Area. In this case, an interesting encounter with an elderly Chang is worth quoting. He said: "We were calling ourselves Chang. You people came and told us that we are Nagas and we started calling ourselves Nagas. We started learning Hindi, but you told us to learn English. And we started learning English." The Nagas used to call themselves by the respective names of the tribe concerned; but the more pronounced trend was to identify oneself with the village of one's inhabitation. Thus their identity used to be mostly village based.

There is considerable confusion about the Naga identity among the Nagas and the non-Nagas. The Naga identity, as exists today, is a recent construct. It continues to evolve and is a case of greater identity formation. The author attempts in this book to analyze Naga identity formation in the broader framework, taking into consideration their history and culture, origin, migration, ethnicity, social structure and village polity. It also deals with the politicization

of the Naga identity. The book aims at removing perceptual haziness about the Naga identity.

Shri B.P. Singh, former Home Secretary, Government of India has kindly written the foreword of the book. The author expresses his grateful thanks for the same. The author is thankful to Shri J.N. Roy, *IPS* (Retd.), treasurer Astha Bharati, for encouragement for writing the book. He also thanks Shri Ashok Kumar Mittal of Concept Publishing Company, New Delhi for speedily undertaking the publication of the book.

B.B. Kumar

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INTRODUCTION

The Naga Students Federation (NSF) has issued a directive and a warning against any academic research into the Naga people's history without its permission. The immediate provocation for the directive, as reported, was due to their concern about 'genome research project' which has been undertaken in Nagaland University by some Naga and non-Naga scholars. It requires, among other things, the collection of blood samples from every Naga tribe. The NSF, whose support to Naga nationalist aspirations and Naga sovereignty is well-known, is afraid that such physical anthropological research may reveal, beyond doubt, the physical distinctiveness of different Naga tribes. The NSF maintains that the history of the Naga people had been distorted by the research by non-Naga scholars. The president of the apex Naga students' organization said that 'people from outside the Naga community' would not be allowed to undertake any research on Naga history without the organization's permission (*Frontline*, September 26, 2003). This development makes it clear that the universities; Nagaland University now, and North-Eastern Hill University earlier, have failed to create healthy academic ethos; and the above-mentioned directive is the manifestation of the new form of 'academic terrorism'.

The Britishers kept the Nagas isolated from the rest of the country. Some prominent British colonial functionaries wanted the separation of the Naga and other tribal inhabited areas of the North-East from the rest of the country. Their strategy, commonly known as the Coupland Plan, of the formation of a separate Crown Colony or a Hill State could not succeed as the independence came too early

after Second World War for them. The Nagas by and large wanted to remain in India. Their only apex organization, Naga National Council (NNC), passed a resolution just before independence, and wanted the Naga Hills district to remain a part of Assam State in India. The demand of self-determination was made by a section of the Nagas afterwards.

The generic term 'Naga' was loosely used for a number of tribes on our eastern fringe a century ago. Not only the tribes calling themselves Naga today, but even the Kukis, Kacharis, Abors, Mikirs and the Nepalis settled there were called Nagas. On the other hand, even Nagas did not know about the particular nomenclature, and even resented to be called Nagas. Every Naga tribe has its own name. Its neighbours also gave separate name to a tribe. Thus the composite Naga identity is of recent origin and it lacks claimed historical support. The history of the Nagas is the history of the individual tribes; it is also the history of a thousand Naga village republics.

The Nagas had harmonious relationship with the Ahom kings. At least the Aos and the Lothas never raided the plains for the heads. Few cases of the conflict between the Eastern Nagas and the Ahoms is recorded by Gait in his *History of Assam*. But such raids became gradually less and less. Angamis and other Nagas served in the Ahom army. The Naga raids in Assam and Cachar plains started only after the arrival of the Britishers in the North-Eastern scenario. Similar interface existed between the various Naga tribes and Manipuris, Kacharis and Singphos.

The demand of the right of self-determination was voiced by the NNC under the leadership of Phizo. It was based on the grounds of (i) ethnic distinctiveness, (ii) distinct social life, way of living, laws and customs, etc., and (iii) different religion – Animism and Christianity. The Nagas are in noway distinct from other tribes of the region. Their social life, way of living and customs are also dissimilar in many ways. Animism and Christianity are also not the exclusive religions of the Nagas. On one hand, there are many traits, which are not shared by all the Naga tribes, on the other hand, there are many common culture markers, which are shared by the Nagas and the non-Nagas.

The Nagas are polyglot; they speak dozens of mutually un-intelligible languages. The physical features differ even from one

household to another in a village. The intra-Naga differences in their social structure, village polity, dress, hair style, tattooing, setting of the village, housing pattern also differ significantly. The mode of agriculture, sowing of seed and harvesting is also not identical. Their mortuary rites and beliefs after death are also not similar. The migration has taken place almost from every direction. But the places of origin are not far away from their present habitat.

The Naga tribes have mixed origin. They have incorporated Mongoloid, Austric, Aryan and even Negroid ethnic elements in them. Even the individual Naga tribes have taken ethnic elements from diverse sources. In spite of such vast diversity, the "greater identity formation" has taken place, which is a welcome development. The Naga identity is a stable one today.

The greater identity formation of the Nagas was only possible by bringing them under single administrative unit of Naga Hills district followed by the unification of Naga Hills and Tuensang area. It became a dense administrative region after the formation of the State. Unprecedented growth of education and development activities brought the Nagas nearer to each other than never before. Even the spread of Christianity was facilitated by the State formation. It was not possible for the Nagas to even know each other without bringing them together under bigger administrative unit. It is interesting to know that even as late as 1929 after the formation of the Naga Hills district the Nagas hardly knew each other. The Memorandum presented to the Simon Commission by the Naga Club gives clear picture of the knowledge of the Nagas about themselves. It says:

"Our country within the administered area consists of more than eight Tribes, quite different from one another with quite different languages which cannot be understood by each other, and there are more Tribes outside the administered area which are not known at present. We have no Unity among us and it is really the British Government that is holding us together now."

It is clear from the above statement that the Assamese, who called them 'Noga', the Indian British Government, and to the greatest extent, the Government of Independent India forged and strengthened Naga Unity and thereby their 'greater identity'.

Ironically, many Nagas who suffer from 'holier than thou' attitude, blame them the most for keeping them under separate administrative units.

The authors long sojourn as an educator in Nagaland and his abiding interest in the history and anthropology of Nagas and other tribal communities of the area was one of the reasons to write this book. The recent movement for greater Nagaland, viz. Nagalim, compelled the author to undertake immediate repeat-study of the history and anthropology of the Naga tribes to update and renew the earlier ones. The present book is the outcome of the same. While the recent identity formation and desire of the Nagas to live together, is a welcome development, the same should not be claimed on the basis of history and anthropology; as facts do not substantiate such assertions.

THE NAGAS : AN OVERVIEW

Naga is a generic term used for about thirty tribes of our eastern hill frontier in the states of Nagaland, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh and Assam. The Angami, Ao, Chakhesang, Chang, Khiamnungan, Konyak, Lotha, Phom, Pochury, Rengma, Sangtam, Sema, Yimchungru and Zeliang reside in the state of Nagaland. Chakhesang, known earlier as Eastern Angami, is the combination of Chokri, Kheja and Sangtam (better known as Pochury) tribes. Zeliang is the combination of Zemi and Liangmei. Similarly, Zeliangroung is the combination of Zemi, Liangmei and ROUNGMEI tribes. The Tangkhul, Mao, Maram, Kabui (also known as ROUNGMEI), Kachcha (Zemi), Koireng (Liangmei), Maram, Maring, Thangal, Anal, Mōyon, Monsang and Lamgang Nagas reside in northern, north-western and eastern districts of Manipur. It needs mention that the Anals were earlier considered to be a Kuki-Chin tribe and they speak a language of that family; but they claim now to be a Naga tribe. Rengma and Zemi Nagas also reside in Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills districts of Assam, Noctes, Wanchos and Tangsas live in Tirap and Changlang districts of Arunachal Pradesh. Some Naga tribes also reside in Myanmar in the contiguous areas of Tirap, Mon, Tuensang and East Manipur, especially in the Somra tract. They are Heimei, Para, Rangpan, Htangan, Tsaplaw and Somra Nagas.¹ Khiamnungan, Tikhir, Chirr and Makaware tribes found in Tuensang district are also living across the border.² Khiamnungans are called Para in Myanmar.

Origin of the Word "Naga"

The nomenclature 'Naga' was given to these people by the Assamese. They pronounce it 'Noga'. The opinion about the origin

of the word 'Naga' differs. Capt. Butler linked the term with Hindi word 'nanga' and Bengali word 'nangta', and some with Sanskrit 'nagna'. These words mean naked. Gait, Peal, Holecombe and Elwin link it with the word 'nok' (meaning people in Nocte; Sanskrit 'loka', people). Owen favours the derivation of the term from Sanskrit, 'nag', meaning mountain.³

Hutton favours its derivation from the Sanskrit 'nagna'. He wrote:

"In view of the fact that Ptolemy in the third or the fourth century A.D. and Shiabuddin Talish in the sixteenth both speak of Nagas as "Nanga," *qua* "naked," I must recant my derivation of "Naga" from the Sanskrit Nag (*vide* Mills, *The Lhota Nagas*, p. xvi, n.2) and substitute the Sanskrit *nagna*. See Yule and Burnell, *Hobson Jobson* (1903), S. V. NAGA. The correspondent who would derive "naga" from *Nok* (Hindustani log?) was probably S.E. Peal, and was certainly in error."⁴

E.T. Dalton has also linked the term 'Naga' to the Sanskrit root, meaning 'naked' or the Sanskrit 'Nag', snake. He wrote:

"The learned leave us to take our choice as to whether the term Naga, the name applied by the Hindus to the inhabitants of the hills we are about to explore, is from the Sanskrit root, meaning 'naked', or the Sanskrit 'Nag', snake. Whichever derivation we take, it must be admitted that the word is aptly applied, as the Nagas love to decorate, rather than to clothe, their person, and are decidedly snake-like in their habits."⁵

The Austric link with *Nag* (snake) legend is well established. Some Naga languages certainly show marked Munda, an Austric language, linguistic traits. Therefore, the possibility of derivation of the word from 'Nag' should be examined.⁶

The Use of the Term "Naga"

As mentioned earlier the name "Naga" to these tribes was given by others. Until recently, the term was not in general use among the Naga people.⁷ The people of Tuensang rarely spoke of themselves as Naga even in 1954.⁸ The same was the case with the Nagas of Cachar. Soppit observes: "Many of the people from intercourse with

the plains began to acknowledge the term Nage and to answer to it, but in the remoter villages, removed from outside influence, the term is unknown, nor is it in anyway recognised by surrounding tribes, Kukis and Kacharis".⁹ Not only this term was not used by the Nagas themselves, but in fact, as Hokishe Sema has observed, "for long, this appellation of "Naga" was resented to by these people, till political expediency caused it to be accepted as describing the separate identity of these people as distinct from other ethnic tribal people and also from the people in the country at large."¹⁰

Earlier, the term 'Naga' was loosely used for other tribes also. As for example, we find mention of the "Kachari Nagas", "Kuki Nagas" and the "Abor Nagas" in the nineteenth century by Dalton.¹¹ Hutton's observation about the Nagas in this connection is worth quoting, which says: "if not impossible, it is exceedingly difficult to propound any test by which a Naga tribe can be distinguished from other Assam or Burma tribes which are not Nagas."¹² On the other hand, there exists too much intra-Naga differences. Anyway, the Naga identity formation, though new, and to large extent artificial construct was a welcome development. B.K. Roy Burman has termed it "Secondary Social Entity."¹³ It is a case of "Greater Identity Formation."¹⁴

The Names of the Individual Tribes

Most of the Naga tribes use different names for themselves than the names commonly given to them. In most of the cases, even their neighbours also call them differently. The names of some of the Naga tribes is given below:

<i>Commonly used Name of the Tribe</i>	<i>Other Name(s)</i>
Ao	They call themselves Ao and Aorr; called Ao by Chang Nagas; Aorr by Sangtams; Cholimi by Semas; Uri or Chongli by Lothas, Paimi by Konyaks, Hatigoria and Dupdoria by the Assamese.
Angami	Call themselves Tengima and Tenyimie. Earlier they were called Gnamei and Tsanglo. They are called Monr by Ao Tsungumi by Semas and Tsungung by Lothas.

<i>Commonly used Name of the Tribe</i>	<i>Other Name(s)</i>
Sema	Called Sema by Angamis; Simi, Simrr by Chongli Aos; Moiyarr by Mongsen Aos; Chumm by Lothas; Sumrr by Sangtams; Sangli by Changs.
Lotha	Ndreng or Southern Lothas call themselves Kyong, "Kyon or Okyo; called Chisima by Angamis; Tsindrr by Aos and Choimi by Sema, Miklei by Assamese and Tsontsu by themselves.
Rengma	They called themselves Njong or Injang; called Monr by Aos, Mozhumi by Angamis, Moiyui by Lothas, Mezama by Angamis and Moxhumi by Semas.
Konyak	People of Tamlu called themselves Konyak or Haha; called Mirirr by Aos; Taprongami or Minyuma Nagamni by Semas; and by various names like Banpara, Mutonia, Namsangia, Tablungia etc. by the Assamese.
Chang	They are called Mojung by Konyak, Mochungrr by Aos; Mochunmi by Semas, and Machongrr by Sangtams.
Phom	Also known in odd days as Tamlu and Chingmengnu Nagas; Phoms of Mirenokpo or Assiringia villages in Ao area were called Assiringia Nagas by the Assamese.
Sangtam	Called themselves Isachnure or Bir Pirr; called Lophomi (Northern Sangtam) and Tukomi (Central Sangtam) by Semas, Sangtam by Changs and Sangtamrr by Aos. Eastern Sangtam together with Chokri and Kheja is called Chakhesang and alone Pochuri.
Yimchunger	The tribe called itself Yachongr. Called Yachumi by Sems, Yamsongrr by Aos; Yamsung by Changs and Yamchongrr by Sangtams.
Khiamngan	Called themselves Khiamngan (alternative spelling Khemungam, Khemungan, Khiemungan); called Aoshed by Changs; Tukhemni by Semas and Para in Burma. Early name also Kolyokengnyu (the one living in stone roofed houses); also known as Bosorr.

<i>Commonly used Name of the Tribe</i>	<i>Other Name(s)</i>
Kheja	Known as Chakhesang along with Chokri and Sangtam (Eastern); also known as Kezhama, Kezami and Eastern Angami.
Chokri	Also known as Chakhesang; Eastern Angami, Chakru and Chakrima.
Zemi	Known as Zeliang with Liangmei and Zeliangrong with Liangmei and Rongmei Nagas; called Mezame by Angamis; other name is Kachcha Nagas.
Liangmei Rongmei	Old name is Koireng. (Nruanghmei) are also known as Kabui or Kachcha Nagas.
Mao	Called themselves Memi.

Classification of the Naga Tribes

The Naga tribes were roughly classified into the following four categories:

The Southern Nagas

This included Zemi, Liangmei, Ruongmei, and some Naga tribes of Manipur. The classification is based on linguistic differences, advanced mode of singing and dancing among Zeliangrong Nagas, prevalence of Technonymy among the Zemi and the existence of Morung as an important institution and feature of the village.

Western Nagas

The Western Nagas include Angamis, Chakhesangs, Semas, Rengmas, Lothas, Maos and Marams. They share the legend of dispersal of the tribes from Kezekenoma stone, practise stone pulling ceremony (except the Semas), bury their dead and cover the paddy seeds after dispersal with earth by using Hoe. Angamis practise extensive terraced cultivation. These Nagas do not practise tattooing. Heads taken during head-hunting were burnt or hung outside the village.

Central Nagas

This category includes Aos, Tangkhuls, Sangtams, Changs, Phoms, Yimchungrus and Khamngans. They practised tattooing, used to make xylophones (large wooden war drums), out of single tree trunk and used to hang the head taken in war in their houses. They do not cover the paddy seed after dispersal and do not practise stone pulling ceremony. These Nagas used to expose their dead on machans; some also smoked the dead body. The Chang also used to bury their dead. The Sangtams buried the dead body below hearth throwing out any bone found during digging. The Tangkhuls used to bury the dead and erected machan over the grave, as the Aos did.

Eastern Nagas

The Eastern Nagas include the Konyaks, Wanchos, etc. They practised exposure of the dead, but used to treat the head separately. Tattooing was extensively practised. They made huge war drum from single tree trunk.

Physical Features/Characteristics

The Nagas tribes differ considerably in their physical features, appearance, general characteristics; dress, ornaments, weapons, cultural and social set up, languages, etc. Such differences are found from place to place and even within a single tribe. In many cases, it is not possible to give any general description of the features of even a single tribe. As Hutton has observed in the case of the Angami Nagas: "it would be impossible to give any general description of the type of Angami features, as it varies from village to village and even from house to house in a remarkable degree. The flattened nose and slightly oblique eyes of a decidedly Mongolian type may be seen side by side with a straightness of eyes and nose that might be purely Aryan."¹⁵ In spite of such wide-ranging differences the contrasting features of different tribes have been observed and reported by many scholars. It may be interesting to describe some of them.

Dr. Brown gave common name 'Kolya' Nagas to a collectivity of Naga tribes consisting of eight clans, namely, Thangal, Mao, Murram, Pural, Threngba, Meithiphum, Myang-Khong, and

Tokpo-Khul (in reality, the first three are known tribes; the identity of the rest is not known). The Kolyas occupy geographically intermediate position. They may be said to resemble the Kaupuis¹⁶ in the south, to blend into the Angamis on the north, to approximate to the Tankhuls to the east, and to gradually become more and more like the Kachcha Nagas on the north and north-west isolated, however, within their respective wild mountain homes the various clans of Kolyas have come to possess peculiarities in dress, social habits, and language which render it no difficult task to assign to each man his proper clan, if not to fix the very village to which he belongs. They have little or no dealings with each other, but on the contrary exist in what one might be almost pardoned for describing as a chronic and hereditary state of feud one with the other.... Their custom differ but slightly from those of the Kaupuis, but in language, dress, and facial peculiarities they are much more nearly related to the Angamis."¹⁷ This shows intra-tribal differences in language, dress, customs, etc. among the Nagas.

The Angami Naga, with considerable physical powers and great power of endurance is ordinarily about five feet nine inches tall. The stature, tall for a hillsman, not infrequently goes upto six feet. The men of Khonoma group are generally made on rather heavier lines and are on a whole taller than the Chakhesangs.¹⁸ The body of the Angami, as Hutton observes, "is lithe and frequently very finely developed, particularly to the calf and chest and shoulders, for which the climbing of hills and hoeing of terraced fields are doubtless responsible."¹⁹ The toes of the Angamis are often widely separate, the big toe branching away from the others. Angami's features are mobile, pleasant and often decidedly handsome, and the voice on the whole musical.²⁰ John Butler in his '*Rough Notes on the Angami Nagas*' has written about their physique and characteristics. He wrote: "The average Angami is a fine, hardy, athletic fellow, brave and war-like, and among themselves, as a rule, most truthful and honest. On the other hand, he is blood-thirsty, treacherous, and revengeful to an almost incredible degree. This, however, can scarcely be wondered at when we recall what I have already related regarding revenge being considered a most holy act, which they have been taught from childhood ever to revere as one of their most sacred duties."²¹

The Ao men, as observed by A.W. Davis, in *Census of India, 1891*, Assam (Vol. 1), both Chongli and Mongsen, are somewhat darker in complexion and inferior in physique to the Angamis. The women, who are comparatively superior in physique to the men, are, after the Angamis, the best looking in the hills.²² The Sema men are short and muscular.²³ Lothas inhabit, comparatively warmer area which has its effect on their physique. The tribe was adjudged to be most quiet and amenable to discipline.²⁴ In a comparison, it is said that 'if the Sema among Naga tribes be likened to the Irishman then the Lotha is the Scot among them.'²⁵ The Rengmas and the Kacharis are found to be similar.²⁶ The Kachcha Nagas compare unfavourably in physique with the Angamis; being less muscular built but well made and active. The tribe is simple and honest in character, with a ready appreciation of honour. They compare favourably with Kacharis and Kukis in appearance, having often well-cut features, and bright, intelligent faces. The flat noses and high cheekbones are not uncommon. They are not a war-like tribe.²⁷ Tangkhuls and Luhupas are a tall race.²⁸ Marings resemble Burmans.²⁹ The physique of the northern tribes is considered to be inferior and black.³⁰

The Chang Nagas, having fine tall but lean physique, are very war-like tribe. Hutton observes: "The tribe is very war-like, being second to none, not excepting the Semas. They are of fine physique, tall but lean."³¹ He further observes, "The Chang has stature, but not the breadth, not the calf, being rather curiously built on very marked lines of his own tall, lean and narrow, though muscular enough."³² They usually have red or light brown skin and wavy hair. The black complexion is looked down with contempt and aversion and white as decidedly displeasing. The Nagas with red skin as attribute are called "matmei" or real men.³³ The observation of Porteus about them is worth quoting:

"I should say, their physique is good for Nagas and superior to that of Aos and Lothas, . . . they seem not to be wanting in pluck as estimated by the Naga standard. . . . I should be inclined to differ from Macabe's opinion. . . . that they have any affinity to the Semas. The connection between them and the Aos seems on the contrary, to be a near one as might be expected from their geographical position. . . . Although absolutely cut off

from all communication with the plains, I should place the Majungs³⁴ decidedly higher in the scale of civilization than the Semas, and hardly below the Aos.³⁵

The Lotha's colour varies from light to medium brown. The inhabitants of the low ranges tends to be darker.³⁶

Dresses and Ornaments

The Nagas differ in their dress and ornaments, pattern of cloths, especially in the patterns of their beautiful shawls. Dr. Butler has written: "I may here note that, like our own Scotch Highlanders, every Naga tribe uses a peculiar pattern of cloth, and thus any individual can at once be easily identified by his tartan."³⁷

Colonel R.G. Woothorpe has divided the Nagas of the Naga Hills and the country to the north of the Angamis into kilted and non-kilted Nagas. The Kabuis and many of the Kolyas used to wear a figleaf-like apron suspended from the waist string, or to don a sort of tightly bound *dhoti* which covered their back as well as the front of the body. The *dhoti* worn by the Mao and Murram Kolyas, however, very much resembled the Angami Naga black kilt, only that the ornamental shells on it never (as formerly was the case amongst the Angamis) denoted a warrior who had captured so many human heads. The Kolyas as a race are, however, far inferior to the Angamis or even to the Kabuis in matters of personal adornment. The Mao and Murram Nagas rarely wore any other garment besides their black kilt, and only occasionally did they possess ornaments or jewelleryes. Their ears were, however, perforated by persons who desired to wear earrings during the winter months, and coloured cotton thread, red and blue, was worked into ear pendants eight inches long.³⁸

The chief article of attire of the Angamis, and one which distinguishes him from most other Nagas, used to be, and still is, during special occasions, a kilt of blue or black cotton cloth of home manufacture, varying from 3 ½ to 4 ½ feet in length, according to the size of the man, and about 18 inches in width, decorated with three, and sometimes, though very rarely, with four, horizontal rows of small white cowrie-shells. This kilt, as stated by John Butler, "passes round the hips and overlaps in front, the edge of the upper flap is ornamented with a narrow fringe, whilst the under-flap having a

string attached to its lower corner is pulled up tightly between the legs, and the string, which generally has a small courie attached to the end of it, is then either allowed to hang loosely a few inches below the waist belt, or is tucked in at the side, and thus the most perfect decency is maintained, forming a pleasing contrast to some of their neighbours 'who walk the tangled jungle in mankind's primeval pride'.³⁹

He further remarks about the Angami dress: "I do not think that any dress that I have ever seen, tends so much to show off to the very best advantage all the points of a really fine man, or so ruthlessly to express all the weak points of a more weedy specimen as this simple courie begirt kilt."⁴⁰ And again he praises that dress eloquently thus: "Finally, as regards the dress of the Angami, I do not think that we can easily find a more picturesque costume anywhere than that of the men, but it requires to be seen to be understood, and I am afraid no amount of description can adequately represent the vivid colours, and general get-up of a well-dressed Angami warrior, flashing about in all his gala war-paint,..."⁴¹

Aos in the earlier days were known as Hattigorias, Dupdorias. The Phom Nagas of Mirinokpo, a colony from Orangkong, were known as Assiringias. R.G. Woodthorpe has described their dress as given below:

"Dress of the three tribes is the same, consisting for the males of a small waist-cloth tied at the back end, being brought round between the legs and drawn up under the waist-belt, falls in front in a broad flap. These cloths are of various colours and patterns, from dark blue with white stripes, to white with variegated patterns of black, or black and crimson. The Dupdorias fix small stripes of brass in clusters down the edges of their flaps, apparently to give them additional weight. The broad dark blue or black flap adorned with cowries is also common among these tribes in full dress. The general decorations ...as being worn by the non-kilted tribes, such as the bearskin corone, cotton wool bindings for the hair, and puffs for the ears, necklaces, etc. There is one common ornament worn suspended on the chest,...it is a long flat strip of wood about 15 inches long, narrow in middle, but

broadening slightly towards the ends, and covered with coloured canework, cowries or white seeds, and adorned with a fringe of long red-hair....The Assiringias wear in war dress, tall conical helmets, adorned with boar's tusks and two straight plumes of hair, one on each side, leaving the apex of the helmet bare. The clothes of these three tribes are many coloured, and seem to be used indiscriminately, according to the taste of the wearer...The women's dress consists of a small petticoat of dark blue, a cloth of the same colour being thrown over the shoulders. They wear large brass rings on each brow, supported by a string passing round the head. Sometimes these rings pass through the upper portion of the ear, but generally they simply hang on the temples. The lobe of the ear supports large thick, oval, or oblong-shaped pieces of a crystal obtained from the plains.⁴²

Colonel Woodthorpe describes tail used by the Rengmas, the nakedness of some tribes and the war dress of some of them. According to him: "The Rengma's are particularly noticeable for the peculiar tail which they alone, I believe, of all the tribes wear. It is of wood, about a foot and half long curved upwards, broad at the base and tapering to the tip. Rows of white seeds are fastened longitudinally on the tail, and from it hang long tufts of black, and scarlet hair. The broad part of the tail is fitted to the small of the back, and is suspended from the shoulders by a broad prettily embroidered belt (white, red and black); a small cloth tied tightly round the waist further secures the tail. The tail is used in fight to signify defiance;..." "This tribe, as also many others, wears, as a waist cloth only, a small flap of cotton cloth pendant from the waist belt. Others wear a double flap, the inner end of which is drawn tightly up between the legs and secured at the back to the waist belt. Some of these flaps are dark blue ornamented with cowries, in stars or stripes, others are white with broad red patches, or white with fine red lines: indeed this small garment varies in size, colour, and ornamentation with every village, certainly with every tribe. Some tribes go perfectly naked; One tribe we found close to the Sehmahs, and it is curious fact that these naked people are not found in a group by themselves, but scattered about among the other tribes; thus we find a village of naked Nagas surrounded by decently clad people, and

pass through several villages before coming again upon the naked folk. It is very seldom indeed that any women are seen in a state of complete nudity, and generally they are decently clad, much as the Angami women already described. Some tribes, as Rengmas, Lhotas, Hatigorias, etc., supplement their waist cloths by an apron about a foot square, profusely ornamented with cowries; other tribes those in the hills adjoining the districts of Sibsagar and Jaipur, wear a long bright blue cloth, very much embroidered with red cotton, and decorated with beads, the inevitable cowries, etc. Very few, however, of the non-kilted tribes quite come up to the Angami in general appearance, when fully equipped in his war paint: no decorations, though frequently more elaborate, seem so clean or handsome."⁴³

The traditional dress of the Lothas is slightly more decent (than Rengma's) and consists, for the men of a small loin-cloth and apron either of light blue or white striped horizontally with thin lines of red, or, for the lower villages, of dark blue striped with broad lines of red. They used to wear a cloth of alternate broad stripes of white and dark blue round the shoulders and reaches to the knee.... The women used to wear a scanty black petticoat and leave the breasts bare. Their ornaments are brass and white metal armlets, beads, and ear ornaments made of small bamboo tubes, into the end of which are inserted small tufts of red hair.⁴⁴ A.W. Davis, in Census of India, (1891, Assam, Vol. I) has described Sema dress thus: "They are practically naked, as the small flap they wear dangling from their waists cannot be said to in any way hide their nakedness. In addition to this flap they wear the large cloth common to all the Naga tribes. The commonest pattern among them is a cloth with alternate broad stripes of white and dark blue. The ornaments of the men are beads. In their ears they often wear enormous quantities of cotton.... Their women wear a very scanty black petticoat, and leave their breasts bare. For ornaments they wear strings of beads round their waists and necks, and on their arms brass bracelets. Above their elbow, large and very heavy armlets made of some white metal are usually worn."⁴⁵

The traditional dress of the Changs, like that of Yimchungru and Sangtam, and the Sema *lapuchoh* is a small *lengta* worked in red dog's hair and with a circle of cowries.⁴⁶ The Chang shawls are very

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handsomely designed. Unmarried boys and girls wear the shawls called *Kaksi nei*. Newly married couple use *silang nei*. Yet another variety of shawl, *tobu nei* has zigzag pattern in alternate red and black on a blue band.⁴⁷ Changs, like Semas and Konyaks, used fibre-cloths earlier and there was a time when even fibre cloth was not available in their society. Hutton has written:

“Fibre-cloth undoubtedly preceded cotton-cloth and among the Changs too there are villages where cotton cloths are not known, while those that have taken to cotton are aschewing fibre. They have a tradition that a few generations ago even fibre-cloths were unknown, and women wearing plantain leaves for the petticoats carried their children in net-bags on their backs, having no other cloths for their children. This tradition, no doubt, indicates the development of cloth from nets. The fibre used by Changs for both nets and fibre-cloth is that of nettle, called by them *seno*.⁴⁸

The Changs use very noticeable belt, which is four to six inches broad band usually completely covered with cowries and sometimes with circles of the same and decorated with red dog's hair.⁴⁹ It needs mention that the dog's hair, the circle made of the cowries, etc. have different symbolic meanings. As Hutton observes: “The red dog's hair, like the red goat's hair on dao-handle and sash, is explained as representing the fire, which they apply to the enemy's village; the cowri circle represents the moon, and the trefoil and quatrefoil groups of three or four cowries each, with which they embroider ‘lengtas’ and belts represents the stars, as raids are undertaken by nights by the light of the moon and the stars”.⁵⁰ It is believed that the broad cowri belts and cane leggings of the Chang are the survival of the rawhide armour used long ago by them and few other tribes.⁵¹

The Changs, like Rengmas, used to wear full dress warrior's apron. The use of the Chang warrior's apron and the brass-disc, which is even now used by ex-head-hunters during ceremonial war dances, was denied to anybody who was not a head-hunter.⁵² The Changs once extensively used close fitting type cane leggings manufactured by the Khamngans.⁵³ Such leggings, still used during ceremonial occasions, were traded to the Aos by them.⁵⁴ The Changs wear the hat made of bear's skin ornamented with pairs of small

boar's tusks. They purchased from the Khamngans, a kind of tall conical hat, of fine red plaited cane with a pattern in yellow orchid stalk worked into it, and traded it to the Aos.⁵⁵ The decorated ceremonial warrior's helmets with hornbill feathers. Chang ornaments, like those of the Phoms, included large, smooth ivory armlet about two inches broad, consisting of section cut from a tusk. Aos, Angamis, Semas and Lothas also use such armlets with slight variation.⁵⁶

The Changs are good wood carvers, cane workers and excellent poker work decorators. They decorate drinking horn pipes, dao slings and other wood work by their poker work. The axe-shaped dao used by the eastern Rengmas,⁵⁷ and the Lothas and themselves a few generations ago,⁵⁸ was made by them. The Lothas called it Tsonak. They manufactured beautiful red hafts of spears and traded the same to the Aos, and through the Aos to the northern Rengmas.⁵⁹

The Tangkhul dress consisted of a simple cloth worn round the waist. They tie it in a knot in front leaving the ends hanging down. Their waist cloths are made of stout cotton woven in red and blue stripes two inches wide and horizontal. In cold weather, they wear a long cloth in red and blue stripes over the body. In the case of the chiefs, as per the custom, a handsome border is added to the same. They have another pattern of the dress also. At a time they have a ring on and even if scantily dressed, they consider themselves to be properly garbed. They use much more elaborate costumes on high days and holidays, which consists of a handsome kilt embroidered with ornaments like sequins and the head dress is the luhup with decorations of toucan feathers and tresses of hair. The women wear petticoats, reaching from the waist to the knee, made of the cotton cloth manufactured in the weaving villages with red and white or black and white, two inches in width. Occasionally the women with some pretence to wealth or position wear petticoats of red with small stripes of white and black.⁶⁰

The ordinary dress of the Mao, Maram and Mayang Khong Nagas consists of a short black cotton kilt about eighteen inches deep and ornamented by three or four rows of white cowries. White trouser buttons also, on latter days, replaced the cowries. The rows of cowries were only allowed in the kilts of the persons killing two persons. The use of 'tail' as a curious ornament reminds us of the tail

used by the Rengmas. The headman and the persons who have erected a stone wear special cloths. The fashion of the enterprising Angamis also spread among them as they received many clothes from them by barter. The dress of the Kabuis used to be scanty. In the Manipur valley and in Cachar they adopted either a kilt or a short *dhoti* put on Bengali fashion. The Quoirengs/Liangmeis wear the short black kilt, which is the dress of their Angami neighbours with whom they had trade relations.⁶¹ Hodson has quoted the interesting account of the dresses of the Marrings given by Dr. Brown.

“Their dress consists, amongst both men and women, of a sheet, white with a striped border, or striped throughout; this is folded across the waist and twisted or tucked in at the side; the men fasten one end behind, *dhoti*-wise; in the women this is allowed to hang down, so as to form a petticoat.”⁶²

Hodson further notes the similarity between kilt and *dhoti*. He writes:

“It is noteworthy that the development of the simplest clothing found among these tribes, the plain waist-cloth with fringed ends, leads to both the kilt and the *dhoti*, for both these garments are fastened below in much the same way and differ only in depth.”⁶³

The upper garment of the Maring men is a sheet of thick cotton, either striped or checked, and sometimes a woollen blanket. The women use a white sheet with striped borders, worn like the Manipuri *farak* (*fanek*) and reaching from over the bust to a little way below the knee as the upper garment. The women also wear a sheet like the men's. They also use Manipuri ‘*furit*’ or jacket during the cold weather.⁶⁴

The traditional upper garment in India was always an unstitched sheet of cloth or shawl. The material used for the same—whether cotton, wool or silk—depended on local availability and the demands of weather. The thickness of the shawl also depended on the weather condition. The design and the pattern varied from place to place and people to people.

The dress also effects the general appearance of the people. In many cases, it becomes difficult to distinguish the persons of different communities if they put on the same dress.⁶⁵

The dresses and ornaments invariably show social distinction in any society. This is true in the case of the Nagas also. The pattern of the shawls differ indicating prowess in war, feasts of merit and performance of social gennas. Among all the Nagas, only the warriors, who have taken a head, have the right to wear the tail feathers of the great hornbill, and those who have not done so are allowed to wear merely some substitute, or else imitation feathers made of paper.⁶⁶

Hair-dressing

Different kinds of hair-dressing is in vogue among the Naga tribes. The Angamis used to let the hair grow naturally in front while tying up a small knot at the back. The hair going to form the knot was separated from the rest by a narrow circle of shaved skin. This was, however, omitted by the Chakhesangs. The Khejas, in certain cases, allowed the back hair to fall untied to the neck. The Aos, Semas, Lothas, Rengmas, Sangtams, Changs and Yimchungrus used to shave the lower hair and allowed the hair at the top of their head to grow long, cutting it off to the same length all round the head. The Kachcha Naga did not seem to do his hair at all. The Konyaks used to grow a long tail at the back. It reached sometimes to the ground, which instead of being plaited, was tied round with a cloth into an elaborate knot. The Tangkhuls used to cut their hair back at the sides, leaving a point in front. It gave a short of cockscomb effect. A dao and some sort of wooden hammer was employed for that primitive method of hair cutting, in which the dao was held under the hair and tapped along the edge with wooden hammer.⁶⁷ The Nagas of Manipur have also their different styles of hair-dressing.⁶⁸ In many tribes young girls were only allowed to grow hair after attaining the age of marriage. The stone-puller is not allowed to shave his hair for 30 days.⁶⁹

Tattooing

Tattooing may be considered as some sort of personal decoration. It is practised by all the northern and eastern Nagas, and not by the western Nagas.⁷⁰ Among the Konyaks, only the Thendu section tattoos their faces. The Thenkoh section do not do so. The men are married after taking a head. The women of the two sections have

different tattoo patterns.⁷¹ Only the women were tattooed among the Aos. They were tattooed on the chin, neck, bosom, arms, and leg. The tattoo pattern for the Chongli and Mongsen women on the legs and arms differed.⁷² Only women were tattooed among Sangtams also.⁷³ Both men and women among the Phoms were tattooed.⁷⁴ Among the Changs the head-takers were tattooed on the chest, the women were tattooed on their forehead and chin.⁷⁵

Weapons

The spear, dao and shield are the traditionally used weapons of most of the Naga tribes. The shields used by the Angamis in war used to be a long strip of rhinoceros, elephant or buffalo hide from 5 to 7 feet high, but generally about 5 or 5 ½ feet. A lighter shield made of bamboo was used for ceremonial purposes.⁷⁶ Among the other tribes the shields are smaller and less decorated than the Angami's, and among the tribes immediately adjoining the Angamis they are made of plaited bamboo, unadorned generally.... The spears and daos among the Rengmas, Semas, etc., are very similar in appearance and size to those of the Angamis, some slight peculiarity in the shape of the spear occasionally indicating the tribe using it. We find among these non-kilted tribes very good bows and cross-bows of bamboo, carrying long iron-headed arrows, which are seldom poisoned.⁷⁷ Lotha's arms are spear, dao and shield⁷⁸ Sema's arms are spear, cross-bow and dao.⁷⁹ The Chakhesang's two handled dao with a somewhat shorter blade, with the same breadth throughout, had indented end. The Angamis, unlike the Semas, Aos and Changs, have neither their daos decorated with red hair, nor the wooden sling used by them is ornamented to any appreciable extent. The Lotha, Sema and Ao slings almost always have a pattern cut into them. The double bladed dao used by the Chakhesang Nagas, a most uncommon one, was perhaps imported from the Tangkhuls.⁸⁰ Daos used by the Changs has a very long blade and long handles and is drawn over the right shoulder.⁸¹ The Changs were expert in the use of cross-bow. The tribes of Tuensang, like the Changs and Khamngans used to apply poison in the cross-bows.⁸²

Naga Village

The attitude of the Nagas towards their villages differ considerably. Some tribes have deep attachment for their village sites and rarely

change it, while some of them change it easily. Zemi Nagas, even if they rarely change their village site due to very pressing reason, hardly move a mile away from the old site. This leads one to conjecture that they are descendants of the earlier settlers of the region.⁸³

We have very big Ao and Angami villages, whereas the Sema villages are usually small. The Sema villages, like other Naga villages, are situated on the tops of ridges or hills. They are practically without artificial defences of any kind. Semas, like most other Naga tribes, except in the case of a few villages, which have copied the Angami custom, keep their grain in small granaries clear of the houses of the village. It is, therefore, safe in the case of fire.⁸⁴

Whereas most of the Naga villages are situated on the hill tops or spurs, the Tangkhul and Kabui villages are also located on the slopes of the hills. The Tangkhul villages are big and small.⁸⁵ Some non-Naga tribes, such as Sauria Pahariyas of Chhota Nagpur also prefer hill-tops for their village sites.⁸⁶

The Naga villages are usually divided into *khels* or sections. Earlier, only one clan lived in a particular *khel*. In many cases even *khels* were well-protected and fortified, as was the case of the Chang Naga villages.⁸⁷ The Angami and Ao Nagas had very big villages. Of course, some of their villages were also small. The Naga villages were well-protected also. The following description of the Angami villages makes the picture clear:

“The Angami villages are invariably built on the very summits of the hills, and vary much in size, some containing as many as a thousand houses, while others consist of no more than twenty. The villages are all strongly fortified with stockades, deep ditches, and massive stone walls, and the hill-sides thickly studded with *panjis*, a *chevaux de fries* of sharp pointed bamboo sticks planted in the ground. In some cases, also, the sloping side of the hill is cut away so as to form a perpendicular wall. The approaches to the villages are tortuous, narrow, covered ways, only wide enough to admit the passage of one man at a time; these lead to gates closed by strong, heavy wooden doors, with look-outs on which a sentry is posted day and night when the clans are at feud. Very often these

approaches are steeply scarped, and only means of entry in the village is by means of a ladder consisting of a single pole, some fifteen or twenty feet high, cut into steps."⁸⁸

A peculiarity in all the villages of the non-kilted Naga tribes, which again distinguishes them from the Angami, is the presence in their villages of a conspicuous building called Bachelor's House or morung. It is also found among the Garos and many other tribes. In larger villages we find two or three of these houses in each village. In these live all the young men of the village, from the age of puberty till such time as they marry and set up a house for themselves. Among the Rengmas, Lothas, etc., the bachelor's house is not a very imposing-looking building, being only rather longer than the other houses in the village, all of which are small and poor as compared with those of most other tribes.⁸⁹

The founding of a Naga village preceded selection of the site and certain rituals. The availability of ample fertile agricultural land and water sources and defence aspect were taken into consideration. The founder, and latter on his descendants, used to be the chief. The first step towards the establishment of a village was to build a morung. All the villagers participated in the construction of the same. The construction of the houses of the priest and the founder followed. It was not possible to settle a village with only one or two clans. An easily defensible place and a tree suitable to be the head-tree was necessary for selecting a site for founding the village by the Rengmas.⁹⁰ The water used to be stolen from the parent village by them.⁹¹ The founder and the first settlers usually got better and more land. Latter ones got less and inferior land.⁹² The post of the Lotha chief (*ekyung*) was hereditary in the family of the founder of the village.⁹³ In the case of the Angamis, it was the post of the priest (*kemovo*). Availability of water and a suitable head-tree was necessary for selection of site by the Lothas.⁹⁴ The Lotha settlers steal a branch of the head-tree (*mingetung*),⁹⁵ water from the village spring⁹⁶ and if possible the luck-stone from the parent village.⁹⁷ They select a priest (*puthi*).⁹⁸ The founder makes fire from the fire-stick.⁹⁹

The villages were, usually, settled on long narrow spurs having a narrow street in between. Many bigger villages in the Angami area, such as Kohima, did not follow such pattern. Tuensang, more than

hundred years ago, called Mojung-Jami at that time, was a long narrow village covering about one and a half miles. It looked like a single street with rows of houses on either side.¹⁰⁰

Housing

Mostly, the traditional Naga houses are either of machan type or those constructed on level ground. A common practice, though, not adopted by the Angami, is that of raising the house above the ground on poles or piles of bamboo. The house is divided generally into a front room, the floor of which is the ground itself, and here is the fireplace. Then we come to a house occupying the rest of the house, the floor of which is raised, and beyond the house is a small raised platform, a continuation of the floor, on which many of the household duties are performed, and where vegetables are dried, etc. The walls and floor of the house are of bamboo matting, with thatched roofs. Not only the northern tribes, but even some Zeliangrong houses are machan or platform structures. The Angamis, Semas, Rengmas, Tangkhuls and the tribes south of them build their houses on ground. The Aos and the northern tribes build their houses on bamboo platform or 'machan'. The Lotha's method is a sort of compromise. He covers the floor of the machan with earth.¹⁰¹

In comparison to the Angami houses, the houses of the Lotha and Rengma Nagas are not nearly so large, well-built and substantial, the material is also not so good, and bamboo is used more freely instead of wood. The houses of the Lothas are distinguished from all others by their peculiarly-shaped roof. On the ridge of the usual thatched roof, and raised from it, is another small thatched roof or ridge, which projects some feet over each gable end, which looks like a provision for the escape of smoke and for ventilation; but it is unlikely that such a thing was ever thought of this tribe.¹⁰² The Sema and Angami houses are not arranged in regular streets within the village site, but each individual appears to put his own house where he finds it most convenient to do so, due regard being had to the fact that the houses must for purposes of defence be not too widely scattered. The houses of Sema chiefs are distinguished by their extra size.¹⁰³

The typical Kachcha Naga house differs from that of any other tribe. The front of their house bears the appearance of a high arch

pointed at the top. The doorway is in the centre. The roof slopes down and back from the apex of the arch, which is sometimes as high as 20 feet, until it touches, or nearly touches, the ground. In the same manner the thatch on either side is brought down with a steep slope either actually on to the ground or, as is more commonly the case, to a foot or a foot and a half. The spaces on the sides and in front are planked in. As in most cases, there are two rooms inside the house, a sitting and eating, and a cooking and store-room.¹⁰⁴

The traditional Naga houses had no latrines and people had to go to nearby forests to answer the call of nature. In case of the children, very old or sick persons or untimely motion any convenient place was chosen near the house and the same was cleaned by the pigs immediately.

The Nagas used locally available material for the construction of their houses. Mostly, thatch was used for roofing. Slate was used in the Khamngan and Pochury areas and thatch or shingle by the Tangkhuls for roofing. Nails were rarely used as cane and creepers were readily available for the purpose. The house was abandoned when struck by the lightning or in case of 'apotia' death.

Several rituals and ceremonies accompanied house construction. Apart from the site selection ceremony, rituals were performed practically at every stage of the house construction.¹⁰⁵

The Nagas Society, like many others in the country, rewarded head-hunters, givers of feasts and stone pullers¹⁰⁶ giving them certain privileges. One was able to recognise them by seeing their dresses, ornaments and houses.

The attitude of the people also differed from tribe to tribe. As for example, the attitude of the Konyaks, Lothas and the Aos towards their ageing parents differed considerably.¹⁰⁷ The standard of morals also varied considerably.¹⁰⁸

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