

Naga Nationalism: where is it headed?

Part – I

Nations are created by nationalism (Ernest Gellner, *Nation & Nationalism*). Eric Hobsbawm called nationalism as invented tradition. Nationalism genie unleashed some 200 years back had been stalking diverse Land and people since then without anyone able to control it. Hitherto societies had fuzzy identities as Benedict Anderson would peruse in his 'Imagine communities'. Modern man does not simply exist; he exists as French or German and he can exist with dignity only under a French or German political roof. Since the British departure, Naga nationalism gained momentum and even got strengthened by adversity with all its wears and tears, outlived 13 Prime Ministers of India. Where have it landed today and where it is apparently headed is worth reckoning. Seemingly, the robust support it once commands among the masses is severely under strain especially among the new generation who makes 40% of the population after all the madness post 1975 where the nature of conflict changed to fighting within. What sustained the Naga nationalism and what is really hampering the same is also worth noting. One reason for its sustenance is that it draws its life and legitimacy through the mandate given to NNC since its inception in 1946, the declaration of Independence on 14th Aug. 1947 and the Plebiscite of 16th May 1951. New Delhi couldn't do much to undo this historical events and the statehood which was intended to placated the same only complicated things further and became a mere pawn in the hands of different forces at play.

Nagas have paid a heavy price on the altar of nationalism in terms of men, money, etc. Since 1954 till 1964 around one lakh Nagas had perished due to starvation, disease, killing, etc as direct consequences of war which stunted the population growth. By May 1992, India had stationed about 15% of its 1.2 million troops in Nagaland (Associated Press, 05/12/1992). But why still it failed to subdue the Nagas quest for nationhood and infact created more resentment due to military highhandedness towards the civilians, the answer is simple; it is not a military problem but political.

Govt. of India (GOI) did also devise a diabolical way of dealing with such unrest as can be surmised from Sanjoy Hazarika's *Stranger of the Mist*. It would employ three options; 1) military solution 2) Money solution & 3) Divide & rule. In the first option it would send thousands and lakhs of soldiers to suppressed unrest through force. But if this option fails, it would employ the second, i.e., money power. Carrot and stick policy would be used here so as to let them like the carrot (money) or face the military stick.

The intention is to soften the resolve of the nationalists by flooding them with money that they are so used to luxury that they become too lazy to go back to jungle. Those who sing the India tune loudest are crowned kings and placed in high places to be a symbol of envy to those who don't fiddle. But if this option failed again, it would employ the third with the combination of former two. Utilizing massive intelligent machinery, money and military, it would try to create fissions wherever possible, divide them into pieces that they are too busy fighting among themselves and never stand a chance to fight the state anymore. Nagaland and NE are infact a virtual colony of India that exist for the enrichment of New Delhi and to let the strategic location serve as first line of defence in the event of foreign aggression. The region is 35% to 50% behind mainland India (*stranger of the mist*. p.xvi). The real India starts from Bengal and it has devised a shrewd mechanism of control where in principal proclaiming all the lofty ideals of democracy like freedom, equality, etc, but everything is a sham in reality design only to serve the centre's interest and the racially different north easterners treated as second class citizens.

The NNC pioneers and men like AZ Phizo had long ago grasped the fate that awaits Nagas and did try really hard to free the Nagas from this kind of neo-colonialism. Infact Phizo was farsighted enough and was ahead of his peers in the whole of NE when he personally went to meet the Khasis, Mizos, Assamese, Meities, etc, who spurned his idea of independent states for themselves on the eve of British departure but soon realised the tragedy after experiencing new India and the whole region plunged into insurgency to free themselves from Indian yoke, but it was too late to do anything. This is why Naga nationalism can't be

equated with insurgencies of NE.

Today the changing trend of Naga Nationalism is quite palpable. Factionalism had deeply gnawed into the marrows of the populace and the people rise against multiple and exorbitant taxes are sign of people frustration and angriness manifesting itself in the form of protest (for instance the ACAUT). This is something the factions should never have created in the first place to let the people rise against them. Under the present format, Naga groups will last only half its life and is presumably deck for damn. It has reached a climax of morbid flux where it is 'not possible to neither move forward nor retract to a safe zone' as in the words of SC Jamir. It is not Indian military that broke the back of Naga nationalism but factionalism that is breaking its morale.

But why factionalism has come about. Whom do they represent? What is their mandate? These are poignant questions to be answered by the factions. It is short sightedness that divided them and it is their ego that kept them there, led by people far more fascinated by game of manoeuvre and power politics lacking far-sightedness. Till 1979, there was only one mass based Naga group but after 34 years at the end of 2013 there are seven factions claiming govt. of its own raising taxes to the hapless populace (average of 1 faction in every 5 years). The last two factions came up within two years. At this rate soon every tribe or region will have its own factions.

The most pertinent question is when did Nagas give new mandate to form new factions? Taxes cannot be raised without a govt., govt. cannot be formed without a mandate and mandate cannot be formed by deception. It is an historical fact that only one mandate was given in all course of Naga history and that was given to NNC, and until and unless new mandate is given, NNC alone holds legitimacy. To speak other way round apart from this fact would be intellectual cowardice because this is simply the only fact. Mandates are hard to create and even harder to destroy. Any group formed as a deviant from the NNC is a group devoid of the mandate, therefore, does not bear legitimacy until it seek new mandate. It is not a matter of which faction one likes to support; it is a matter of mandate and legitimacy.

To endorse the factions outside the mandate means to endorse scores of factions that are likely to arise very soon looking at the madness of the situation and pay all taxes. Just because some people wield the capability to command fear doesn't mean it possess mandate in anyway. The creations of new factions and the ramifications that followed suit have cost us deeply and injured our placidity. The damage caused is irreversible; however, the time is always right to do the right thing. True reconciliation and unification will surface only by coalescing within the platform of the mandate and anything outside this may not last.

To be continued

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