April 10, 2004

NSCN (IM) and the Roots of Naga Identity: Religion and Language: Part I

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Available at: https://works.bepress.com/vikas_kumar/17/
Beyond Domestic Politics

With Rahul Gandhi filing his nomination from Amethi and Sonia Gandhi her’s from Rae Bareli, and L.K. Advani traversing considerable distance to enter Bihar in the second leg of his Bharat Uday Kath Yatra the post-election scene is presenting a lot of contrasts even as political pundits and analysts continue to forecast a comfortable victory for the BJP and the coalition it leads at the hustings, something contrary to the information available from those capable of feeling the pulse of the people at the grassroots. The Congress position is not in the least bleak with Sonia Gandhi drawing large crowds wherever she conducts her jansampark abhiyan (mass contact programme) and now both Rahul and Priyanka having enthused the Congress workers in UP there is a sense of consternation in the camp of the BJP and all its associates including the Samajwadi Party which is being regarded as the Trojan Horse of the ruling party by large sections of thinking people bereft of any political axe to grind. In the midst of such events the entry of Syed Shahabuddin into the Congress is a clear indication of where the sympathies of the Muslim masses lie: definitely with the Congress and not Mulayam’s party whose closeness to the BJP does not bear elaboration. Yet what is important is the element of internal sabotage and subversion the Congress is faced with at present: that is what the party needs to guard against above everything else.

While the country is gradually being gripped by the poll fever major developments are taking place in our neighbourhood and beyond and they are not getting the attention and notice they deserve. The victory of President Chandrika Kumaratunga’s United People’s Freedom Party (UPFA) in Sri Lanka’s parliamentary elections by winning 105 seats (eight short of an outright majority in the 225-member House) and the swearing in of senior SLFP leader Mahinda Rajapakse as the new Prime Minister constitute a sea-change in the country’s political landscape which was dominated for quite sometime now by the UNP leader and outgoing PM Ranil Wickremesinghe who can legitimately claim to have turned a new leaf in Colombo’s relations with the Tamil separatists, specifically the LTTE, by reinvigorating the peace process through substantive talks. With this change and the fact that the Sinhala nationalist party, the JVP, as an UPFA constituent, has 42 MPs in parliament there is a possibility of the peace process being derailed or distorted. Much depends on the President who must exercise her authority to intervene and prevent such an eventuality even while protecting the country’s as also the Sinhala community’s basic interests. India too has a positive role to play to help the new Sri Lankan Government renew the peace initiative for the benefit of Sri Lankans of all denominations and the region as a whole.

Nepal is in the throes of a crisis once again. While the armed Maoist offensive shows little signs of a decline political parties in the Himalayan Kingdom have come out on the streets of the Kathmandu in their thousands demanding fresh elections so that power returns to the people’s representatives instead of remaining concentrated in the monarchy. The persisting instability in the country can pave the way for a civil war which will be detrimental to South Asia in general even if the subcontinent is coming out of the shadows now that the India-
views he expressed on a few vital questions put to him. There was no ambiguity or ambivalence on his views on basic issues regarding democracy and the inalienable rights of the people under it in India. There are a number of dedicated souls like Rajindar Sachar, Suresh and Daud and a host of activists in this area where eternal vigilance is needed. Of course, there is the colossal figure of Justice V.R. Krishna Iyer who is a great source of inspiration and tower of strength for hundreds of workers in the field. However, the large void created by the death of Justice V.M. Tarkunde will remain unfilled. Men of his calibre, commitment and courage are rare to come by. The whole of democratic India salute the memory of this uncompromising champion of people’s rights.

**NSCN-IM and the Roots of Naga Identity: Religion and Language—I**

**KUNAL GHOSH and VIKAS KUMAR**

This is a two-part article that is being carried here for the benefit of our readers. The first part deals with religion and the second, language.

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On January 8, 2003 Isak Chisi Swu and Thuingaleng Muivah, the Chairman and General Secretary, respectively, of the Isak-Muivah faction of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) came to New Delhi at the invitation of the Central Government for wide ranging discussions on substantive issues related to the peaceful solution of the five-decade-old Naga problem. Their visit was the culmination of a long drawn out process of dialogue that began in the early 1990s abroad between the NSCN-IM leadership and senior government officials. This was the first time that the NSCN-IM leadership agreed to come to India for discussions. During their course of stay in New Delhi the NSCN-IM leadership interacted with a cross-section of national leaders from different political parties. They appreciated the maturity of the present political leadership and its better understanding of the uniqueness of Nagaland. They also expressed their commitment to the continuation of the ceasefire agreement signed in 1997 and the peaceful resolution of the Naga problem through unconditional talks.

The NSCN-IM leadership used the opportunity to exchange views about crucial issues, controversial and non-controversial, relating to Nagaland, for example, territorial limits; need to protect the uniqueness of Naga identity, traditions, customary laws etc. It needs to be noted here that Nagaland already enjoys special status under Article 371 A, which ensures that “no Act of Parliament shall apply to Nagaland in relation to (i) religious or social practices of the Nagas, (ii) Naga customary law and procedure, (iii) administration of civil and criminal justice involving decisions according to the Naga customary law, (iv) ownership and transfer of land and its resources...” [The Times of India 2003]

The NSCN-IM leadership defines the uniqueness of Nagaland in terms of ‘their distinct tribal identity, culture, way of life and their faith—Christianity’. [Pandey 2003] However, both within and without Nagaland there is disagreement about what constitutes the core of Naga identity. Similarly there is disagreement about the constituents of Naga culture and customary law.

The identity of any group of people is largely defined by religion and language, written and spoken. The NSCN-IM’s perspective on these vital issues is at the best confusing and erroneous to the extent it is in dissonance with the ground realities within the Naga communities. This dissonance, which has the potential to derail the peace talks and plunge Nagaland into another round of mindless violence, has so far not received the attention it deserves in the present context. The objective of the present series of two articles is to examine the afore-mentioned dissonance with respect to the different facets of Naga identity. The first part (Part-I) of this article discusses the religious facet of Naga identity and the second part (Part-II) of the article deals with the linguistic facet.
Here before moving on to the subject matter of the article we would like to briefly mention that apart from language and religion the definition of the limits of the traditional Naga territory is another issue on which the NSCN-IM has directed its focus. This has introduced deep fissures among different groups in the North-East. They are using a redefined Naga linguistic and religious identity to push forward their highly controversial claim to 'Greater Nagaland'. The question of 'Greater Nagaland' is inextricably tied up with the traditional territory and language of Manipur and Assam (and Arunachal Pradesh to a lesser extent). The issues involved are extremely complex and have a long history. It will not be possible to deal with these questions in the present article which require another article devoted to the task.

**Christianity in the Naga Hills: The Beginning**

Let us begin with the beginning of Christianity in the Naga Hills since the NSCN-IM leadership equates it with the Naga faith and the uniqueness of Naga identity. Miles Bronson started the Naga Mission School at Namsang in the late 1830s. G.A. Small, a British educationist who worked in Assam in the first half of the twentieth century, described the American Baptist Missionaries as members of a mission who, 'knew nothing about education, but only wanted to send home sufficient return of converts to guarantee their salaries'. [Hazarika 1995, p. 68] Decades later another educationist, Rev. Dr T.A. Shishak, noted the following about the leitmotif of mission schools: 'The primary purpose of mission schools was to teach Naga reading and writing so that they could read the Bible...' [Shishak in NSUD 1996, p. 30]

However, not much was achieved until 1869 when E.W. Clark started the Baptist Mission Centre of Molungyimchen in Mokokchung, the stronghold of Ao Nagas, with the help of Godhula, an Assamese evangelist, and Susongmen, an Ao convert. In the following decade the Mission spread its activities to Kohima, the stronghold of Angami Nagas. [Nag 2002, p. 56]

Commenting on the growth of Christianity in Nagaland The District Gazetteers of India (1998) says: by 1901, the Nagas were predominantly animistic: The conversions movement was, however, going space and the British government even gave financial subvention to the missionaries... Today most of the Nagas are Christian and animism as a faith is much in decline... 'That the government of the day was not only sympathetic but also positively helpful was an important factor in contributing to the success of the missionary activity... By 1961-71 66.76 per cent of the total population of Nagaland was Christian. This went up to 80 per cent in 1981 and crossed 90 per cent by the census of 1991. [Vol. II, p. 597]

According to the Census of India (1991) 87.47 per cent of the population of Nagaland follows Christianity, 10.12 per cent follows Hinduism, and a negligible 0.48 per cent does not follow any of the major religions, that is, they are adherents of what is popularly known as 'animism'.

**Native Naga Faith**

As early as the first quarter of the twentieth century the labelling of the native Naga faiths as animism came under attack from the British scholars themselves. [Misra 1998] Unfortunately, the usage still enjoys popularity among the social science community both within and without India. We will examine the nature of the native faith in a short while. But first a glimpse of what the Baptist missionaries thought about the Nagas would be worthwhile.

A heathen people whose speedy conversion was possible... (for) they lack any distinctions of caste or priesthood. [From the Annual Report of the Baptist Mission—1856, in Misra 1998]

Despite having started very early, in the first half of the nineteenth century, the missionaries didn't succeed in turning the tide in favour of Christianity among the Nagas till the 1950s. Christianity, till then, was not the religion of the great majority of Nagas as noted in the Naga National Congress (NNC) resolution (February 20, 1947) submitted to His Majesty's Government (UK) and the Government of India:

In religion, the great majority of the Nagas are animists but Christianity which was introduced by the American Baptists long before the advent of the British rule is now speedily spreading. (emphasis ours) [Nag 2002, p. 130]

The prospect of 'speedy conversion' remained only a possibility for long and it was only after independence (1947) and the start of insurgency that the process of proselytisation picked up momentum and 'speedy conversion' became a reality. The resistance to gospel came from 'certain well-embedded Naga customs and religious beliefs, a resistance that can be safely stated to be a factor behind the initial failure of the mission in the Naga Hills'. [Misra 1998] Presently we have a fragmentary idea of what exactly was the nature of Naga religion that prevailed in the Naga Hills prior to the advent of Christianity. However, we know for sure certain things like the claims about non-existence of a priest class among the Nagas are untrue. 'The Angamis,' Nag (2002) says, 'have a hereditary priesthood, the office being handed down the line of the founder of the village in question.' [p. 351]

The New Britannica Encyclopaedia (1986) aptly
sums up the present state of our knowledge about
the native Naga faith in the following words:
In the traditional religions of the Naga tribes, special status
is given to the sun and the moon. There is a conception of
a supreme creator and there are many minor deities. Nature
is seen to be alive with invisible forces, with which the
priests and medicine men mediate. They also lead rites and
festivals, bless the marriage bed, and protect the craftsman
at his work. Naga ideas of after life vary from tribe to tribe,
but there is wide agreement that the soul does not perish at
death.  [pp. 132-3, The People, Nagoland, Vol. 21]
Claims about the religious isolation of Nagas from
the adjoining Brahmaputra Valley are not justified.
The above description of indigenous Naga faith and
specially the centrality of the Sun and the Moon is
remarkably similar to the Donyipolo Yelam, the
indigenous faith of the Adi tribes of Arunachal
Pradesh and Assam-based tribes related to them—
like the Mishings.  [Rukbo 2002]
Similarly, claims about absence of any worthwhile
interaction between the Naga faith and mainstream
faiths of India are equally baseless. Sankardeva
(1449-1569), the great Vaishnava preacher of Assam,
had disciples from both the hills and the plains.
disciples from the hills were Norrrottam—a Naga,
It is quite unlikely that Nagas did not have any
interaction with Buddhism that criss-crossed the
North-East and neighbouring Myanmar, with Buddha’s
message of love and peace. [Note 1] Therefore,
claims about religious isolation of Nagaland do not
stand even a superficial scrutiny.
The worship of the Sun and Moon and a soul
that does not perish at death are also a part of the
Hindu belief system. While the Nagas did not
explicitly subscribe to any major form of Hinduism
‘they also did not share each other’s religious
practices’ and the similarity between their respective
faiths ended at the point that in the past all of them
were characterised as ‘animism’ by the colonial
anthropologists and the Church. [Nag 2002, p. 351]
Finally, why the Naga faith has been called
“animism” is a moot question. It may have an element
of animal worship, but it encompasses much more
than that. Yet the Church and the British colonial
administration have labelled it as “animism”, which
carries a sense of derogation. Perhaps, it is a case
of giving a dog a bad name before killing it.
Apart from all this the Nagas, contrary to the
popular belief, had extensive ties with the Ahoms
of Brahmaputra Valley [Nag 2002] partly because
of geographic proximity and partly because of the
fact that the Ahoms entered Assam from the Naga
Hills in the early thirteenth century. There was a
considerable give and take between the two
communities, in all walks of life, in course of their
centuries-long relationship, before the British
imposed the Inner Line Regulations in the nineteenth
century to safeguard the tribal culture. Interestingly,
the issue of safeguarding the tribal identity was
never discussed in the Inner Line Regulation Act
document. [Nag 2002, pp. 20 and 60] In fact, issues
related to trade in rubber, wax, ivory etc. (item no.
5 of the Act) and elephants (item no. 8-10 of the
Act) figure quite prominently in the document.
[Appendix II—Inner Line Regulation, 1873, Subir
Ghosh 2000; also refer Nag 2002, pp. 46-7]
Delving a bit into the evolution of the Inner Line
Regulations will contribute towards a better under-
standing of the issues before us. The Inner Line
Regulations evolved over a long period, during
which the colonial power drove a wedge between
the hills and plains peoples to safeguard their
strategic and economic interests in the North-East.
A series of rebellions plagued the North East in the
early nineteenth century, especially the Ahom
rebellion of 1830 AD which brought the Ahom
nobility and many tribes from the neighbouring
Hills, including Nagas and Khasis among others,
together against the British misrule. These rebellions,
according to Misra and Misra (1998),
alerted the British to the danger of a possible alliance
between the hills and the plains to jeopardise British designs
in the region. It became that much more essential to
segregate the hill tribes from the plains when the British
began tea cultivation in large areas of Assam adjacent to the
hills often encroaching upon tribal lands.
Under these conditions the Bengal Eastern Frontier
Regulation (1873) was enacted which made legal
provisions for an Inner Line to protect the tribal
people from the dominance of the plains! However,
by the end of the nineteenth century there were
more than 40 tea gardens on the lands claimed by
the Nagas [Nag 2002, p. 46] and the American
Baptist missionaries were firmly established in the
Naga Hills.
The introduction of the Inner Line Regulations reinforced
the ‘hill-plain’ dichotomy, which in the
first place was a colonial construct. The Inner Line
Regulation Act was ‘a significant step towards
decreasing the contact between the hills and the
plains, thereby ensuring an easier subjugation of the
was followed by the Government of India Act
(1919), recommendations of the Simon Commission
and the Government of India Act (1935) all of
which, on the one hand, progressively extended the
domain over which these regulations could be
applied and, on the other, made the segregation
increasingly irreversible.
Onward March of Christianity

Notwithstanding the ground realities the British colonial administration, for political reasons, shared the attitude of Baptist missionaries towards the Nagas.

On the religious side, colonial officials emphatically recorded the absence of any definite ideas about religion among the Nagas, while simultaneously stressing their intelligence and capability of receiving religion from the missionaries... their conversion into Christianity was considered as a means to turn them into ‘a valuable counterpoise to the vast non-Christian population of the plains’... (and) created the possibilities of the emergence of Christian tribes devoted to the ideal of colonial rule in the hills. [Misra 1998]

Later developments show that the nineteenth century colonial administration was right in its assessment of the emergent situation in the hills on account of the spread of Christianity. Since the 1920s a section of Naga elite began demanding continuation of British rule, in case an independent Nagaland was not feasible after the lapse of paramountcy. On their part some British officials were trying to carve a ‘Crown Colony’ between Myanmar (then Burma) and India comprising of hills inhabited by Christian Mongoloid tribes under a plan known as Coupland Plan. Commenting on the impact of the missionary-Raj nexus in the North-East Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru in a speech delivered in New Delhi (June 7, 1952) noted that the British officers and the missionaries in the North-East generally tried to make the people ‘anti-India’ and ‘induced them to think in terms of independence’. [Nag 2002, p. 337]

Baptism, indeed, has had a very deep impact on the Naga society. The Naga ‘national’ anthem, adopted by the NNC, ‘was only an adaptation of the American national anthem’. [Nag 2002, p. 147]

The Church has imposed Roman script for tribal dialects that did not have their own scripts and in addition they are trying to supplant Nagamese with English as the lingua franca. The latter lays bare the efforts of the Baptist Church to de-link Nagaland from Assam and redefine the Naga identity because Nagamese is a pidgin that has evolved through the centuries of intercourse between the Nagas and the Assamese. More about the language issue in the second part of the article.

One would be curious about the present profile of the Baptist Mission in the region. Broadly commenting on the nature of activities of the Baptist missionaries at present in the region Ghosh (2002) observes:

This is the best time (in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 terror attack on the World Trade Center, New York) to remind the Americans that the Baptist Christianterrorists are active in India’s North-East and they derive their financial support from the southern parts of the USA where the Baptist Church has a strong following. Funds are collected in the form of donations in various church establishments in the name of evangelical work. Some of this money is spent in true philanthropic work of spreading education and healthcare. However, it has been suspected for a long time that a part of this fund gets diverted for buying arms for the Baptist terrorists of the North-East. Our ex-Chief Election Commissioner, T.N. Seshan, gave voice to this suspicion in a television panel discussion on Doordarshan as early as in 1993.

The strong link between the Baptists in the USA and Nagaland is corroborated by the fact that more than 10,000 Nagas, including representatives of both the factions of the NSCN, attended a convention of Nagas, organised by the Baptist Fellowship of America in 1997 at Atlanta (USA), to mark the 125th year of the advent of Christianity in the Naga Hills. [Nag 2002, p. 306] Finally, a word about the American Baptists, especially the Southern Baptists. On various occasions observers have drawn attention to the disturbing role played by this group in different parts of the world. [Ghosh 2000b] Recently, George (2003) pointed out the deplorable evangelical drive launched by the Southern Baptists—the most fundamentalist Christian outfit in America—and the Samaritan’s Purse in war-torn Iraq.

Church and Separatists: The Unholy Nexus

Having discussed the history and external dimension (British colonial and American Baptist) of the religious question in Nagaland we now move on to the internal dimension, namely, the link between separatist organisations like the NSCN-IM and the Church and the fallout of this unholy nexus vis-a-vis the Naga identity. Recently, Nayar (2003) pointed to the close relations between the NSCN-IM and the Church. On an earlier occasion S.C. Jamir, the erstwhile Congress Chief Minister of Nagaland, exhorted the Church to oppose the separatist ultras and lamented that the Church leaders had not come out openly against them. [The Statesman, December 29, 2000] It would be worthwhile to find out what endears the outfit to the Church. A look at their manifesto would help us in finding the answer to this puzzle. Presented below are different excerpts from their manifesto collected from Nag (2002) and Hazarika (1995).

‘We declare we are revolutionary patriots... To us the sovereign existence of our country, the salvation of our people in Socialism with their spiritual salvation in Christ are eternal and unquestionable.’ [Appendix I—Manifesto of the Nationalist Socialist Council of Nagaland, Hazarika 1995]

‘import of things repugnant to the taste of a Christian people would be prohibited.’ [p. 324, Nag 2002]

‘We stand for faith in God and salvation of mankind in Jesus, the Christ, alone, that is, “NAGALAND FOR CHRIST”. However, the individual freedom of religion shall be
safeguarded and imposition of the faith on others is strictly forbidden.’ [Appendix J—Manifesto of the Nationalist Socialist Council of Nagaland, Hazarika 1995]

Such assurances fly in the face of their actions that are largely in consonance with their uncompromising stand on this issue in their manifesto. Like the NLFT [Ghosh (2000 a and b); Hazarika 2000, pp. 173, 175], the NSCN-IM, too, has been involved in conversion to Christianity. Nag (2002) noted the following regarding the proselytising role of the NSCN:

Besides, providing them (Nagas) primary and political education, the NSCN also propagated Christianity... (NSCN) had substantial success in converting these tribals to Christianity. In this task the NSCN went about with strict professionalism by its own admission... In fact, NSCN claimed that 'God worked with NSCN to do His will'. [p. 284]

The outfit has proclaimed its intention to fight for Christian Nagaland. Its goal is more singular and exclusive than the avowed goal of its predecessor, the Naga National Council (NNC), that stood for 'Protestant Christianity and Naga Religion' as the two recognised faiths in Nagaland. [Part X of NNC sponsored ‘Yezabo (Constitution) of Nagaland’, Ref. NSUD 1996, Appendix I—The Yezabo of Nagaland]. While on the one hand in its propaganda the NSCN-IM substituted Christian for Protestant, on the other it quietly dropped the Naga religion. These changes are a reflection of very basic processes undergoing in the Naga society. By the time NSCN came into existence Roman Catholicism had gained a secure foothold in Nagaland whereas it had just begun evangelical activities in the 1950s. [Gazetteer 1998, Vol. 11, p. 597] In the 1950s, during the formative days of the NNC, animism or Naga-religion was still strong; however, during the time of the formation of the NSCN animism, as a faith, had declined considerably. In the long drawn out Naga struggle Protestant Christianity has occupied the centre-stage despite the presence of a sizeable Catholic Christian community and non-Christian community in the State. The sustained Baptist propaganda would like people outside Nagaland to believe that the original Naga faith no longer exists. But we know that that is far from the reality. In fact, according to Nag (2002), the ‘Naga villages in Sibsagar subdivision and Tirap district’ still follow Hindu practices. [p. 39] The Hindus and the so-called ‘animists’ constitute more than 10 per cent of the population of the State.

**Erosion of Ancestral Culture**

One thing has to be noted before we move on to the question about the real motive of NSCN-IM in meddling with the religious composition of the Naga society. The point is about the adversarial relationship that Baptist missionaries have maintained with the native faith and culture of Nagaland right from the beginning. The very first mission centre established by Clark at Molungyimchen (Mokokchung) founded a new completely Christian village near Molungyimchen ‘when the converts increased in number and conflict grew in the village over the question of observance of tribal rituals and festivals vis-a-vis Christianity’. [Nag 2002, p. 56] While the contribution of Christian Missionaries in bringing education, medicine and hygiene to the remote hill tribes has been appreciated by all observers of the North-East many of them have voiced concern about the stifling of Naga culture and religion. They have imposed,’ T.N. Kaul observes in a note written in 1953, ‘a new kind of narrow-minded missionary culture (as distinct from a Christian culture, as in certain other parts of India), upon those whom they have converted.’ [A Brief Note on NEFA, Manipur State, Naga Hill District (Kohima) and Lushai Hills (Aijal), Hazarika 1995, p. 351] Gopinath Bordoloi while commending the missionaries for their good work also pointed out that they were inducting ‘an alien culture to the Hills’. [Hazarika 1995, p. 62] ‘Old customs and traditions,’ Shishak (1996) notes, ‘were rapidly forsaken or modified beyond recognition, and old beliefs which for ages had been firmly held were quietly dropped, partly because they met with contempt and ridicule from the missionaries...’ [NSUD 1996, p. 26] Similarly, Misra and Misra (1998) observe:

The introduction of Christianity a century ago had initiated a process of far reaching change in the traditional Naga society. Western style education combined with Christian ritual loosened clan and village ties. Traditional Naga festival, dances and other forms of folk activities gradually died out... their ban of religious festivals, feasting, and dancing resulted in destroying in one mighty sweep the entire culture of the hills with its rich oral tradition of songs and dances.

Finally we will consider a seemingly unimportant, nevertheless crucial for Nagas, instance where Christianity has interfered with the native customs. ‘Indigenous wine (zam),’ according to Vashum (1996), ‘was at one time an inseparable asset of Nagas’ and ‘was important component of their culture itself... With the coming of Christianity, such consumptions of wine have become a thing of past except for few cases.’ [NSUD 1996, p. 67; also Hazarika 1995, p. 351] Those who have been witness to Naga cultural events would know how much of the native Naga culture still survives. A group of Nagas gave a musical performance ‘Colours: A Festival of Classical Music’ on July 17 and 18, 2002 at the India International Centre (Delhi) [Delhi Diary, July 12-18, 2002] The predominance of Western classical music in this
'Classical' music programme was a yet another reminder of the lost cause of local culture that has been reduced to a curiosity, perhaps worth preserving for anthropologists of future generations.

Conclusion

Just about two centuries ago Christianity had no existence in Nagaland. It was imported by the Baptist Missionaries in the 1830s. The ancestral faith of the Nagas, so-called ‘animism’, has close resemblance with Donyipolo Yelam of neighbouring Arunachal Pradesh and remote resemblance with Hinduism. Until 1947 Christians were a minority. Christianity won converts rapidly in the last 50 years and now is the faith of the great majority. That Christianity springs from the Naga roots is patently false. Yet the NSCN-IM wishes to establish this by incessant propaganda and succeeds to a large extent in moulding the self-perception of the Naga people so much so that they now hold their ancestral faith in contempt.

Tracing the source of alienation of the Christianised tribes of the North-East Chaube (1973) notes that though the Church has done commendable work in the field of education ‘yet their religious and language policy created a barrier between different sections of the people’. [for further details refer Ghosh 1999] The same holds true for Nagaland as well where the NSCN-IM, in collusion with the Baptist Church, and tacit approval of the Catholic Church, is trying to construct a case for a theocratic state where Christianity will be the state religion. Once the Central Government agrees that Christianity is an essential feature of the uniqueness of the Naga identity, the foundation of a theocratic state is laid; building on that foundation will follow Afterwards. Secessionism of Nagaland would likely be revived at a suitable juncture in future and a window is being kept open for that. This bodes ill for the plural character of Nagaland, in particular, and North-East, in general. Prof. J.S. Bhandari (1996), an anthropologist at the Delhi University, in his Foreword to ‘Nagas at Work’ notes the inevitability of the redefinition of the Naga identity in the light of profound changes introduced by Christianity in the following words:

The Nagas ...have undergone remarkable transformation in the last century and a half especially as a consequence of conversion to Christianity. The new faith which gradually spread throughout the region meant not only a shift in the religious beliefs but a total transformation of the Naga cognitive universe. This change in the worldview necessitated redefinition of their identity. [NSUD 1996, p. ix]

It is incumbent on the Central and State governments to ensure that the return of the NSCN-IM to the mainstream does not lead to institutionalisation of discrimination against the non-Christians. The Central Government must raise this issue with the NSCN-IM leadership in the next round of peace talks and the NSCN-IM has to be convinced that religious and linguistic plurality is the key to sustainable peace in the State. In Part-II of the article we will examine the linguistic facet of Naga identity, the changes foisted by the Church and the separatists, and the impact of that on the Naga society.

NOTE

1. Even as late as 1980s, according to the NSCN itself, the impact of outside world on the Naga populace inhabiting the Indo-Myanmarese border was almost nil. [Nag 2002, p. 284] For long Myanmarese Nagas have been coming to India for education and better employment opportunities [Bhattacharji 2002, pp. 177 and 186] For the information of the readers, in 2000 over 800 migrants and repatriates from Myanmar had registered themselves at different employment exchanges in India. [The Hindu 2003] However, the authors do not know how many of them were Myanmarese Nagas.

Following the military crackdown on the NSCN in neighbouring Myanmar in the first quarter of the 1990s around 100,000 Myanmarese Nagas were forced into Nagaland. [Nag 2002, p. 286] This westwards migration of the Myanmarese Nagas has long-term implications for the Naga society. Presently, an overwhelming majority of Nagas subscribe to Christianity in the State. However, Christianity did not have a meaningful presence among the Myanmarese Nagas even as late as 1980s. The Myanmarese Nagas have been living in close association with the Kachins, Kachins and Shans in that country. The Naga separatists from India have from the very beginning depended on the Kachins and Kachins for arms and training apart from safe havens. It needs to be noted that Kachins [Ghosh 2000b], Kachins [p. 674, Kachins, Vol. 6, Britannica 1986] and Shans were historically influenced by Buddhism to varying extents. Presently, among these groups the Kachins, like the Nagaland-based Nagas, have a Christian majority. [Ghosh 2000b] Only 10 per cent Kachins have embraced Christianity. [p. 674, Kachin State, Vol. 6, Britannica 1986] Similarly, only a small fraction of Shans has adopted Christianity. Historically, the Shans were greatly influenced by Buddhism as would be evident from the old manuscripts written in the Old Shan script, which is ultimately derived from the Brahmi script. [Diringer 1947] The point we are trying to make is that though the influence of mainstream Indian faiths on Nagas has been debated for long without any resolution we can with a far greater degree of certitude submit that Buddhism influenced the Nagas of Myanmar. Therefore, large numbers of Nagas pouring in across the border from Myanmar are bound to make the scene complicated for Naga separatists who for long have stressed the primacy of Christianity in the context of the Naga identity.

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'Spectacle' of Democracy in Times of Elections
About Shrinking Critical Space and Marginalised Collectivities

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The general elections of 2004 are different in many senses from the past. They not only give impressions of the transformed electoral agenda—an apparent shift from the communal and communitarian agenda of the BJP to a more 'development oriented agenda' (epitomised in the 'India Shining' campaigns)—but also the moods operandi of contesting elections. One of the major shifts appears to the spectacular and magnanimous 'involvement' of the film and television stars in politics. An impetuous eruption of interest in politics, to transform the society, is visible in their acts. There has been hardly a day without the film stars' faces spread over the front pages—from the luring beautiful faces to the apparently committed stars having long association with the progressive genre of cinema. The entry of film stars in politics has not been new to India with South India being the pioneer in successfully entertaining them in politics beginning with M.G. Ramachandran and then N.T. Rama Rao. Today, North India has its own two film stars—Shatrughan Sinha and Vinod Khanna—-as part of the Union Cabinet.

There is a big line-up of film stars in politics now—from Smiriti Malhotra Irani, Aman Verma, Sudha Chandran and Gajendra Chauhan etc. of the small screen to Hema Malini, Poonam Dhillon, Om Puri, Jeetendra, Govinda etc. The new trend following the overwhelmingly paid participation of film stars in the last round of Assembly elections in Delhi, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh is a furtherance of the way in which commodification of the democratic processes happens as well as the way in which public opinion loses its significance to the spectacle of images. This development has a certain deep lying significance, which needs to be unravelled. The freedom of film stars to participate in politics as individuals is not a problematic proposition. What jeopardises the need for critical thinking among the electorate and the subtle manipulation of their opinion is the wholesale trend of filmising the elections.

Transforming Images of Democracy

The elections ushered a spate of advertisement...