
Quest for Nagalim: Mapping of Perceptions Outside Nagaland

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Introduction

The Nagas of Nagaland could always identify themselves with the Naga identity due to being in a state named after their own collective identity. However, the Naga tribes outside Nagaland, especially those of Manipur and Assam, always had a strong reason to reassert their Naga-ness. The response to the idea of a separate Nagalim has been wide-ranging across the entire region affected by Naga insurgency.

A Framework Agreement was signed between the Government of India and the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN-IM) on August 03, 2015. The agreement affected four states and approximately 35 Naga and other ethnic tribes inhabiting the traditional Naga areas. The agreement set three crucial parameters for the detailed settlement. First, it recognised that the Naga ‘history and situation’ was unique. Second, it proposed that sovereign powers would be shared between the Centre and the Nagas through a division of competencies, that is, through renegotiating the Union, State and Concurrent Lists of competencies of the Indian Constitution. Third, the two sides would strive for a mutually acceptable and peaceful settlement.

While details of the accord are still shrouded in secrecy, it has been indicated that there will be no modification to the state boundaries. There

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are indications about facilitation of cultural integration of the Nagas through special measures, and provision of financial and administrative autonomy of the Naga dominated areas in other states.

Response from Naga Tribes in Manipur

There is speculation among the Nagas of Manipur with respect to the likely solution that may emerge out of the ongoing negotiations. The range of possibilities include: (i) greater autonomy only for the Nagas within the state of Nagaland with a statutory pan-Naga body with legislative, budgetary and negotiating powers for all the Naga inhabited areas; (ii) pending the integration of the Naga areas outside Nagaland into a single administrative unit, creation of Regional Autonomous District Councils for the Naga-inhabited districts of Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh and Assam, with greater autonomy for the Nagas only within the state of Nagaland; (iii) Special Naga Law (may be named as the Naga Constitution) incorporated in the Indian Constitution, with division of competencies between the Centre and the Nagas, with full rights to exploit all the natural resources by the Nagas within the Naga dominated areas. The Naga tribes of Manipur maintain the stance that the integration of all the Naga inhabited areas outside Nagaland into a single unit with an alternate system of administration is a non-negotiable factor in any resolution roadmap for the Nagas. At the same time, they are also apprehensive of the loss of land and property in the event of the imposition of the socialist ideology of the NSCN (IM) after a possible change of regime post successful conclusion of the ongoing negotiations. The responses of the major Naga tribes inhabiting the Naga areas of Manipur are given in the succeeding paragraphs.

The Mao

The Mao tribe inhabits the northern hills of Manipur bordering the areas of Nagaland. Not a single Mao village in Manipur participated in the

Naga plebiscite of 1951. The participation of people from the Mao tribe was led by one Beshikho Chaumai who joined the Naga National Council (NNC) in 1955. In the ensuing years, after the split within the NNC and later within the NSCN, the support of people from the Mao tribe also got divided.

Today, a majority of the Mao people believe the NSCN (IM) to be the sole voice of the Nagas in their quest for a separate Nagalim or Greater Nagaland. They support the ongoing peace talks between the Government of India and the NSCN (IM) and aspire for greater Naga unity through territorial integration of the Naga inhabited areas. The Maos are not in favour of centralised codification of their existing customary laws and practices as they prefer a federal structure for the Nagas, giving greater socio-political and cultural autonomy at the tribe / village level.

The Poumais

The Poumais were one of the largest Naga tribes before the colonial intervention. In 1950, people belonging to the Poumai tribe decided to pay tax to the Kohima administration, and live together with the Naga tribes of Nagaland. However, the Meitei King forced them to pay tax to the state of Manipur. This was opposed by the Poumais, and resulted in large scale violence in the region. Consequently, the administrative boundaries of the Poumai inhabited areas were redefined. This resulted in the fragmentation of Poumai territory and marginalisation of the tribe. Their traditional territory is now divided into three different administrative divisions viz, Phutsero in Nagaland, Somsai (Ukhrul) and areas of Senapati district in Manipur. They seek to integrate their territory as part of the proposed Nagalim. There is also rift between the Poumais and the Tangkhuls over the allegation of conversion of the people of Thiwa Poumai village into the Tangkhul tribe against the wishes of the people. In the past, there were indications of fissures between the people of the Poumai tribe and the NSCN (IM).

The Poumai community demands immediate withdrawal of the bifurcation of Shepoumaramth region allegedly created by the NSCN(IM) for so-called 'administration convenience'. The Poumais feel that certain quarters of the NSCN are working against the natural rights of the tribe behind the silver lining of the peace process. This makes the community feel betrayed.

The Poumai tribe stands for the territorial integration of the Naga inhabited areas. They support the ongoing Naga peace talks and seek greater integration between the NSCN(IM) and the tribal leaders under the aegis of the Naga People's Organisation (NPO) as part of the peace negotiations. They are opposed to the idea of centralised codification of Naga customary laws and practices, and believe that the same should be left to respective tribes to decide.

The Thangals

The Thangal population is divided in five constituencies in Manipur, which include Karong, Tadubi, Kangpokpi, Saitul and Saikul. They resent the division of traditional Thangal territory due to intervention by the NSCN(IM). The Shepou-Maram Administrative Region of the NSCN(IM) for the Naga tribes of north Manipur discounts the presence of the Thangal tribe in the Maram circle, and recognises their habitation only in the areas of the Shepou circle. This has resulted in the marginalisation of the Thangals in Manipur. The Thangals aspire for a distinct identity and prefer a centralised system of administration for the Nagas as against a federal system. Thangal leaders seek territorial integration of all the Naga inhabited areas under a single administration.

The Marams

The Marams believe that the current peace negotiations stand a greater chance of success as they appear more consultative and inclusive in nature. The review and consultative meetings involving apex Naga tribal

bodies and the NSCN(IM) are held on a regular basis as against the earlier days when the peace negotiations were restricted to a chosen few. They prefer a centralised system of administration for the Nagas. They want the jurisdiction over the customary practices to remain with individual tribes and seek greater involvement of tribal organisations in the Naga peace process.

The Tangkhuls

A civil society body known as the Manipur Naga Council was formed in 1956, merging with the NNC in 1957. Soon, the Tangkhuls started calling themselves Nagas and took the role of leadership in the Naga politics in Manipur. They felt the necessity of a common identity with a broad based foundation as part of the democratic set-up of government. They found a better alternative in the form of the Naga identity. The great awakening among the Tangkhuls for the ‘Naga’ identity aroused the spontaneous response from other tribes in Manipur to accept the term ‘Naga’ as their common identity. It is in this process that the Naga groups have united under the Naga identity, with each tribal group maintaining its separate entity in Manipur.¹

The Tangkhul extremists were not willing to become part of the numerically dominant Meitei society and, hence, they decided to join the revolution for Greater Nagaland. Ukhrul and Kamjong districts, with their overwhelmingly Tangkhul Naga population, support the call by the NSCN (IM) for the “integration of Naga-inhabited areas outside Nagaland into a single political unit of Greater Nagaland / Nagalim”. Tangkhul dominance in the NSCN (IM) top leadership is a cause for concern amongst the other Naga tribes in the outfit from Nagaland and Manipur.

The Tangkhuls look for greater emphasis on centralised governance for the Nagas as the existing arrangement under the Village Authority Act has proven to be ineffective. To them, integration of the Naga areas is

essential as it would result in bringing all the Naga tribes and areas under centralised governance. Mere cultural integration without territorial integration will not accrue major gains.

Tangkhul civil society leaders believe that codification of Naga customary laws and practices needs to be undertaken for all the tribes, based on consensus. However, they do not see the necessity of incorporating tribal organisations into the framework of the ongoing peace talks as they are confident of the present NSCN (IM) leadership working for their interests and aspirations. They are extremely upbeat and hopeful of an early resolution to the Naga issue.

The Tangkhuls in India still maintain close affinity with their Tangkhul brethren in Myanmar and continue to remain in touch with them through various civil exchange programmes and social obligations like festivals, etc. They aspire for a unified Nagalim, which includes the Naga inhabited areas of Myanmar.

The Zeliangrongs

The Heraka cult created by Jadonang was the first serious contest between the new social and religious order of the Naga Hills and the old beliefs.² The followers of Heraka amongst the Zeme tribe were sceptical of the intentions of the NNC (in the initial years of the Naga revolution) and later the NSCN-IM, for openly advocating a Christian ideology while suppressing other religious traditions. The Herakas say that the Naga claim for independence should be based solely on the common ethnic links and not on religious affiliations. While there is a conscious revival among the Christians to promote the idea of ‘Nagaland for Christ’ extending to all Naga inhabited areas, the Zeme Herakas respond with their own set of arguments. They suggest that, first of all, ‘Nagaland for Christ’ is touted only by fundamentalists, and, second, that the notion of ‘Zemehood’ is intrinsically linked with the reform message of the Heraka and, therefore, inseparable from the identity of a Zeme Naga.

While fighting for the cause of the Nagas, Zeliangrong land and resources have been facing threats at the Ntangki Reserve Forest in Nagaland, and Sadar Hills and Tousem Areas in Manipur. A large chunk of Zeliangrong land in the North Cachar (NC) Hills (Assam) was bartered away to appease the Dimasas. Many Zeliangrongs were killed and their properties destroyed by the Dimasas in the NC Hills and there was no one to defend them. Considering the situation at hand and taking cognisance of all the challenges, the Zeliangrong United Front (ZUF) was formed in 2011 with the aim of fulfilling the cherished dreams of the Zeliangrong people and other kindred tribes.³

The Zeme Naga tribe, part of the Zeliangrongs, in the North Cachar Hills district of Assam, has a sizeable population and they also form part of the greater Nagalim project of the NSCN (IM).⁴ A large population of the Rongmei and Liangmai tribes of the Zeliangrongs have also been supporting the NSCN (IM). Hence, there are two militant factions, with contesting agendas, amongst the Zeliangrongs.

Response from Naga Tribes in Assam

In the North Cachar Hills, the first recognisable outside 'religion' to come into contact with their world was Christianity, brought about by the Calvinistic Methodist Church of Wales (later known as the Presbyterian Church of Wales) missionaries in 1904.⁵ However, in the Zeme inhabited areas of the North Cachar Hills, Christian conversion was slow for various reasons; the progress was actively opposed by the Heraka. Two revivals in 1948 and 1978 strengthened the growth of Christianity in the region. The Baptist mission from Manipur had its first Zeme 'convert' from the Presbyterian Church. Over the years, Baptist churches gained popularity in the North Cachar Hills. The association of the NSCN (IM) with Baptist churches attracted the Baptist converts to support the insurgent outfit. However, there remains a parity between the Herakas (Zeme Nagas) and the followers

of Christianity (the later converts) in support for the issue of Nagalim in the areas of North Cachar Hills in Assam.

Response from Naga Tribes in Arunachal Pradesh

There is lot of scepticism amongst the tribes inhabiting Longding, Tirap, Changlang and part of the Lohit district of Arunachal Pradesh against the growing influence of Naga underground factions in the region. Longding district is predominantly inhabited by the Wanchos who have ethnic affinity with the Konyaks of Mon district. Over the years, the district has witnessed the influx of the NSCN(K), the NSCN (IM) and NSCN(R). Tirap district (Khonsa town, in particular), inhabited by the Noctes, has always been the traditional bone of contention between the NSCN(IM) and NSCN(K). The area of Changlang district is inhabited by the Tangsas and Tutsas. The NSCN(K) and NSCN(R) dominate most of the Changlang district, however, in the recent years, the NSCN(IM) has also been making inroads at a rapid pace.

In December 2012, a forum representing three Naga inhabited districts of Arunachal Pradesh submitted a memorandum to the Union Home Minister urging him to book the NSCN(IM) General Secretary, Th. Muivah, for all the alleged excesses committed by the outfit's cadres in the three districts. The memorandum alleged that apart from the miseries heaped on the people by the majority non-Nagas of Arunachal Pradesh, the people of Tirap, Changlang and Longding have to bear the brunt of the atrocities of the NSCN(IM) cadres,. The memorandum further cautioned that "if the Government of India is incapable of assuring safety of the people, the time is not far when people of the region will rise and prepare to defend themselves".

The NSCN(IM), in recent years, launched the Operation Salvation scheme with the intent to propagate Christianity among the Nocte, Wancho, Tutsa and Tangsa tribes. In view of the ban on the entry of Christian missionaries, the underground outfits use their own cadres as

pastors and priests to freely circulate, and propagate the religion among the tribes of the state. The tactics being used are to, first, convert the people to Christianity, and then, through the Church, engage in a sustained campaign to achieve the goal of changing their identities; once these small tribes declare themselves as Nagas, the territorial claim over their land as Greater Nagalim would follow⁶

The Meiteis and the Nagas

The Meiteis assert that their culture is a fusion of Naga and Meitei cultures. The Meiteis are disillusioned by the discourse of a separate identity and historical exclusivity of the Nagas. They emphasise upon the pluralistic culture of their state and maintain the stance that the Nagas of Manipur are integral to the state's history and evolution. The term Naga, according to the Meiteis, has never been applied to the hill tribes of Manipur by the Ahoms and the British, as the same was limited to the Naga tribes of present-day Nagaland. As per the states' narrative Raja Pamheiba belonged to the hill tribe (Naga), and was conferred the title of *Gharib Nawaz* by the Meitei Pangals (Muslims) for his benevolence.

In the real sense, the relationship between the Nagas and the Meiteis is, firstly, due to geographical proximity, both in terms of historical interpretations as well as its claimants in modern-day politics, and politicisation.⁷ Historically, there has been socio-economic as well as cultural interaction between the two communities. Markets located in Manipur valley were visited by the Angamis for commercial purposes. The Meiteis interacted with the people from the Mao tribe through the Marams by way of trade relationships. The perspective of the Meiteis on the Zeliangrong movement and their historical relations were closely interrelated⁸.

However, after the advent of the British, the relationship between the two communities had been deteriorating steadily. In recent times, the existing bitterness between the Nagas and the Meiteis is fuelled by

capitalisation of ethnic politics and hegemony that prevails in the region. The Meiteis perceive the movement for Naga integration as a ‘dangerous’ game of ethnic politics and conflict. A controversy erupted between the two communities over the issue of the ceasefire area coverage as part of agreement between the Government of India and NSCN(IM) in 2001. The Meiteis, including the Meitei Pangals (Muslims), were united in a mass movement against the decision to extend the Naga ceasefire to the Naga-dominated hill districts of Manipur (Chandel, Ukhrul, Senapati and Tamenglong).

The Naga demand for the creation of a separate state adversely affects the territorial boundary of Manipur. The Meiteis are deeply apprehensive that the current peace process could end up in balkanisation of Manipur. Geographically, the hills constitute 70 per cent of Manipur’s territory and any further slicing of territory would leave Manipur at a disadvantage. Even the Manipur State Legislative Assembly has resolved to protect Manipur territorial integration. The Meiteis are apprehensive of the demand raised by the Nagas under the aegis of the United Naga Council (UNC) for an alternate arrangement of administration, and introduction of the provisions of the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution in the Naga inhabited districts of Manipur.

In December 2016, the creation of seven new districts, including Sadar Hills, was declared by the Manipur government. This further fragmented the Naga inhabited areas and resulted in dilution of Naga majorities in the hill districts of Manipur. The declaration was strongly opposed by the Nagas under the aegis of the UNC. The protests resulted in the longest ever economic blockade in the state in 2016-17. The issue is presently being discussed trilaterally between the Government of India, the Manipur state government and the UNC.

The Kukis and the Nagas

The Kuki-Naga hostilities go back to the 1917 Kuki revolt against the

British in which the Kabuis, Thangkuls and Koms suffered from violent attacks by the Kukis during these clashes. The Kukis claimed the refusal of the hill and valley people to join the Kuki rebels in attacking the British, as the main reason for attacking the other groups during their revolt against the British.

The history of the inter-ethnic relationship between the Kukis and the Nagas reached a tipping point with the breaking out of ethnic clashes between the two in 1992.⁹ Although the physical violence has ceased, the wounds of past miseries are apparently yet to be healed. To restore peace and normalcy between the two, the Kuki groups put forward two important demands to the Nagas and the Government of India. First, the Kuki Inpi Manipur (KIM), want the NSCN-IM, to make an formal apology for their heinous crimes, and perform Kuki customary rites such as paying *Luongman* (corpse price) and doing *Tol-theh* (cleaning the house for shedding human blood). Second, the Kukis demand that the Indian government should compensate for the loss of lives and properties to thousands of displaced victims. The growing mistrust, if allowed to continue, may result in sowing the seeds of war between the Kukis and Nagas.¹⁰

Since the early 1970s, the Sadar Hills District Demand Committee (SHDDC), predominantly from the Kuki tribes, demanded the separate revenue district of Sadar Hills.¹¹ The Manipur government gave an assurance to the Kukis about the upgradation of the Sadar Hills (mainly comprising the Kuki inhabited areas of Senapati district) into a full-fledged revenue district by signing a memorandum of understanding with the SHDDC on October 31, 2011. In December 2016, the Manipur government declared the creation of seven new districts, including the Sadar Hills district in the state. Though the declaration satisfied the Kukis, the same was opposed by the Naga bodies under the aegis of the UNC who vowed to intensify their movement against the declaration.¹²

The rebellion in the hill district amongst the Kukis has been specifically to resist the NSCN-IM and Tangkhul domination. Any move of the Indian state favouring the NSCN-IM is typically construed by the Kukis as going against their interests. They accuse the Indian government of holding high-level talks with the NSCN-IM, which the Indian government once labelled as a ‘terrorist organisation’, while ignoring the Kuki Inpi Manipur (KIM) leaders’ repeated requests for personal interviews with successive Indian Prime Ministers.¹³ The KIM and Kuki Organisation for Human Rights (KOHR) see the constitution of a High Level Committee (HLC) on an ‘alternative arrangement’ for the Nagas in Manipur as sowing the seeds of communal disharmony, ushering in the divide and rule policy amongst the people of Manipur and aiming to revive violence against innocent people.¹⁴

The Kuki tribal leaders believe that any new arrangement for the Nagas consequent to the ongoing peace talks will adversely impact the non-Nagas and may disturb the prevailing peace in the region. It may aggravate simmering disputes over the areas of jurisdiction claimed by the respective ethnic groups in Manipur. The Kukis fear that the demand for Naga integration, if accepted and approved by the Government of India, may result in the Kukis becoming minorities in their own areas. They seek parallel talks with the Government of India before the resolution of the Naga issue. The declaration of seven new districts in the state of Manipur has led to bifurcation of all the Naga dominated districts in the state. Noney district has been carved out of Tamenglong district, resulting in increasing the population parity of Naga vs Kuki inhabitants in the newly created Noney district. The slicing of Kamjong out of the earlier Naga stronghold of Ukhrul district has diluted the Naga dominance in Kamjong district; the split of Tengnoupal and Chandel has resulted in marginalisation of the erstwhile Naga domination in the region; and the creation of a full-fledged district of Sadar Hills out of Senapati has further infuriated the Nagas. Given these major unresolved issues, tensions between the two ethnic groups continue.

Non-Naga Tribes within Nagaland and Their Response to the Naga Issue

The Kacharis and Kukis of Dimapur and Peren share a number of common features. Their traditional strongholds are located in southwestern Nagaland, sandwiched between Assam and Manipur. This area contains most of the fertile plain area of Nagaland and, thus, attracts Naga tribes from the hills. Consequent to the fear of isolation, many Kacharis sold their land and migrated to Assam. The Kukis too had to abandon their land surrounded by the Naga areas.

These tribes are located close to Dimapur and Kohima, which are important urban centres, providing excellent scope for business as well as political activities. However, this location advantage has not translated into better infrastructure and economic gain for these tribes. Both the tribes are underrepresented in government jobs. The underrepresentation of the Kukis is surprising because they are Nagaland's second most literate community. Moreover, these tribes have remained unrepresented in the State Assembly since the late 1980s.

However, factors other than small size explain the marginalisation of these tribes. First, each of them belongs to a larger tribal conglomeration, a majority of whose population is located outside Nagaland. While the bulk of the Kukis are located in Manipur, the Kacharis are concentrated in Assam. Second, their kin outside Nagaland have been demanding separate Dimasa (Kachari) and Kuki states that would include parts of southwestern Nagaland.

The Dimasas claim Nagaland's most important town Dimapur, which was the capital of the medieval Kachari kingdom. If the Nagalim vision becomes a reality, the Dimasa population, represented by militant groups, and premised on the ideology of carving out a separate Dimasa homeland, the "Dimaraji Kingdom" comprising the Dimasa-inhabited areas of North Cachar Hills, Karbi Anglong, parts of Nowgaon district in Assam, and parts of Dimapur district of Nagaland, is likely to launch a

violent reactive movement. This will surely recreate a situation of ethnic violence and tension.

The Aboms and the Nagas

In the recent times, the Assam government has been totally against parting with its territory in the territorial designs of Greater Nagaland / Nagalim. The all Assam Students Union (AASU) maintains the stance that the territory belonging to the state of Assam will not be allowed to form part of any of the Naga areas territorial councils. One of the most active and dreaded Assamese insurgent outfits, the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), despite receiving its initial training at the time of its raising from the NSCN(IM), also maintains a stance that the latter's claim of eight Assam districts as part of Nagalim has "neither credibility nor any historical basis". They have asked NSCN(IM) to remove all Assamese districts from the map of the proposed Nagalim.

Nagas of Myanmar and the Quest for Nagalim

The ancestral territory of the Nagas in Myanmar reaches Kalaywa on the far south, Daung Thone Lone (Three Hills) on the east and Tanai of Kachin state, presently on the north. But while drafting the Constitution in 1974, the Naga territory was sliced into a smaller one that included only one district i.e. Khamti district, with five townships: Khamti, Homlin, Layshi, Lahe and Namyung. The Naga territory was again shrunk in the 2008 drafting of the Constitution, according to which, only the hill towns of Layshi, Lahe and Namyung were marked as the Naga territory, called Naga Self-Administered Zone (NSAZ), but without including Khamti and Homlin, the two important towns of the Nagas. This has created a lot of resentment among the ten Naga tribes and put them into confrontation with the Government of Myanmar.

Territorial Claims by the Neighbours

The Chins, who are the southern neighbours of the Nagas in Myanmar, say that the Nagas are a tribe of the Chin family and claim that Mt. Saramati (which is located in the Naga Hills district) is the highest peak in Chinland. They count the Nagas as Chins and claim the Naga territory to be part of Chinland. This has created a lot of resentment among the Naga tribes, as the Chins lay claim on nearly one-third of the Naga territory in Myanmar. Several Naga organisations like the NNLD (Naga National League for Democracy), despite clarifying their stance on this issue, are apprehensive of its potential to create destructive chaos among the neighbours and its adverse impact on peaceful coexistence in the future.

In the northern part of eastern Nagaland, the Tanai township is presently under the Kachin state and, thus, based on the status quo. The Kachin neighbours claim that it belongs to the Kachin people, as part of Kachinland. But, according to the Nagas, this claim is historically incorrect, as the claimed territory belongs to the ancestral land of the Nagas.

In the Framework Agreement signed between the Government of India and the NSCN(IM), there is no mention of what the Nagas call Eastern Nagas or the Naga inhabited areas inside Myanmar. Yet, both the NNC and NSCN, before and after the split, had discarded the division of the Naga homelands by the Anglo-Burmese Yandabo Agreement of 1826, and, later in 1953, under the Indo-Burmese demarcation in Kohima on the Naga territory by Pandit Nehru and U Nu, the then Prime Ministers of the two countries.

Conclusion

The idea of a solution for the Naga issue is different among different tribes. Some tribes favour a centralised administration for all the Nagas, whereas others prefer a federal arrangement, with greater autonomy to the Village Authorities. Besides, tribes such as the Poumai and Thangal aim to unify their traditional territory as part of the new arrangement,

which, at a later stage, may become the cause for a inter-tribal rift among the Nagas. Since the areas of some of these tribes extend into other states, it may further complicate the issue.

The Tangkhuls' dominance and diktats are clearly discernible in their version of the solution for the Nagas. Seemingly, they tend to undermine the role of the Village Authorities in the administration of individual villages / tribes. The Zeliangrongs, on the other hand, are further divided on the issue of religious practices, besides a parallel demand for a separate Zeliangrong homeland.

The issue of centralised codification of the customary laws is also contested by a majority of the Naga tribes of Manipur, except the Tangkhuls. Only the issue of territorial integration of the Naga inhabited areas under a single administration finds a united stance by all the Naga tribes of Manipur. The Nagas of Manipur completely support the ongoing peace negotiations between the Government of India and the NSCN(IM).

The association of the NSCN(IM) with the Baptist churches attracted the Baptist converts to support the insurgent outfit. However, there remains parity between the Herakas (Zeme Nagas) and the followers of Christianity (the later converts) in support for the issue of Nagalim in the areas of the North Cachar Hills in Assam.

The people of the three Naga inhabited districts of Arunachal Pradesh are completely against the presence of the NSCN(IM) and its activities in the state. The tribal leaders perceive a huge disparity between the aspirations of the NSCN(IM) and the inhabitants of the three districts. They demand that the these districts combined be granted the status of a Union Territory under the direct control of the central government as they are not willing to part with either the state of Arunachal Pradesh or with Nagalim.¹⁵

The existing bitterness between the Nagas and the Meiteis is fuelled by the capitalisation of the ethnic politics and hegemony that prevails

in the state of Manipur. The Meiteis perceive the movement for Naga integration as a ‘dangerous’ game of ethnic politics and conflict. The Kukis fear that the demand for Naga integration, if accepted and approved by the Government of India, may result in the Kukis becoming minorities in their own areas. They seek parallel talks with the Government of India before resolving the Naga issue. Even if they settle the simmering land dispute and reconcile over other differences among themselves, the Meiteis are likely to oppose any attempt to break up Manipur.¹⁶

If the Nagalim vision becomes a reality, the Dimasa population, represented by militant groups, and premised on the ideology of carving out a separate Dimasa homeland, the “Dimaraji Kingdom” comprising the Dimasa-inhabited areas of the North Cachar Hills, Karbi Anglong, parts of Nowgaon district in Assam, and parts of Dimapur district of Nagaland, is likely to launch a violent reactive movement. This may recreate a situation of ethnic violence and tension in the region.

There has been lot of resentment and feeling of marginalisation among the Naga tribes based in Myanmar. This has put them into confrontation with the Government of Myanmar and has strengthened their support for the bigger Naga movement.

Notes

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