

## Historical fact of the Naga Political Issue

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### 1. NAGAS WERE POLITICALLY ALIVE:

The Naga National question was not born on the eve of Indian Independence in 1947. As the first chapter on Sovereignty and Independence of the Nagas show, the Naga sense of nationhood and solidarity was a fact that had existed ever since the Nagas have been in existence in recorded history as far back as the 12th century. When the Ahom Kings from Thailand crossed the Naga territories in the 12th century, they encountered fierce attacks from the Nagas. The same spirit of solidarity was shown when the British at the turn of the 18th century entered their territory. As also pointed out in the introductory chapter on the Anglo-Indian war and the Anglo-Naga war the Naga defence of their ancestral lands against the British invasion in 1832 preceded the Indian Independence uprising of 1857 by at least 25 years.

While it has never been suggested that in Ancient times or before the British rule, the Naga Hills were ever an integral part of India, it has been suggested that there were periods in between revolt, when Naga Chiefs owed allegiance or perhaps paid Tribute to the Ahom Kings of Assam before British conquest, Assam itself then, not being part of India. - Major-General Sir James Johnstone, K.C.S.I

### My experience in Manipur and Naga Hills 1896

There was no established United Government of Nagaland or a Naga kingdom as such prior to the departure of the British from the Indian subcontinent. But the same case is also true to India, which prior to 1947 was mainly a subcontinent of 500 Princely states.

It would also be very wrong to project the Naga political consciousness as something that originated with Phizo and a few 'gangster' as some Indian writers have referred to the Naga freedom fighters. Even as clearly as 1929 when the Simon Commission visited Kohima, the Naga Club had clearly stated that Nagas would not join the Indian Union because they were not Indians. That Phizo played a significant role in shaping the political destiny of the Nagas and that he was largely responsible for giving shape and form to that destiny is an undeniable fact. That, however, does not mean that prior to Phizo there was no form or consciousness of that national destiny. It must also be remembered many others who helped shape that destiny with equal zeal and commitment. In fact, what some Naga political leaders have often asserted that there were many Phizo's among the Nagas is true.

The story of the Naga National Council and the Nagas Nationalist movement for recognition of their inalienable rights to sovereignty and independence therefore began from 1929 in written form though it has its roots as A.D 150 with the Nagas inhabiting their homeland from that period on. To make this fact very clear I quote from the memorandum that was submitted by the Naga club to the Simon Commission in 1929.

"If the British Government, however, wants to throw us away, we pray that we should not be thrust to the mercy of the (Indian) people who could never have conquered us themselves, and to whom we are never subjected but leave us alone to determine for ourselves as in ancient times!".

### 2. FORMATION OF THE NAGA NATIONAL COUNCIL

The Naga National Council has its roots in the Naga Club of 1929, which submitted a memorandum to the Simon Commission in 1929. The second stage of its development can be seen in the Naga Hills District Tribal Council established in April, 1945 by C.R. Pawsey, the then Deputy Commissioner of the Naga Hills.

One finds many parallels in the formation of the NNC and the Indian National Congress. A British administrator A.O. Hume founded the Indian National Congress in 1885. Hume's concern in forming this Indian political body was to give them political and administrative training in self-governance. Similarly, C.R Pawsey, the Deputy Commissioner of the Naga Hills played a pivotal role in the formation of the Naga National Council. Mr Pawsey's concern for the disunited Nagas led him to form the first political body called Naga Hills District Tribal Council. His aim in forming body was to unite the Nagas and also for repairing some of the damage done to the Naga villages and Naga economy by the devastations of World War II. Like the Indian National Congress, the political objectives of the NNC also were not very clear in its formative stages. However, while the Indian National Congress took many years to form itself into a political platform for voicing its national rights, the Naga Hills District Tribal Council (NHDTTC) within

a year transformed itself into a Naga political institution. The NHDTTC was thus formed in April 1945. The following year, on 2nd February 1946, the NHDTTC met at Wokha and changed its name to the Naga National Council (NNC).

Naga Leaders like Phizo, Aliba Imti, T.Sakhrie and many others were thus proving to be very fast learners in chalking out the Naga Political rights as well as charting the destiny of the Naga Nation.

The NNC was formed with the aim of uniting all the Naga tribes under one political umbrella. It was first formed with 29 members representing the various tribes on proportional representation of one member for every 10,000 people. As to its membership, every Naga born of Naga blood was by virtue of birthright a member of the NNC. From its very formative years it was a Naga people's political institution supported and financed by the villages. Contributions for its maintenance came in the form of membership fee of Rupees 2/- and even pumpkins, paddy, cows and mithuns. The NNC was closely knitted together through the Central Council, Tribal Councils, Regional Councils and Village Councils. From its very inception the policy of the NNC was to establish a sovereign independent Naga country and to develop it according to the indigenous Naga democratic customs and culture.

However, as is true of any organization there were people in the NNC who were more moderate and shortsighted in their political vision for the future of the Nagas. In fact, a careful analysis will reveal that there were three categories of people within the NNC at this stage:

1. Those that were for total sovereignty from the beginning and never compromised their stand to date.
  2. Those that wavered at the beginning but were eventually won over to the majority body and became faithful to date.
  3. Those that wavered from the beginning and eventually went for full cooperation with the Indian Government.
- Of these three categories of members in the NNC, the first formed 99.99% of the Naga population, which was clearly shown through the plebiscite of 1951.

Another group of a few individuals belonged to the first group at the initial stage but when the war broke out and they realized that they had to pay a price, they made a complete turnaround and joined the last.

### 3. POLITICAL STRUGGLE WITH BRITISH INDIA

What the Indian Government later did was to ensnare the third group of the NNC with military protection, economic prosperity and political power. As already outlined in the first chapter, along with this small minority, the Indian Government even succeeded in superimposing an Indian state of Nagaland against the wishes of the 99.99% who refused to be a part of India. For the past 52 years, India has been trying to portray this minority as the true representatives of the Naga Nation.

At various stages of the struggle for Independence, this group of the NNC also created a lot of confusion in Delhi by sending contradictory memorandums and letters to the political leaders of India. Later on, many Indian politicians and writers used these documents to substantiate their claim that Nagas themselves had asked to be part of India.

When the British Cabinet Mission came to India, the NNC sent a delegation to Delhi and gave them a memorandum. The Cabinet Mission was sent to study the political situation in the Indian sub-continent in the light of the impending transfer of power that was to take place soon. In the memorandum the NNC declared that the future of the Nagas would not be bound by any arbitrary decision of the departing British Government if such decisions were taken without the prior information and approval of the Naga people. The memorandum was submitted to them on 9th April 1946.

Following this memorandum to the Cabinet Mission, the NNC also published a book where the Naga desire for full independence was clearly outlined. Orient Press of India published this book on 23rd December 1946. In a subsequent interview with a correspondent of the Azad, Messrs, A. Z. Phizo and T. Sakhrie clearly told the Indian Press that the Naga stand was for complete independence from India. This event was later discussed in the Indian Legislative Assembly where Nehru replied in the affirmative but later brushed the issue aside saying that the statement had no particular importance nor was supported by a substantial opinion.

Following these declarations another memorandum was submitted to the departing British Government and the incoming Indian Government on 27th March 1947. The memorandum was entitled Memorandum of the case of the Naga people for self-determination and an appeal to the H.M.G and the government of India.

This memorandum after outlining the historical, political and cultural background of the Nagas requested the two Governments for granting an interim Government for the Nagas for ten years after which the Nagas would be free to decide their own political future. The purpose of the memorandum was stated thus:

The memorandum seeks to present the case of the Naga people for self-determination for the realization of which an appeal is made to HMG and the Government of India to set up for the Naga people an interim Government for a period of ten years, at the end of which the Naga people will be led to choose any form of Government under which they will live.

Copies of this memorandum along with personal letters were also sent to Clement Attlee, the Prime Minister of England, Lord Simon, Member, House of Lords and Winston Churchill. A part of the letter to the House of the Lords read:

No argument is needed to show that the Nagas are a separate people with their own customs, traditions and culture; and to say that British Government has decided to hand over to the Indian hands complete authority for governing of even Nagaland, in complete inconsistency with the policy of administration hitherto followed in the hills and in violation of implied but clear pledges on the past years, without even asking the opinion of the Nagas is not only unjust but immoral.

When no favorable response was forthcoming from the British Government, A. Z. Phizo led another delegation of the NNC to meet Lord Mountbatten, the then Governor General of India with a suggestion that the new Indian Government should act as the Guardian power for ten years after which the Nagas would be free to determine their own political future. Part of the suggestion submitted to Lord Mountbatten read thus:

1. The interim Government of the Naga people will be a government by the Naga people over all the people of Nagaland, having full powers in respect of legislation, executive and judiciary.
2. Nagaland belongs to the Naga people and will be inalienable.
3. The interim Government of the Naga people will have full powers in the matter of raising revenue and expenditure, an annual subvention to cover the deficit being given by the guardian power.
4. For defence and for aiding the civil power in case of an emergency, a force considered necessary by the NNC will be maintained in Nagaland by the guardian power. That force will be responsible to the NNC who will in turn be responsible to the Guardian power.

To this second proposal too, the British Government did not take any serious notice. The NNC was advised to refer their proposals to the Advisory Committee on the Aboriginal tribes that would visit Kohima on 29th May 1947.

One possible reason for this apathy to the pleas of the Nagas might be because of the NNC's refusal to accept the coupled plan of setting up a North-Eastern Agency on the pattern of a Coupled colony comprising of all people of the North-Eastern region who were neither Burmese nor Indian. This plan, if it materialized could have become a Crown colony, with people more devoted to the British than their own citizens. It would have compromised most of eastern people like the Nagas, Karens, Chins, Mons, etc. and perhaps even people like Mizos, Khasis and perhaps even the Assamese people. The petroleum, tin, jade, lead, gold, etc.

This scheme, however, could not materialize without the consent of the Naga leaders and hence most of the time of the NNC leaders were taken up by the discussion on this plan.

The NNC leaders refused this offer on the grounds that the Nagas had no right to obstruct the Eastern people from becoming free of the British yoke. They were also for sovereignty and independence rather than continuance for another 50 years or even a hundred years under British dominion.

Many of the British administrators in the Naga Hills were angry with the Naga leaders for refusing this scheme and started acting very adversely towards the Naga demand for sovereignty. Thus while Pakistan, Nepal, Burma and Sri Lanka besides India were all given their independence on the eve of the transfer of power, the British continued to ignore the wishes of the Nagas in spite of the two memorandums submitted to them.

Meanwhile during the partition of India and Pakistan, an option was in principle, given to the adjoining border people to join either Pakistan or India. The Nagas however could not join either of them because they were neither Muslim Pakistanis nor Hindu Indians.

In 1946, the Indian Constituent Assembly constituted a sub-committee for the North-East region with the following persons as its members: Gopinath Bordoloi (Chairman), N.V. Thakar, B.N. Rao, Ramdayani (Secretary), Rev. Nichols Roy, T. Aliba Imti and two co-opted members, Pu Khawtinkhuma and Pu Saprawnga. When this sub-committee met in Shillong over the issue of joining India, while all the other members, on behalf of their people, signed to join the Indian Union, T. Aliba Imti who was then the President of NNC refused to sign and walked away. He said,  
 We the Nagas cannot sign our names to be under India  
 We do not agree with it and we resign.

He also told the Committee: I cannot return to my people as a traitor.  
 The constituent Assembly sub-committee again visited Kohima in May 1947 but the NNC still refused to join the Indian Union and stated that it was willing to co-operate with India only under the 10 year interim period with the freedom to secede after ten years; the NNC maintained that they had their own constitution and that they would not subscribe or surrender to the constitution of any other country.

An attempt was made to resolve this deadlock with the coming of Sir Akbar Hydari, the Governor of Assam to Kohima on June 27, 1949. During his three day stay at Kohima a nine-point agreement was signed between the NNC and the Government of India.

The Preamble to the agreement read:

“The right of the Nagas to develop themselves according to their freely expressed wishes is recognized”. Due recognition and power was also given to the NNC with regard to Judicial, executive and legislative powers. The agreement ended with the 9th clause that read:

Period agreement:

The Governor of Assam as the agent of the government of Indian Union will have a secular responsibility for a period of ten years to ensure the due observance of this agreement; at the end of this period the Naga National Council will be asked whether they require the above agreement to be extended for a further period, or a new agreement regarding the future of the Naga people arrived at.

On the basis of this ninth point, most of the NNC members felt that their right to become independent after the 10 years was safeguarded. There were, however many in the meeting who felt that the agreement had been rushed through without proper consultation with the masses of the Naga people. This group pleaded for more time to be given so that a thorough discussion could be held before agreeing to sign it. However, under pressure from the administration the decision was put to vote and was won by a marginal majority, A. Z. Phizo, writing about his event in his letter to Rajagopalachari, the first Governor General of India write thus:

At that time fourth fifth of the members of the NNC were Government servants. It was in June 1947 under duress of official high pressure that NNC was divided. Sir Pawsey, the last British D.C was there then. As most of the NNC members were government servants, it was made to be considered as accepted. During the division of the agreement Sir Akbar Hydari threatened the Nagas with a military power in the presence of Sir Pawsey and others. Within three days the Naga public rejected Sir Akbar Hydari's agreement. His threat was considered as a challenge and it enraged the people. On his return from Imphal, Manipur State, the people in writing informed him. (This letter was written by Phizo from the Presidency Jail, Calcutta on 22nd November 1948 where he was prisoner arrested six months ago on Sir Akbar Hydari's orders.)

A lot of controversy arose over the 9th clause with Nagas claiming that their right to secede after 10 years and form their own government was guaranteed while the Indian government insisted that no such provision was granted under the clause. Some of the NNC members would pursue this agreement for a long time until the Indian government finally discarded it in 1951.

Markot Ramuny in his book, *The World Nagas* wrote:

At this stage (1951) the Government of India decided that nothing would be done in future which might in any way be regarded as official recognition of the nine-point agreement in question. This was four years after the Governor has signed the agreement. The Nagas had been let down and the credibility of the Government went down almost beyond redemption for many years.

Abandoned by the British Government on the one hand and having failed to elicit any response from the Indian Government for their political rights, the Nagas next turned to Gandhi, the father of the Indian nation with their plea.

#### 4. NAGAS MEET MAHATMA GANDHI

A delegation of 9 NNC members including A. Z. Phizo and T. Sakhrie met Gandhi's secretary and insisted and they stated the reason why they wanted to meet Gandhi, T. Sakhrie, the General Secretary of the NNC quickly scribbled the following points as the reasons why they wanted to meet Gandhi.

1. The Nagas are from a country in the Northeast frontier of India, which lies between two huge countries namely, India and China.
2. The Nagas were independent before the British advent.
3. They were first attacked in 1849. They bravely fought the British for 30 years for their independence. The last battle was fought in 1879 and the Nagas were conquered.
4. The Nagas (British Subjects) demanded for independence in 1929 when the Simon Commission visited Kohima, headquarters of the Naga Hills.
5. The Naga Hills has been totally "excluded area" since the 1935 Act came into force.
6. Again in 1946 the Nagas demanded for complete independence when the British decided to withdraw from India. An interim arrangement on the lines of district autonomy has been offered to the Nagas by the authorities and the Nagas have rejected it.
7. The Nagas fought for independence when the British threatened to take away their independence back in the 19th century.
8. Again the Nagas resisted Japanese Invasion with all their might in 1944, for their independence. There are some historically important dates here. The first battle with the British was in 1832 and even as late as 1935 some Nagas were still fighting the British.
9. This demand of the Nagas for independence is not the opinion of a dean or ruler. (The Nagas have no ruler and the British are going). It is the will of the people.
10. The Nagas will declare independence on 14th August 1947 and sent cable to UNO.

Points of discussion:

1. The Nagas are determined to have complete independence. They will not join the Indian Union. They will die before losing their independence.
2. Will the Government of India use force to bring the Nagas under the Indian Union? Does anyone under the sun have the right to take away their independence? Is might still right?

Mahatma Gandhi gave the NNC delegation a lengthy interview. The discussion ranged from the Naga rights to brotherhood of mankind and even conquered economic self-reliance etc. However, the most important point of discussion was Gandhiji's assurance that the Nagas have every right to be independent if they did not want to join the Indian Union.

When the Naga delegates pointed out that Assam Governor, Sir Akbar Hydari was threatening to use force against the Nagas in case they refused to join the Indian Union, Gandhi exclaimed: "Sir Akbar is wrong. He cannot do that... I will come to the Naga Hills; I will ask them to shoot me first before one Naga is shot at". (Had Gandhi not been assassinated shortly after, Nagas are convinced he would have done just that).

Gandhi went so far as to say, "Why wait until 14th August? Why not even declare your independence tomorrow?" The Naga delegation came back assured by Gandhi's assurance and declared their independence on 14th August 1947, one day prior to India's own declaration of her independence. The sequence of events shows that the Nagas had done everything possible and required of them declaring their independence.

The message of this declaration was sent to the King of England, the Government of India, and the Secretary General of the United Nations Organization. The telegraphic message to the United Nations read:

To,  
Secretary General  
United Nations

Benign Excellency,

Kindly put on record that Nagas will be independent. Discussions with India are being carried on to that effect. Nagas do not accept Indian Constitution.

The right of the people must prevail regardless of size.

Nine members of the NNC signed this message and an acknowledgement was received from the U.N. from Lake Success. The next day, on 15th August 1947 when India's flag was hoisted by the then Deputy Commissioner Mr. Pawsey at Kohima, there was not a single Naga present on the occasion. Other attempts by the Indian officer to hoist the India flag in Naga territory was resisted by the Nagas. Nagas pulled down all these flags. This was done on the ground that Indians would not be allowed to hoist their National flag on Naga territory.

Following this great event, the situation in Nagaland calmed down as the attention of the newly formed Indian Government and the departing British Government was fully occupied by the carnage the partition nightmare. Having stated their case to the British, India and the world and having declared their independence on 14th August 1947, the NNC was now busy trying to set up their own Government in Nagaland.

While ardently for sovereignty and independence, knowing their limitation they had asked for an interim government both from the British as well as the Indian Government through which they could train themselves for self-governance. Now that both had turned down their pleas for assistance and co-operation, they were planning to stand on their own feet and run their own government. As a first step in defiance of the Indian administration in Kohima, they set up their own court at the Naga Club, Kohima and started functioning. Earlier, in September 1947, a committee had been set up by the NNC to draft the constitution which was adopted at Wokha on the 25th October 1947. Heads of Provincial Government were also appointed in this meeting.

The NNC had also set up two central Councils, one in Kohima and the other at Mokokchung, A. Z. Phizo though still not yet- the President of NNC had been its spokesman in most of these events that had led to the declaration of Naga Independence on 14th August. He had already travelled widely into Assam, (Lushai Hills now Mizoram), and Manipur etc. in an attempt to persuade these people not to join the Indian Union but instead form independent countries of their own. His efforts failed and all other princely as well as tribal people of the North-East Indian regions which had not been a part of India in history all joined the Indian Union volitionally.

His efforts in all these ventures had however depleted all his financial resources and his family was almost starving. He therefore decided to travel to Calcutta, both to see off his nephew, Viichazelhu Iralu, who was headed for America for further studies, as well as to conduct some business to provide for his family.

While on his trip, on July 19, 1948, Phizo was arrested at Calcutta and detained for five months under the Bengal Security Act. Though his family had to suffer due to his imprisonment this was perhaps a God given opportunity for him to sit down and reflect on the future course of the Naga political destiny. While being detained in the Presidency Jail in Calcutta he wrote his famous, "A letter from jail". The letter was addressed to C. Rajagopalachari, the first Governor General of India. In this letter, he presented the Naga case with great clarity. His qualities as a statement and politician are vividly reflected in this letter. He so convinced Rajagopalachari with the case of the Nagas that the first Governor General of India openly declared that Nagas had every right to be Independent.

Phizo was released on 18th December, 1948. He was released on compassionate grounds when his wife and son met with a vehicle accident where his wife was seriously injured and his son died. Within a year of his released, the NNC declared on 30th December 1949 that a sovereign state of Nagaland would soon be inaugurated. Again on 18th February, 1950 another NNC resolution was sent to the Governor of Assam, which read as follows:

1. No Naga should join the Assam Legislative Assembly or Indian Parliament representing the Nagas.
2. It was resolved that the Nagas will not accept anything that is autonomous in character.
3. The aspiration and inspiration of the Nagas to fight for freedom is through peace and good will, not through bloodshed. The Nagas are strongly determined to fight constitutionally for the liberation of their motherland- Nagaland.

In spite of all these declarations, resolutions and memorandums submitted to the Indian Authorities, the Indian Government and the Assam Government continued to turn a deaf ear to all that was shouted at them. The official attitude was one of considering the Nagas as a race of wild savages who would never be able to unite for anything. It was true that they were disunited villages and tribes prior to the coming of the British Raj. But 65 years British rule had sufficiently taught them that it was better to live in peace with one another than to be in a state of constant warfare. The same period had also taught that without unity there could be no progress economically and politically. Also the Nagas labour force that had gone to Europe in the First World War had brought back many insights and had shared them with their respective tribesmen. The Naga experience of the World War II had further widened their political horizons.

Yet the Indian Government continued to treat the Nagas as savage tribesmen needing to be governed by more intelligent beings.

In the early part of December 1950, Bishnu Ram Medhi, the Chief Minister of Assam visited the interior of Nagaland. Everywhere he went whether in the Ao region, Sema region, Lotha region or the Angami region, he was confronted by the Naga villagers who told him in no uncertain terms that Nagas were a sovereign independent Nagaland, independent of Assam and the whole of India. One does not know whether Medhi passed this information to Nehru, the Prime Minister of India or not, but the official attitude from the Indian Government continued to be where the impression was given that only Phizo and a few educated Nagas were agitating for an independent Nagaland. Whether the leaders of India knowingly or unknowingly held such an official attitude, their arrogance cost at least half a century of war with the Nagas.

Against the malicious propaganda by the Indian Government the NNC in desperation finally decided to hold a plebiscite to once and for all show India and the world the desire of all the Nagas.

In order to maintain complete fairness and openness in the execution of the plebiscite, prior information was given to the President of India to delegate and to observe the proceedings of the plebiscite from the beginning to the end. The plebiscite was held all over Nagaland. The inaugural function was held in Kohima on 16th May 1951 and about 6,000 people attended this inaugural function. All Naga adult male and female above the age of fifteen were included in this plebiscite. The Naga people were asked to give their thumb impressions on either one of the two columns in paper indicating "for" and "against" joining the Indian Union.

After the inaugural function, NNC volunteers took the plebiscite papers to all the villages, even to the remote regions. The plebiscite was conducted even in non-Naga villages like Kuki villages residing inside the Naga territory. All the Naga villages enthusiastically participated in the plebiscite. The whole operation took two months to complete and the youth wing of the NNC mostly took the responsibility of conducting it successfully. When all the thumb impressions were recollected the result was a resounding 99.99% verdict for Naga independence and refusal to join the Indian Union.

The first Indian General Election which was held in 1952 was totally boycotted by the whole Naga population. No Nagas participated in this event and all the ballot boxes were returned to India empty.

Taking all the accounts in the Naga Political journey for the last 70 years, the latest development for Naga Political issue read:

#### NAGA CONCORDANT

Having Reconciled on the basis of the Historical and Political Rights, the top Naga leaders have agreed that Nagas are ONE. Therefore in pursuance of this agreement, the following signatories have resolved in principle to work towards the formation of one Naga National Government.

To ensure the realization of the Naga National Government, a High Level Commission (HLC) has been formed by the top Naga Leaders. The High Level Commission shall be comprised of the signatories, headed by either the Chairman/President or the General Secretary/Vice President, and having no less than four competent members in the ranks of Kilonser/Major General and above, as found deemed fit by the respective governments.

To expedite this process of eventually forming the Naga National Government, the High level Commission shall hold meeting without any further delay in the presence of the Forum for Naga Reconciliation as facilitators.