



Cover Page



DOI: <http://ijmer.in.doi./2022/11.02.79>

THE QUEST FOR NAGA INTEGRATION: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

R. Vashum

Sociology Faculty

Indira Gandhi National Open University

New Delhi, India

Abstract

This paper attempts to examine the demand of the Nagas for a unified Nagalim (or Naga land) comprising the contiguous Naga inhabited areas of Nagaland state and parts of Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh and Assam. This demand has been registered since many decades ago, particularly from the 1960s. This issue has also been one of the core issues in the current Indo-Naga peace negotiation. The stumbling block towards the demand has been mainly attributed to the reservations of the affected neighbouring states. The paper argues that the demand for creation of a new state by expansion or decreasing of state/s does not lie with the specific concerned affected State, but it is the prerogative of the central government. Therefore, there is no reason why the central government should not solve the protracted Naga Integration issue by considering the demand of the Nagas under the provision of the constitution of India. The paper concludes that the solution to the problem of Naga territorial integration demand can be conceded by the central government as per the constitutional mandate. The paper primarily emphasizes on the initiatives of the Naga civil society groups while not totally ignoring the initiatives of the Naga nationalists. The sources of this paper have been derived mainly from the secondary data. Primary data based on field work has also been used.

Keywords: Naga Integration, State Reorganisation, Creation of State, Northeast India, Civil Society, Constitutional Provisions, Nagaland State.

Introduction

Nagas are located in the contiguous areas of India and Myanmar (erstwhile Burma). It was the British colonialists who divided the Naga homeland into two different states (countries). On the Indian side, the Nagas are further divided into four administrative units, namely Nagaland state, and parts of the states of Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh and Assam. In Myanmar, the Nagas are placed in the Sagaing Region (erstwhile Sagaing Division). The concept of unification of Naga areas is not a new phenomenon. It can be dated back to as early as the early 20th century. The 'Naga Club' formed in 1918¹ were already conscious about the fraternity and sorority of the Naga people which has enormous elements of the idea of Nagas living together as a people in an independent situation and in accordance with what they desired. Since then, there have been many initiatives and movements for unification of the Naga areas besides their struggle for self-determination (also known as 'Naga resistance movement'). Today, Nagas are experiencing critical socio-political situation in their own homeland, with no authority to make their own decisions and control their resources and their lives. The power and authority of controlling their everyday lives largely lie beyond their grasp with the exception of Nagaland state which was created in 1963. In all the other three regions in Manipur, Assam and Nagaland (within the Indian Union), they have been conditioned as vulnerable minorities. This has further ignited the cause of Naga movement for self-determination even after Indian independence. It is not surprising that we find today most of the high-ranking leaders of the Naga movement hailing from different parts of divided Naga areas including the Naga Hills of Manipur.

Concept and Philosophy of Naga Unification

Every people and nation have their own aspirations and dreams. Even an individual has dreams too. It is a basic human instinct endowed by nature or the creator. It's the aspiration that propels a person or people to look and move forward and live in future. Man lives in future, so also society or nation for that matter. The Nagas surely have their aspirations. Unification of Naga areas has been part of the dream. It is a means towards the greater goal of the Naga people. Therefore, while dealing with the question of Naga unification, it is pertinent to understand the components of the aspiration and its nuances of the journey towards the goal. In the other words, the concept, philosophy and praxis need to be examined. The philosophy of Naga unification is deep-seated. The quintessence of the philosophy is the desire and aspiration of the Nagas to live as a people in a unified socio-political set up according to their shared worldview and vision. They want to make their world in their own ethos and genius. This has been their unflinching resolve over decades. The Nagas believe that they are one people. They occupied the present territorial domain since time immemorial. But it was only during the British colonial rule in Asia that the Nagas were vivisected into various territorial and politico-administrative units. Later, it was the Government of India and the Government of Myanmar (erstwhile Burma) that have further

¹ The Naga Club is the first Pan-Naga socio-political organization.



Cover Page



divided the Naga areas into different administrative units. Today, the Nagas are in four states of India, namely, Nagaland, Manipur, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, and in Sagaing Region of Myanmar.

The rationale for Naga integration can be understood from the statement the Naga Students' Federation (NSF) in its Memorandum submitted to the Prime Minister of India in 1973. It reads: "There is social affinity, customs, traditions, and common heritages and beliefs among the Nagas; geographical contiguosity; historical backgrounds and records; proposal and agreements between the Naga people and Govt. of India; constitutional provision and there is willingness in the minds of the Naga people and those certain section of people who are demanding to merge into Nagaland state. Therefore, for the interests of the Nagas, greater nation, security and integrity of India, the legitimate claims and demands of Nagas must be justly considered and the Naga must be integrated through the democratic, peaceful and constitutional means" (1973).

The Nagas have been desperately longing for undoing the physical (territorial) barriers that have been coercively appropriated by external forces at different historical periods and come together under one socio-political unit. They value freedom and dignity as other peoples do, perhaps even more than what many peoples and nations would have. In order to realise this aspiration and dream, there is a strong feeling that unification of the Nagas is a pre-requisite condition. Therefore, the Nagas strongly feel that they must come together, live together, reason together and build their world together in one socio-political set up. The process for living and building their world together in one socio-political unit is known as the movement for 'Naga Unification' or 'Naga Integration'.

There are two broad connotations of the concept of 'Naga Unification'/'Naga Integration'. First, it denotes, the unification of all Naga inhabited areas in India and Myanmar in a larger sense. This concept is mainly spearheaded by the Naga nationalists. Second, the concept also denotes the integration of all Naga contiguous areas in the Union of India. This movement started sometime in the 1940s headquartered at Kohima. These movements operated independently which sometimes contradict to each other, particularly in the 1950s and the 1960s. Although the two operative concepts appear to objectively contradict, particularly in the 1950s and the 1960s, these movements operated independently which sometimes contradict with each other.

Historical Analysis

Nationalists' Frame

Although, the seed for Naga unification movement was sown by the first Naga apex organization called Naga Club (formed in 2018), the practical and operative aspect was initiated by the Naga National Council (NNC) in 1947 which is evident from their "4-Point Memorandum" submitted to Lord Mountbatten, the then Viceroy of British-India on February 20, 1947. The memorandum was for setting up an "Interim Government" for a period of ten years. The first point clearly mentions about a unified Nagaland (Nagalim²) when it states that "the Naga people will rule over all the people of Nagaland having full powers in respect of legislation, Executive and Judiciary".³ The second and more prominent record for Naga territorial unification was recorded in the "Nine-Point Agreement" (also called "Sir Akbar Hydari⁴ Agreement") signed at Kohima in June 27 to 29, 1947. This Agreement was a kind of semi-independent status wherein the Government of India takes "special responsibility for a period of ten years to ensure the due observance of this Agreement" subject to future review (see Point 9). The coverage of the area specifically mentioned was to bring 'all Nagas' within "one unified administrative unit" (see Point 6). However, the Government of India did not implement the Agreement. This led to the ultimate decision of the declaration of Naga Independence under the aegis of the Naga National Council (NNC) on 14 August 1947. The Naga Plebiscite of 1951 conducted by the NNC under the leadership of its president A.Z. Phizo that voted 99.9 percent reaffirming the declaration of Naga independence in 1947.

There was also a "Naga Raj" movement led by Jadonang since 1928. This movement was a religio-political movement launched against the British rule. Although it was a nationalistic movement, the movement could not spread to the larger Naga constituents, and limited to the Zeliangrong group (the four constituent tribes/sub-tribes- Zeme, Liangmai, Rongmei and Inpui). After he was hanged in 1931 by the British authority, his follower- a 16-year-old Gaidinliu (later called Rani Gaidinliu) led the movement for a while till she was arrested and imprisoned in 1932. In the post-independent India, the movement had been largely used as a religious movement ('Heraka' movement). The Naga Raj movement also indirectly influenced the unification of the divided Zeliangrong areas who were/are placed in different administrative units of Assam, Naga Hills and Manipur.

² Nagalim or Naga Lim denotes Naga Land (Lim, meaning 'land').

³ See Ao 1993, p. 278 at point 1.

⁴ Sir Akbar Hydari was the then Governor of Assam.



Cover Page



Since the 1960s onwards, there have been important developments initiated by the Government of India for solving the Naga political problem which certainly includes the issue of Naga integration. The First Peace Process (1964-1972) was held between the Government of India and the Naga National Council (NNC). It involved three prominent personalities as Peace Mission members, namely, Revd Michael Scott (from the United Kingdom), Jaya Prakash Narayan (Member of Parliament) and Bimala Prasad Chaliha (Chief Minister of Assam). Apart from other official negotiations, there were six rounds of talks in the Prime Ministerial level from 1966-1967 the peace negotiation was deadlocked (Cff. Ramunny, 1993; Aram, 1974). However, the ceasefire continued till 1972. After few years some NNC members signed an Accord with the Government of India called the Shillong Accord⁵ in 1975. But this Accord was literally for a mechanism for the Naga nationalists to voluntarily accept the Constitution of India, surrender arms, and discuss on settlement. There was no discussion effected as the Naga people and the NNC in particular did not endorse the Accord. The Accord became a huge problem within the NNC which ultimately led to the split of the NNC. Consequently, a new group called the “National Socialist Council of Nagaland” (NSCN) was formed in 1980. The NSCN then became the leading group of the Naga movement.⁶ The second Peace Process which began in 1997 and being continued till today did make some progress. However, it has been widely reported that even after the signing of the “Framework Agreement” between the Government of India and the NSCN on 3 August 2005 there are unresolved crucial issues including the subject of Naga Integration.

Civil Society Initiatives

The integration of Naga areas was also a crucial point of the Naga People’s Convention (NPC) since the late 1950s. This organization is an independent body for demanding an autonomous state for the Nagas which was achieved in 1963 as the sixteenth state of India through the Nagaland State created in 1963 through The State of Nagaland Act 1962. Although, the “Consolidation of Contiguous Naga Areas”⁷ has not been realized, the successive governments of Nagaland reaffirm on several occasions for implementation of integrating all Naga areas in India. The implementation of this clause is important for the Naga moderate leaders because the creation of Nagaland state further divided the Naga areas that have been one of the sore points for the Naga nationalist starting right from the NNC days to the present nationalist groups like the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (also known as NSCN-IM) among others.

There are other civil society organizations who initiated for the cause of Naga integration. One of the earliest movements, but short-lived organization was the Naga National League (NNL) formed in 1946 in Mao area of Manipur. The movement was led by A. Daiho and N. Modoli. The main objective of the league was to “consolidate Nagas of Manipur in order to bring together Naga people separated by colonial boundaries” (Shimray, 2007). There are some prominent leaders who individually supported the campaign including Rishang Keishing, R. Suisa, Mathiuhom, N.G. Mono and Kakhangai (cf. Charenamei, 2004). Another concerted effort made by some of the Naga leaders along with other Hill (non-Naga) leaders of Manipur for separating the Hill region from the Meitei dominated Manipur in the 1940s has inter-linkages with the Naga integration movement. Some of Naga leaders (so also other hill leaders) conditionally participated in the making of the Constitution of Manipur- “the Constitution Making Committee” (CMC) in 1947 under the initiative of F.F. Pearson⁸, then President of Manipur State Darbar with the consent of Bodhchandra Singh, the then titular Maharaja of Manipur. They insisted for the right of the Hill people (including Nagas of Manipur) to secede from the State of Manipur (being drafted) at the end of the ten-year period. They also insisted for formation of local self-government for Hill people. However, the Meitei dominated Government authority did not concede to the demand of the Hill people. Therefore, the Naga National League resumed its campaign for merging of Naga areas of Manipur with the Naga Hills District of Assam. They launched a non-cooperation movement with the Government of Manipur. The movement for “No House Tax Payment” to the Government of Manipur was another serious action. They decided to pay to the Deputy Commissioner of the Naga Hills District of Assam. Despite serious and intense movement, the movement died down due to suppression by the Manipur Government involving killing of three persons, injuring many more due to indiscriminate firing by the Assam Rifles, and imprisonment of the movement leaders. In honour of the lost lives, the Nagas in Manipur observe 27th May as “Martyrs’ Day” every year. It was also partly due to ‘Mao Naga centric’ movement and its inability to attract the involvement of other Naga tribes in the movement.

After few decades, some Naga leaders from Manipur formed Naga Integration Committee (NIC), Manipur in July 26, 1968 led by Rishang Keishing and Ng. Mono. In its memorandum submitted to Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister of India, it urged the the “integration of Manipur Naga Areas with the State of Nagaland” and “bring early solution” of the demand (NIC, 1968; cf.

⁵ According to the signatories, the Shillong Accord was signed under duress (a Naga leader told me during my fieldwork).

⁶ See Vashum, 2005 for detailed discussion.

⁷ See Point 13 of the Agreement.

⁸ F.F. Pearson was the Chairman of the Committee. He was a British Indian Political Officer and served as the President (Chief Minister) of Manipur State from 1945-47.



Cover Page



Shimray, 2013). In 1971, the organization was rechristened “United Naga Integration Council” (UNIC). They also participated in the Indian electoral system. The organization was dissolved after merging with the Manipur Pradesh Congress Committee (MPCC), a component of the All-India Congress Committee (AICC) in August 1972 with certain conditions wherein there would be no objection on the agenda of Naga integration. In the “Joint Agreement” of the merger, the representatives of the AICC, UNIC and MPCC states in the first point that “It is agreed upon that the Congress party does not oppose Naga Integration movement and does not consider Naga Integration Movement as anti-party, anti-national, anti-state and unconstitutional activity” and “that the “problem should be discussed and settled at the Governmental level”.

A larger committee called Naga Integration Central Council” (NICC) was also floated with some of the leaders of the NIC and Naga leaders from Nagaland State on October 3, 1970 at Kohima. Some of the prominent leaders include Rev. M. Savino, T. Chuba, Rani Gaidinliu, Rishang Keishing, T. Haralu, S.C. Jamir, Ng. Mono, Mrs. Rano Shaiza, Kongsui Luithui inter alia.⁹ The aim of this body was to work towards “early integration of all the contiguous Naga areas into Nagaland State”.¹⁰ They launched signature campaign in the Naga contiguous areas and also collected Re. 1/- from every Naga family in Nagaland, Assam, N.E.F.A. (now Arunachal Pradesh) and Manipur beginning 1970-71.¹¹ In its memorandum to Smt. Indira Gandhi, Prime Minister of India, dated November 9, 1970, they mentioned the “urgency of accepting the legitimate demand of the people Naga areas to integrate their territories in Manipur, North Cachar in Assam and Tirap in NEFA into the State of Nagaland following the principle of the States Re-Organisation Commission (SRC).” They also demanded for immediate opinion poll to ascertain the wishes of the Naga people should the central Indian leaders doubt about the genuineness of the demand. But the organization soon disintegrated and met its natural death due to differences among the leaders. One of the main reasons attributed was the participation of the leaders in Nagaland State electoral politics with differing ideological affiliations and interests.

One of the main initiatives on Naga Integration has been contributed by the powerful Naga Students’ Federation (NSF), the apex students’ forum of all the Nagas since its formation in October 29, 1947. In its Memorandum to the Prime Minister of India on 9 May 1973, the organization mentioned that from 1947-1973, they had submitted twenty-eight Memoranda for Naga Integration to various Government authorities, particularly to the successive Prime Ministers of India. In one of its publications- “For a Unified Naga Lim” released on 8 January 1995, it lamented how they have not been able to achieve the unification of Naga areas after repeated insistence on the Government of India. It also states that Nagas “have always lived in a contiguous area which, unfortunately, has been split and placed under five political regions by the British in collaboration with Delhi: one group is in Assam, one in Arunachal, another in Manipur, and one is in the present Nagaland state. These four Naga territories have been placed in India, but one large Naga territory known as ‘Eastern Nagaland’ is in Myanmar.” It reiterates that “[e]ven more than in the past, here are definite signs blossoming everywhere signaling that a practical solidarity is workable ... Nagas belong to one single race with a common interest and goal. This is a workable, practical basis for a unified Naga Lim” (ibid.). Over the years, the NSF has been one of the strong proponents for the territorial unification of the Naga regions.

There are also other organisations such as the Naga Hoho (NH- the apex organization of all the Nagas), the United Naga Council (UNC- apex Naga body in Manipur), All Naga Students’ Association Manipur (ANSAM), Global Naga Forum (GNF) inter alia. For instance, the Naga Hoho made its stand clear for its commitment for the cause of “movement and desire for integrating all contiguous Naga areas under a roof” in its White Paper on Naga Integration (2002) even as it countered the contamination of the cause due to “misconceptions, distortions, discords” from within and without. It may be noted that most of these organisations have been initiating for the cause of Naga integration in the organizational level. This could be one main reason for the weakness of the move for Naga Integration.

Constitutional Provision and Naga Integration

The demand for integration of contiguous Naga areas in the Northeast is within the ambit of the Constitution of India which is considered reasonable due to its historical and contemporary situation. Although the demand is constitutional per se, it encountered challenges, particularly from the neighbouring states where Naga consolidated areas fall. The problem is also due to the indecisive nature of the Government of India. Thus, the demand of the Nagas for integration has been an on-going contested subject since many decades. In the post-independence period, many states have been created out of the existing states. In the recent past, there have also

⁹ Some of these leaders have immensely contributed in both the states and the central government. For instance, S.C. Jamir is the longest Chief Minister of Nagaland State. He was also Member of Parliament and Governors of Maharashtra, Gujarat, Goa and Odisha. Rishang Keishing was the longest Chief Minister of Manipur State, a member of Parliament in both Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha.

¹⁰ See NICC Report 3(i), dated October 3, 1970.

¹¹ See NICC Resolutions, dated 12th & 13th January 1971.



Cover Page



DOI: <http://ijmer.in.doi./2022/11.02.79>

been new states' creation, namely, Jharkhand, Uttaranchal, Chhattisgarh, and Telangana. One could add the bifurcation of the state of Jammu and Kashmir into the Union Territories of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh in 2019. The creation of new states has been in vogue after the provisions of the Constitution of India. In the other words, these are rights of the people guaranteed by the Constitution of India.

In the Indian Constitution, Article 3, in particular, categorically provides for re-organisation of States. Under this Article, the Indian Parliament may by law-

- (a) form a new State by separation of territory from any State or by uniting two or more States or parts of States or by uniting any territory to a part of any State;
- (b) increase the area of any State;
- (c) diminish the area of any State;
- (d) alter the boundaries of any State; and,
- (e) alter the name of any State.

The uniqueness of Article 3, as stated by Hidayadullah (1984:51), a Constitutional expert is that “the process of diminution or increase of areas or carving out of new States out of the areas of existing States can be made as many times as may be deemed necessary”. He reiterates that “the organization of States can, under the provisions of the Constitution, take place even against the wishes of the States; the States have only the right to be afforded an opportunity to express their views” (Ibid.). As for the case of Naga unification/integration, Article 3(a) is a relevant clause. The relevance of another clauses- 3(b) to 3(d) can well be applied. Therefore, the Naga claim for creation of a larger Nagaland State by incorporating all the contiguous Naga areas of Manipur, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh is in tandem with the framework of the Indian Constitution.

On the other hand, there have been contestation of the claim by the neighbouring states of Manipur, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. They claim that they would not part any land that belonged to the respective states. Manipur has been the most vocal state that has been raising the issue of Naga integration. The State Assembly has been passing resolutions from time to time to affirm its position for Manipur State integrity. For instance, the State Assembly Resolution (No. 125), dated December 20, 2019 even seeks for amendment of Article 3 of the Constitution of India which reads as- “This House unanimously resolves to re-affirm ... for amendment of the Constitution of India by incorporating that prior consent of the State Legislature of the affected State/s shall be mandatory while forming new State or names of existing State and also to request the Government of India [that] ... there shall not be any change in the present administrative set up of the State of Manipur and not to grant any kind of autonomy to any part of the State” (Singh, 2019). In such juncture, the role of the Government of India becomes crucial on the demand for Naga Integration as the matter is the prerogative of the Central Government.

Conclusion

The urge for Naga Integration came about after the British divided the Naga homeland into five different administrative units in India and Myanmar (erstwhile Burma). The first expression of the Nagas for unification of Naga areas was registered in 1929 through a Memorandum to the Simon Commission. The movement was carried forward by various organisations, be it nationalists or civil society groups. The movement for Naga Integration/ Unification is still vibrant with various Naga groups. On the other hand, there are hurdles towards the demand, particularly from the neighbouring States whose territories would supposedly be affected, namely Manipur, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. Of these States, Manipur appears to be most vocal state. This is probable as the Nagas in Manipur occupy a huge territory in the present State of Manipur. In view of the Constitutional provision for creation of new States or bifurcation of existing State/s in India, the State also resolved to appeal to the Government of India for amendment of Article 3, particularly for making the prior consent of the concerned State before creation or bifurcation of State/s. On the hand, there has been claims from the Nagas to integrate the Naga contiguous areas in India which were divided by the British without their consent. The State of Nagaland reaffirms its resolution for integration of the Naga contiguous areas since 1964 as per Clause 13 (“Consolidation of Contiguous Naga Areas”) of The State of Nagaland Act 1962 which has not implemented by the Government of India. In view of the contradicting claims between different States and communities, the demand for Naga Integration has become a complex issue. In the final analysis, it is the Government of India that can solve the problem as the Centre has the authority to do it if it so wills. Given the historical and political Indo-Naga political conflict, there would be merit for the Government of India to consider the legitimate demand of the Nagas for Naga Integration within the Constitutional frame.



Cover Page



DOI: <http://ijmer.in.doi./2022/11.02.79>

References

- Ao, Tanjenyuba. 1993. British Occupation of Naga Country. Mokokchung (Nagaland): Naga Literature Society.
- Aram, M. 1974. Peace in Nagaland (Eight Year Story: 1964-72). Foreword by Jayaprakash Narayan. New Delhi: Arnold-Heinemann Publishers Private Limited.
- Charenamei, Mani (2005). "Unification of Nagas." In Symposium on the Unification of Naga Areas, 23 October. New Delhi: NPMHR.
- Government of India (1960). The State of Nagaland Act 1962. New Delhi: Government of India.
- Hidayadullah, M. 1984. Constitutional Law of India, Vol. I. New Delhi: The Bar Council of India Trust in association with Arnold-Heinemann.
- Naga Hoho. 2002. White Paper on Naga Integration. Kohima: Naga Hoho.
- NIC (1968). Memorandum Submitted to Shrimati Indira Gandhi, Prime Minister of India from the Naga Integration Committee, Manipur. New Delhi: NIC.
- NICC (1970). "Report on the Central Meeting held on 3rd Oct. '70 at Kohima." Office of the Naga Integration Council, Kohima. Kohima: NICC.
- NICC (1971). Meeting of the Naga Integration Central Council held at Kohima on 12th & 13th January under the Chairmanship of Mr. T. Haralu passed the following Resolutions. Kohima: NICC.
- Naga Students' Federation (1973). Memorandum Submitted to Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi the Prime Minister of India by the Delegates of the Naga Students' Federation at New Delhi, 9th May 1973. New Delhi: Naga Students' Federation.
- Naga Students' Federation (1995). For a Unified Nagalim. Kohima: Naga Students' Federation.
- Shimray, U.A. (2007). Naga Population and Integration Movement. Mittal Publications, New Delhi.
- Shimray, U.A. (2013). "Naga Integration Movement: A Historical Perspective." <https://nagalandjournal.wordpress.com/2013/04/22/naga-integration-movement-a-historical-perspective-by-u-a-shimray/>.
- Singh, Y. Khemchand (2019). Resolution Passed by the Manipur Legislative Assembly in Its Sitting held on 20, 2019. Imphal: Manipur Legislative Assembly.
- UNIC and AICC (1972). Joint Agreement for the Merger of the United Naga Integration Council (UNIC) with the All-India Congress Party. Imphal: UNIC and AICC.
- United Naga Council (UNC). 2001. Memorandum Submitted to Shri Atal Behari Vajpayee, Hon'ble Prime Minister of India. Camp: New Delhi.
- Vashum, R. 2005. Nagas' Right to Self-Determination: Anthropological-Historical Perspective. New Delhi: Mittal Publications.