

## **Naga Nationalism's Dilemma over Meanings, Politics and Religion**

Elija Chara

When 'Naga' is discussed, it begins with the primordial cosmology and then to colonial politics and armed conflict with India, by a romanticised desperate tribal group, for a modern state. Apart from this, there is limited focus to understand the Nagas' national political philosophies and methodologies. The paper examines the theological interpretation of Naga nationalism. It first defines the features of the Naga nation, patriotism, nationalism and state, and then explores the history of national movement to locate the ideological discourses and conflicts that transformed to the origination of the Naga theopolitical theme - 'Nagalim for Christ'. At the heart of the examination is the Nagas' patriotic psychology, national and spiritual dilemma, that attempts to bring about reconciliation among nationalism, armed conflict, political ideologies, theology and modernism, which is largely misinterpreted by outsiders. The positives and negatives of mixing nationalism and religion are critically examined to question the Nagas' being on self-determination, at the same time attempt is made to understand if Naga nationalism's onto-theological nature is a reconciliation, or escapade or for notification, or a forced consciousness.

**Keywords:** Naga, nationalism, theology, ideology, modernism

### **Introduction**

Naga nationalism has been understood in different ways - as secessionist movement, tribal movement, and militancy so on, with primary focus on the Indo-Naga political interactions. For the Nagas, it is about the Right to Self Determination to be recognised and have their own independent homeland called Nagalim. Whereas the dominant presentations on the Naga nationalism have so far been limited to the arms movement/ conflict, there is limitation in the field of the Naga ideology which should also be the primary focus. It is this political ideology that has been sustaining the movement for

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decades, at the same time creates division within the Nagas. Although the Nagas is heterogeneous conglomeration of different ethnic groups, the political vision of a shared nationality and homeland binds belittles the differences. When these cultural differences are negotiating and accommodating for the national interests, the nationalism ideology that is spearheading the movement is disillusioned unable to make a firm political standpoint.

One of the main feature for a nation to be sustainable remains in its ability to define and defend itself. This however is questionable in the Naga's case. Starting from the early phases of the movement, the Nagas always depend on an external element for answers to its personal meanings. For instance, depending on the definitions assigned by British administrators for the meaning of Naga, emphasis on western political institutions for Nagalim, and most importantly- extra emphasis on a western religion- Christianity. Naga nationalism and Christianity go hand in hand, beginning from the entry of the British Empire with their Christianity to the Naga Hills to the present churches' apathy to non-Christian nations and peoples. To present itself as a determinant nation, the Naga has been experimenting to find the appropriate meanings for its cause- federalism, socialism, theocracy, tribalism and *militarism*. In all these experiments, what the Naga failed its inability to comprehend its determinant vision with the ideologies as it is psychologically immature. On this theme of Nagas' experiments for meanings of nationalism, the paper explores the role of religion in the Naga movement and its impact in the Naga cultural identity.

The objectives of the paper are i) to explore the Nagas' vision of nationalism and, ii) to analyse the impact of religion on the identity, culture and politics. On these thematic objectives, the research explores, analyses and debate the unending ideological quest of the Naga. The purpose of the paper is clearly not to provide answers; rather it is to problematise the issues that the Nagas are unwilling to discuss openly. At the same time, it provides an alternative account of the Nagas' nationalism from a conceptual and ideological point of view rather than from a movement perspective. Multiple individuals are purposively interviewed and supplemented by additional literatures, which are analysed in a critical manner for a synthetic presentation. The nature of presentation takes a post-modern approach, so as to raise further personal questions for the self. On ethical grounds, the research participants are presented anonymously. Keeping in mind the questions of objectivity, subjectivity, insider and outsider, the presentation targets the inside (Naga) and outside (others) to contest the popular beliefs, myths and answers of the Naga Nation.

The paper consists of the following sections i) Means and Meanings on Naga?, ii) Naga;s Nation and Nationalism, iii) Religion in National Politics, iv) Political Answer in Christianity and v) Atonement and Modernism: National Divine Nagalim.

### **Means and Meanings on Naga?**

Defining the Naga identity is modernly subjective. The everyday usage is also contradictory in nature.

Whereas the Nagas declare, and they do with pride, to be nation, of sovereign identity, on the other hand, most Naga discussions are on the context of tribe, the

anthropological pre-modern people. It is not that Nagas' thematic nation is less interesting, but one cannot simply and easily move away from the constructed past when past legacies are romantically embedded in the social, political and academic psychology; for that matter, neither the Nagas nor the mainstream, not Nagas, are engaging critically to demystify the Naga mysteries: while the insider Nagas cannot shrug away from the past ghost, the 'outsiders, not Nagas'<sup>1</sup>, also contribute in stereotype psychology to the extent of making the Nagas confused over themselves. What is a nation? What is a nation-state? These are disinteresting questions of, for, the Naga tribal community, and a state of emotional atonement for the Naga national community. These disinteresting and atonement are, one of the, the reasons for Nagas continuous overstaying in a time stuck and the nation question shrouded in unanswered controversies.

Naga is understood as nation relative to objective definitions and subjective assertions, a nation that aspires for a sovereign, recognised and acknowledged space in the world. On Naga, as nation and on its nationalism events, there are enough and enough observations and discussions made, of then are described as Naga national movement, associating and in conflict with India or Myanmar (Burma); however, despite observations and discussions, there is still a critical lag in grounding events for Naga nationalism (conflicts) to be in dialogue with nationalism philosophies and theories, apart from those conceptual allegations, conspiracies and assumptions that act as everyday teleological interpretation of the Naga, its nationalism. Then, to initiate, a paradigm study and analysis of the Naga is, due to multiple insider and outsider issues, are left with more unanswered questions than answers- questions raised by the Nagas and answers refused by the Nagas<sup>2</sup>; it is intriguing to be in dialogue with the Naga, nation, when the Naga thinks one way and the rationale stands the other way, making any attempts to re-analyse, in a critical manner, the Naga a debate of whether to continue with the assignment default or to critically examine: to continue the assignment, default approach, is easy, but too mainstream and somehow fails to provide any critical thinking and challenging outcomes other than the usual documentation sans dialogue, whereas to critically engage with the Naga is also to consciously enrage the Naga, indirect means and ends, and the Nagas' sentimental patriotism and Nagalim's divinity.

Of the Nagas nationalism, there are multiple explanations grounded from varieties of analytical positions. For the Nagas, it is a national movement for independence, to establish a sovereign nation-state, Naga homeland (Nagalim); on the other hand, romantic social anthropologists somehow interpret it as tribal movement for self determination, or political anthropological explanation as resistance movement, while the participating states treating it as rebel-secessionist-arms-militant movements, a security issue etc: the explanations are contextualised to movements, the Naga modus operandi, that is how the Naga nationalism is largely interpreted and constructed, in a romanticised form. The engagements, thus, so far have not yet engage with the themes of nationalism, the philosophy, and for that, the idea of nationalism, so far, is limited to methodology, the nation praxis, the Nagas experiences and mode of operation, to attain the statehood. Critics, mostly not-Nagas, for obvious primordial and methodical reasons, tried to explain Naga nationalism, yet these trials failed to

offer nationalism explanation in trying to explain ‘*why Nagas should not...*’; for that, the critics, non-Naga approach, did/do not offer explanation, rather are mostly of dismissing Naga nationalism without even understanding the Naga nationalism-lack of sound ontological foundation due to objective sentimental diversion. As Geertz (2000) (from Ladd, 1982) states ‘So lumbering an approach to the matter all the definitions are framed by opponents of they are absolutists’, perhaps the Naga nationalism, which is generally acquainted, is what is that is defined by an outsider, not-Naga; this however does not mean Nagas are not self definitive, they are not as critical as the outsider, limited by ‘patriotic psychology’<sup>3</sup>.

To know the Naga nation, it is to firstly understand the philosophy and foundation of the nationalism. Without that, the knowing of Naga nation becomes from a far sighted view that may/(have) contribute(d) to the contemporary Naga social disillusionment over their identity (nation or not a nation) and self determination (deserve or undeserving), and further discussions on Naga nation somehow remains haunted with the ghost of militancy. When the general, mainstream and contemporary, interpretations of nationalism strictly is methodical to the state (for a nation-state), it also becomes somewhat difficult to bring Naga and nation into a dialogue; anyways, where to start the Naga nationalism is also a challenge.

Naga nationalism, as understood for this paper, is a ‘modern phenomenon, as part of the global political movement’ (Hutchinson & Smith, 1994) consisting of ‘necessary populist’ (Nairn, 1977) ‘secular millenarianism’ (Kedourie, 1960), ‘cultural movement’ (Hutchinson, 1987), ‘mass consciousness’ (Connor, 1990) , self determination, so on and so forth. The kind of Naga nationalism is a melting pot of pluralism- nationalisms within nationalism, nations within nation, with sometimes, the different ideologies and paths clashing and challenging each another. Otherwise, Naga nationalism is an accommodative and transformative-evolving form of nationalism; it’s nature undergoing metamorphosis as the Nagas also undergo changes, due to events and political and cultural influences from outside. The Naga was/is not an isolate in its development and evolving stages, although it is interpreted unconsciously by many Nagas, even to the extent of asserting it through the political theme, Naga is a unique nation. In fact, ‘the unique history of Nagas’ has become the theme of Naga nationalism; unfortunately, what is the unique that makes Naga a unique nation remains ambiguous; thus, if this ‘unique has to be resurrected there are questions of what, which and why’ (Mattosian, 1962) without which, Naga nationalism becomes (Gellner, 1983) myth that nation is natural.

The nature of Naga nationalism is thus a heterogeneous ends. It is a mixture, a by-product, a cocktail, of ideologies, events, discourses, conflicts and visions. The present form of nationalism is the result of accumulated historical events; can be illustrated through the dialectical triad- thesis and anti-thesis for the synthesis. These events of discourses for the nationalism synthesis will be discussed *followingly*; but before that, it is to be noted that the objective of synthesising the Naga nationalism is to trace and analyse, and theorise, the philosophical foundation of the Naga nation, and thus, to also locate the political history of contemporary Nationalism theme: Nagalim for Christ. This theme is *hotly* debated politically, theologically and culturally,

and generally misinterpreted out of context by outsiders, not-Nagas, in an attempt to critically ignore the Nagas' nationalism, and then the Nagas also are morally apologetic against nationalism over such theme. In fact, this Nagalim for Christ, as the thematic synthesis, also presents the conflicts and dynamics among the Nagas, and indirectly is a reflective legacy of the cold war politics.

### **Naga's Nation and Nationalism**

The Naga, as asserted by Nagas, '*is a unique nation with a unique history*' (generic statement). What is and constitutes this unique is a question, (even for that matter every nation in the world is unique that is why nations are nations). Conceptualising a methodology for the Naga nation is difficult, and controversial, and contradictory. To theorise the Naga nation is also a challenge. One of the reasons lies in the 'history of its development' (Backhouse, 2011), there is also altogether no consensus among Nagas on the birth of the nation. When discussed generally, 'a section of Nagas trace the element of nationhood to ancient historical existence, *that Nagas were always nation* while others tried tracing back to colonialism and associated period. In these two paths of tracing, there is some sort consensual theme: that Nagas, no matter historical or post-colonial in origin, are a nation in ends from the means of resistance that they are not Indian or Burmese. erhaps, beyond that, there is no concrete explanation or that the explanations are tautological in nature.

In a handbook document of Concerned Senior Citizens' Forum (2006), it is put forward that the Nagas are "a nation because they belong to a community of people having every pre-requisite qualification to be termed as a nation. And Nagas are claiming nationality because they are a nation". Jamir, Naga activist, (1993) makes a bold statement that 'Nagas are not Indian or Burmese'; this same statement is also asserted by the Nagas in everyday talks. This has become the de facto defining figure of Naga's nationhood. The concept of nation, even as a term, is relatively new to the Nagas, not yet deciphered or contextualised, but widely used, even without definitive awareness. This results in inconclusive explanation of the Naga by the Naga, even to the extent of complete out of context paradigm usage. Even though terms like 'nation' and 'nationalism' are widely used, the meanings are somewhere else, such that even when a Naga talks of a nation it is highly doubtful to follow the 'nation' nation, and many times interchanged and inter-used with other terms like tribe, state, sovereignty and citizenship, rendering into deeper confusion. The question is that, how comes Nagas are nation when they do not know what nation means, or perhaps they interpreted nation to something else relating to sovereignty and state. A usual daily discussion on nation is on insurgency, independence, India, Burma, separatism, secessionism, but what exactly is a nation remains a political mystery, which even the political leaders could not comprehend.

Even if there is no definite definition of nation, for defining the Naga, there is still usage of nation in a naturalised romantic way. Generally, (Naga's) nation, for the Naga, is in nascent stage, has not yet been grounded from theoretical perspective; the everyday utilisation in extreme, very minimal, case shows that nation is *something* related to state, a sovereign political institution, and citizenship, otherwise the space

of Naga has not yet graduated from the anthropological identity. Through this, it can be said that Nagas view on nation is part of anthropological schema, a modern identity, an evolved state of identity; in that, when the Nagas mean 'nation', it refers to the unchanging natural identity, an evolved identity, in hand with political sovereignty, somehow related to ethnicity, race, tribe and citizenship: nation is natural, organic and eternal. So, the Nagas' nation can be interpreted as a natural sovereign identity, primordially inherent and geographically contained. Iralu (2009) tries to explain the nation, of the Naga, with three proposals known as Universal Law (of nation): i) No nation on earth exists without a geographical land, ii) the national identity of a nation is inseparable from the geographical identity of that nation, iii) the national and geographical identities of a nation are indestructible and unchangeable.

How do Nagas know they are nation? This is a challenging question, and the premise is as similar as the development of the word Naga. It is agreed by the Nagas that the term *Naga* is not of an inside origin, rather a nomenclature from an outside, especially during the colonial (*British*) period. It is not known how the word *Naga* originate, but the legitimacy of the word, as widely argued by researchers and academicians, is derived from colonial period's 'gazetteers, documents and literatures' which assigned the word 'Naga' to a heterogeneous group of people, for anthropological and administrative convenience. Thus, the Naga, the term, was rooted to anthropology rather than politics, grounded on tribal, primitive and barbaric characteristics. And *how is this related to Naga's nation identity?* is a big question that confuses the Nagas, at the same time. As much as the word Naga is alien in origin, with its meanings established by *outsiders*. Regarding this, Johnstone (1896) suggested that the etymological root of word, Naga, is from Assamese word 'Noga'. Hutton (1921) and Mills (1926) also give the meaning of Naga. These literatures represent the classical colonial writings on Naga, and have been used as reference ever since to explain the meaning of Naga, for instance, Horam (1975), cited by Shimray (2007), writes that the term, Naga, was probably used for them by the plainsmen, which is an inspired colonial legacy, which is in congruent as suggested by Johnstone (1896).

Naga's idea of being a *nation* also has an outside, not-Naga, *ontological* position. Gandhi's statement on July 19, 1947 that 'Nagas have every right to be independent' is something of a slogan, *a theme*, of asserting the Naga nationhood by the Nagas. Another case is 'Narayan and Scott's declaration to the world that the Naga is unquestionably a nation is considered a national assertive recognition by Nagas. NNC in a 1947 stated that there is no argument to justify that the Nagas are a separate people, with their own customs, traditions, and culture' Concerned Senior Citizens Forum, 2006). These statements were of asserting the Nagas' identity as nation, but they did not explain the nature of the 'nation', that is, *what kind of nation is Naga nation?*

The Naga Club in its memorandum to the Simon Commission in 1929 defines the Nagas as belonging to distinct culture, language, *and discriminated by the plainsmen (Indians)*. In a Memorandum of the Case of the Naga People for Self Determination and an Appeal to the H.M.G and Government of India (1947),

‘Sakhrie writes that Nagas are ethnically different stock (from India and Burma), Nagas have distinct social life, manner of living, laws and customs and governance, Nagas follow traditional religions and Christianity, not same with India and Burma’ (Lasuh & Nuh, 2002). The Naga National Council in its Yezhabo (Constitution) also endorses only a homogeneous identity citizenship throughout Nagaland, and it discourages the existence of sub-nation (*tribal unit level*) identity within the Naga.

In a plebiscite held in 1951, Phizo, the Naga leader of the period, declared that Nagas are not Indians, and they are distinctly and unmistakably different race. He further stated that nationality is not a question of racial purity of the people and politics, but a manifestation of biological and psychological factors that is distinctive. According to Phizo, Naga nationalism is based on human principles of individual responsibility, sharing collectively the common weal and woe together; as long as the community group is a living and dynamic institution, it shall make one to be patriotic and nationalistic (Lasuh & Nuh, 2002). Naga nationalism can be said to be cultivated on the belief of distinct people, distinct country and outside the influence of any external nation, with the primary goal to develop one’s culture, preserve primordial elements by not diluting with alien/external ideologies and practices. Despite the leaders’ summation of nation on which the nationalism should be based, Nagas in general are unable to comprehend their nation’s nation.

For the purpose of conceptual critique, the nation Naga can be summarised as a heterogeneous ‘imagined community which is conceived deep and horizontal’ (Anderson, 1983). To be exact, it is a nation without a state, a nation that is not recognised and lack political sovereignty. If grounded from personal communications from the field, Nagas see nation as sovereign people with sovereign state and government; nation is nationality, nation is citizenship and nation is race, quite contradictory. Quite contrary to the nature of defining nation, Nagas’s nation again goes hand in hand with the term *tribe*. Perhaps, Nagas know that nation is a group of people, citizens of state, with similar language, culture and history, but they are unable to be politically actualised with the meanings as it failed to suit their taste. The ecology of tribal identity was experimented for Naga nation, but it failed to generate objective outcome as the Nagas build a boundary between tribe and nation: that, nation is modern and tribe is primitive.

As a perceived modern nation, the Naga nationalism is swaying from its roots of tribal identity to something that can be *substantive* and common for all. In the search for nation answer, Nagas are somehow contented that Naga/Nagalim is divine, unchanging, eternal, sentimental, and emotional and geographically-state bounded. Nationalism is not viewed as a conscious process of building, asserting, promotion and political deliverance of/by nation. Instead, the Naga nation, and the ultimate, Nagalim find solace in religion: Christianity. Amongst all the political themes and slogans of the Nagas, the most relevant and socially comprehensible is ‘Nagalim for Christ’ under which Nagas view Nationalism as a divine apocalyptic space where Nagas and Christ can interact. In fact, religion has played primary role in shaping

and re-shaping of the nationalism, such that nationalism which is a political discourse has become more of a spiritual invocation of the Nagas. It is through this line of religion, the research (and the paper) explores the history and discourse of Naga Nationalism's attempt to give meaning to itself.

### **Religion in National Politics**

The history of Naga nationalism is political and cultural conflicts: inter conflicts for Nagas' sovereignty (between Nagas, India and Burma) and intra conflicts (within the Nagas). These conflicts establish, strengthen and help evolve the interpretation of nation; through the conflict discourse, the nature of the nationalism sways between political ideologies, at the same time, a self conflict stage over the question of ideology, modernity and continuity.

The political movement for sovereignty of identity and nation, known as the Naga national movement, is a modern event, established during the colonial period and continues to post-colonisation. Initially, the movement centred on protection of identity from being colonised and post-colonial sovereignty, and then evolved to nation-state identity and ideological identity. Along this inter-conflict is embedded the intra-conflict, the conflict within the Nagas that ravaged the political-sociology, divides the Nagas and disillusioned them; which however is of another debate subject. Naga nationalism, its nature, was about enlightenment, self discovery, attempt to create space and resistance of cultural imposition; these factors are rooted to experiences and reactions to certain political events, movements. Naga researchers pointed that modern Naga, the nation as we know of today, was born aftermath of the World War I. Nagas served as labour corps in France; during their stay, they observe the political events and dialogues of Europe, got inspired and thereby a sense of solidarity and fraternity bond formed among the Naga labour corps, who would otherwise be pitted against each other back home. Nagas were previously introduced to a new religion, Christianity, which helped in transformation of their worldviews, interactions and identity; the Christian principles of 'forgiveness' was successful in instilling peaceful coexistence and solidarity among the Nagas.

The Naga self discovery, as a modern organism, can be attributed to the new culture associated with the new religion, Christianity, either in the form of acceptance or resistance. It is not that Nagas were not aware of their identity before Christianity arrived, brought with colonialism, the concept of solidarity, oneness and modernity began to be conceptualised only after interaction with the new religion. Prior to colonial experience, Nagas, as tribes, were surrounded by communities following established religions, Hinduism by Assamese and Meiteis and Buddhism by Burmese; the cultural-praxis factor associated with the Hinduism and Buddhism isolated the Nagas who were animistic, and thus considered, along with the cultural practice, as primitive and socially inferior. This social discrimination against the Nagas from communities with established religion was reflected in the Naga Club's memorandum to the Simon Commission, 1929, when 'religion was brought up as one of the reasons Nagas would not be willing to participate in the nation formation of India, and Burma, as the Nagas felt that Hinduism, and Islam and Buddhism, had not historically accommodated



the Nagas, instead they were discriminated and will be discriminated in the near future' (Lasuh & Nuh, 2002). This similar religion concept was also visible in the Naga National Council's principles of nationalism when the leaders brought up 'the question of religion, one of the components of culture' (Field work communication, 2015), as the factor for Nagas to be left alone.

The role of religion, invoked during the initial stage of Naga nationalism (1929-1947), is largely 'misinterpreted by outsiders, not-Nagas, that Nagas were somehow coerced into resistance ideologies to not join India or Burma by Christian missionaries' (Field work communication, 2015). This assumption can be partly true, as Christianity did transform the Nagas' political vision; however it is wrong in many ways, Nagas were not dominantly Christians at the period.

The resistance movement by the Zeliangrong, for a sovereign political-cultural identity, was in response to Christianity and colonisation; it is one of the first self determination and political movements by the Nagas. If Nagas looked upon religion as an institution to assert and ground their identity, political existence, there must be good reasons for that; if Nagas rejected Hinduism and Buddhism, and Islam, it was because of the historical prejudice by the mentioned religions against the Nagas; it was on the similar religious reason that British India was divided into India and Pakistan, but the religious-cultural factor invoked by the Muslims to separate from India did not influence the Nagas' nationalism ideas, even though they were contemporary. For the Naga, religion was, never, not the main reason for pursuing its national vision, but religion did play crucial role in enlightening the Nagas' political thoughts, that is where Christianity came into the picture.

It was not that Nagas were not aware of politics and sovereignty before the advent of colonisation and introduction to Christianity; their awareness was limited, so to say in a primitive state left on its own. In the anthropological schema, the Nagas were wild war mongering headhunting societies, so they were known; the universe was about conflict for survival, no sense of solidarity other than primordial sentiments. The introduction of Christianity, transformed the Nagas from a primitive tribal society to accepted modern organism. 'The plan was to civilise the Nagas which the present Nagas describe as 'from *Darkness to Light*'. Nagas consider this a movement, a transformation from darkness-primitive to light-modern, similarly, politically it was a transformation from darkness-tribal to light-nation' (Field work communication, 2015). How did this transformation took place is controversial, differently interpreted by Nagas and outsiders. To Nagas, 'Christianity brought modern education, and thus modern thoughts and philosophies, along with Christian morals of forgiveness; whereas, for the non-Naga Christianity brainwashed the Nagas into clones of western civilisation' (Field work communication, 2015), the same was/is considered for the Christianised Mizos, Khasis and Garos.

Indeed, modern education allowed the Nagas to expand their political comprehension, gave them the opportunity to negotiate, to resist and to establish themselves; this can be observed in the writings and language of the Naga leaders of the period. On the other hand, the principle of Christian forgiveness allowed the Christianised Nagas to interact with one another peacefully and shun the primordial

conflicts; the lobbying of religion and colonial administration was successful in containing the inter village and inter tribe wars, hatreds and competition, which was channelised instead to integration, solidarity and fraternity. Nagas also felt that Christianity, although culturally disruptive, was accommodative of the traditional Naga political concepts, village based sovereignty. In this way, Christianity, as an institution, somehow was the answer Nagas were seeking/waiting, an ideological messiah, to redeem them from darkness to light, not just spiritually but culturally and politically; it was a political-sociological millenarianism.

Exposure of Nagas to modernity and modern political thoughts was via i) colonisation ii) Christianity iii) World War I. These three institutions shaped the initial nationalism idea of the Nagas. Post August 14, 1947, the day Nagas claim to declare Independence from the British Empire, established the role of religion deeper into the soul of Naga nationalism. The bitter engagements between India and Nagas in the form of arms and military conflict was disastrous to the Nagas, which in fact further led to the fear of the already feared Hinduism, for the Naga, India is always seen as a Hindu nation, and contribute to the strengthening of the adopted religion, Christianity. It was a period of popular Christianisation among Nagas; Christianity becomes a dominant religion while the traditional religions reduced to minority.

The chemical reaction between Naga Christianity (*modernity*) and Nagas nationalism gives rise to the, modern, Naga nation in such a way that each of them has to acknowledge and create space for one another: Christianity accommodating Naga, and Nationalism accommodating Christianity, and thereby the Naga nation being accommodative to both spiritual and political visions- Christianity giving solidarity to Naga nationalism and Naga nationalism being faithful to Christian principles.

In spite of the contributions of Christianity to the Naga nation, there is conflict of interests between religion and nationalism: many times, Nagas are caught between spiritual mission and political mission. The peaceful spiritual principle of Christianity, non-violence and forgiveness, was in stark contrast to the political reality of Naga nationalism which was and is still dominated by bloody violent conflicts. The Nagas pursuit for a sovereign state was responded by India's and Burma's military intervention, culminating to decades of arms conflict; many a times Christianity was accused of encouraging Nagas to rebel, develop hatred against India and Burma and take up arms, Christianity was held morally and politically responsible for sowing the seed of nationalism to the Nagas, and somehow this actually forced Christianity to finally get itself involved in nationalism, as a mediator and as a sanctuary for political redemption. American missionaries were accused of brainwashing and providing money to the Nagas in the 1950s, leading to their expulsions and banning from entering the Naga areas; in fact, foreigners were restricted, denied, entry into Naga Hills, and Mizo Hills, on the fear that foreign Christian institutions were financially sponsoring militants; the legacy of which continues to date, and it is recurring accusation from the side of non-Nagas that Naga nationalism was/is sponsored by American and European Countries.

**Political Answer in Christianity**

When it comes to theoretical explanation of nationalism, Christian theology plays important role, being the dominant. This is because of i) Christianity establishing itself, ii) Naga leaders with theological backgrounds, affiliations and preference, iii) lack of secular academic approach.

Like a typical transiting societies, Nagas also entered a phase of religious romanticism, whereby religion not only establishes itself as a spiritual institution, but also as cultural and political institution; this also contributed to the negative construction of religion's role by observers, non-Nagas, explained in the earlier paragraphs. Christianity establishing itself does not mean Nagas identifying themselves as Christian nation, as religious identity matter less to the Nagas who are more ethnic-nation centred, but it is about the nature in which Christian theology tries to interpret and construct the nationalism. This theological establishment of nationalism began in the 1960s, after the *Naga armies* went to China asking for assistance and the later mass reaction against it. Prior to that, Christianity played little limited role in nationalism; it provided spiritual sanctuary, it provided education and a hope for survival during violent arms conflict, it was a question of modernity, as socially Christianity as an institution was considered a modern transforming formula. In fact, earlier the Church had nothing to do with nationalism's political ideology: there was somehow political separation of religion and nationalism; the idealised Naga Homeland, Nagaland/Nagalim was a space of sovereignty of identity, sovereignty of governance, solidarity and confederative existence, economic and political sovereignty, to establish a modern state. Yet, somehow the events in the nationalism movement hurriedly bring the already established religion, Christianity, into the picture where it was not just a spiritual sanctuary and political mediator, it took the role of moral facilitator and political conductor, providing divine pillar to nationalism at the same time maintaining safe distance by not defining the nation. It was a matter of political guidance, political guidance under the guise of spiritual redemption. In fact, nationally speaking, the initial phase of Naga nationalism (till the 1960s) was darkness, and then, the entry of theology herald the light, the political truth, like the earlier spiritual darkness to light transition from primitive sinful Naga to modern redeemed Naga.

This *theologisation* of the nationalism, if viewed from different perspective, is also a reflection of the global politics of the period. Nagas being Christianised by the American and British missionaries look up to the United States of America and the United Kingdom for the conceptual inspiration for the nation, state and sovereignty. Nagas believed that these two countries, and others, were epitome of modern nation state and will deliver them to sovereignty in international platform, the United Nations; the other factor being indirectly showing gratitude for proselytising and bringing them to modernity. This was also the cold war period, a decolonising era, of ideological impositions, assertions and romanticism, plunging the nations, and states, across the world into political and ideological *groupism*.

The incorporation of theology into the politics of Naga nationalism can be put in two ways: firstly, it was a modernisation and confessional strategy, an attempt to bring the nationalism identity from darkness to light, and secondly, it was a result of ideological conflict between the first reason and the Nagas' attempt to seek political, and in kind, assistance from China (communism); and these two reasons intertwine each other, giving rise to a different nationalism, an alloy, that will incorporate theology and political ideology. In fact, the strengthening of theology in the nationalism was an indirect geopolitical contest between the United States, through religion, and the Soviet Union, through China<sup>4</sup>. There were two major events which can be put together, to locate the geo-political discourse.

First was the effort to bring peace; after years of fighting between Indian armies and Naga armies ravaging the Naga hills with no positive result except more violence, it was clear that India and the Nagas are going nowhere other than violence. The effort to bring peace was initiated by the church, the Baptist Church. Nagas were, are, large Christian, and it was the responsibility of the church to work for peace, after all, peaceful existence is the message of Christianity; moreover, the Indo-Naga war also resulted in destruction of many churches, which negatively affect the spiritual institution, apart from the psychological trauma which the Nagas were going through. In 1964, 'Nagaland Peace Council was established with the efforts of the Baptist Church with the objective of arriving at some solution to end the violence' (Chasie, 2005). The Baptist Church, of Nagaland, share close institutional ties with the counterpart in the United States ever since the Nagas were Christianised by missionaries belonging to the American Baptist. Of course this is a spiritual tie, but it also has a political side, as the Nagas by 'religious default are sympathetic to the United States' (Field work communication, 2015) ; and through the religious route that the Nagas political ideologies matured itself to accept democracy, and reject socialist ideas. Being a religious nation, with majority of them members of Church, the Nagas are 'sceptical of socialism which they, still, believe is anti-religion' (Field work communication, 2015).

The second event was the Nagas' trip to China. 'In 1966, the Federal Government of Nagaland appealed to the People's Republic of China for help; subsequently, Naga armies went to China twice, 1967 and 1969' (Field work communication, 2015; & Iralu, 2009). 'The Naga delegates were made aware of the politics of liberation, communist and socialist ideologies' (Field work communication, 2015) by the Chinese counterparts. 'Impressed with the new found ideology, socialist and communist ideologies were incorporated into the Naga ideas of nationalism, and the movements. When the news of the Naga armies going to China reached the Nagas, there was panic and anger'(Field work communication, 2015). The religious, Baptist Church members, Nagas felt that it was a betrayal by the Nagas to approach China, which is a communist country known for persecuting Christians. 'Ideological propagandas (anti-socialist and anti-communist) began to spread among the Nagas, there was mass phobia and violence in protest against the possible communism and socialism intrusion' (Field work communication, 2015). This phobia event, which can be put as the *red-scare* (neologism for the sake), would have been ignored as Nagas' everyday dilemma

out of frustration; but deeper analysis takes the case to webs of ideological players.

It was not that the United States directly forced anti-communist sentiments on the Nagas, but the role of the American Baptist Church cannot be ignored in this issue, as the Church indirectly represented the American propaganda. 'If Nagas were not affiliated to the Baptist Church, it is highly probable that anti-communist sentiment will develop, as Nagas feel racially closer to the Chinese for which they expected the Chinese to be sympathetic to Nagas on racial-ethnic grounds' (Field work communication, 2015). For the Soviet Union, it was through the communist China that it managed to impart the practical politics of liberation, Marxism, communist and socialist ideas; the idea of revolution strengthen henceforth among the Nagas, with new approach that the Naga nationalism can be materialised only through revolutionary activities.

To be accepted by the people, at the same time to be revolutionary with socialist-communist ideology, nationalism took a new form, by mixing religion (Christianity) and socialism; the approach was taken forward with the nationalism promoting Christianity as the sole, and official, religion of the Nagas. This declaration of Christianity as the official religion temporality subdued the red-scare, at the same time, revolutionary (soviet model of governance) began to establish in the institutes of nationalism. In spite of the spatial accommodation and acknowledgement between Christianity and socialism, there is always mistrust against socialism and revolutionary ideas. The modern political concepts of separation of the church and state never go well to the Nagas, who continue to scapegoat the adopted socialist ideology. Through the metaphysical spiritual means, invoking God, Christianity began to establish more firmly; and with the subsequent political events, there is somehow a distance, gap, emerging between nationalism and the Nagas. The question of religion and ideology became fully, and finally, established with the splitting of the Naga National Council into factions. The most prominent faction led by T. Muivah, Issac Swu and SS Khaplant, who had also previously participated in the trip to China, formed the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (later changed to Nagalim), NSCN; the word 'socialist' in the name was enough to trigger suspicion among the religious Nagas, who believed that the NSCN will impose communism-socialism, destroy churches and turn Nagas into atheism, sinners, by force (like in the Soviet Union and China). And that was how the slogan 'Nagalim for Christ' began to emerge: a call for spiritual awakening and realisation among the Nagas, not to succumb to modern politics and to resist atheism; this slogan got incorporated into nationalism. Now that Naga Nationalism's slogan is 'Nagaland for Christ', and with all the spiritual drama and larger number of Nagas into theological studies, meanings of nationalism began to be interpreted- Nagas for Christ, Nagalim for Christ and thus, Nationalism for Christ, every institutions of nationalism got theologised.

#### **Atonement and Modernism: National Divine Nagalim**

Before the arrival of light, the enlightenment, Nagas lived a life of darkness- political and spiritual darkness. The classical, or traditional, nature of politics however romanticised by the contemporary and for which nationalism was rationalised, they

are considered to represent the period of barbarism, savagery and bloodshed, the headhunt, not a state of nation but a tribal primitive society. Spiritually, the Nagas were pagans and sinners, doomed to be in hell. It was all the credits of Christianity that Nagas progress from primitive society to a modern nation; that is general political psychology. It was, and is, the responsibility of the converts to convert the unbelievers to the new religion; by doing that, they will not only be rescued from hell, they will be delivered to modernity. It is also the moral duty of the converts to guide the society, the nation, to deliverance; and thereafter, they ought to be updated with their spiritual state as well as the spiritual being of the nationalism. Nationalism is, thus, not only about political enlightenment, and movement, it is also a spiritual strengthening through spiritual revolution, welcoming of God to the nation and the marriage of Church and Nagalim.

The contemporary, modern, secular politics that is promoting the separation of state and church (religion) is not what the Nagas are visioning. For them, at least most of them, nation is not a political community, an imagined community and is not just an upgraded version of ethnicity, nation is gift from God, divine, a natural birthright, a spiritual institution and political millenarianism. Nagalim should be a space, a safe haven, for Nagas to pursue their spiritual needs, which will translate to a healthy patriotic feeling. It is the belief 'that a strong religious institute is the result of a strong patriotism' (Field work communication, 2016); this phenomenon is because of the mass religiousness where Nagas, by default, are members of religious institutions (Christian and non-Christian), and these institutes provide communication space between the political needs and spiritual needs. Moreover, religion dominates the everyday life of the Nagas ever since the adoption of Christianity. Prior to Christianaity, religion to the Nagas was a default cultural space with limited authoritative figure; Christianity, as an established modern religion rooted on the 'circum-Mediterranean civilisation' (Fabian, 1983) and American geo-politics, established itself firmly among the Nagas. Christianity became an institution of metaphysical atonement and psychological guide as well as an institution of spiritual plebiscite. Since by default Nagas are members of religious institutions (especially the Baptist Church, which is the most dominant), it is imperative that they cannot abandon spiritual deliverance for the sake of political fruit, at least in the case of nationalism.

It is alleged, by and large, every now and then that the political violence, for nationalism, is diluting the spiritual path, leading the mass into a sin, a doom spiritual future; the solution, intended, was for nationalism to seek forgiveness from the religious institutions, from God, by seeking theological guidance; the indirect intention, goal, was for nationalism to abandon the political revolutionary ideologies, philosophies, and replaced by theology, in doing that, Naga nationalism will not only please God but it will also be divinely approved, and thereafter theological-geopolitics can be incorporated into nationalism.

This theological-politics, an emerged phenomena post Naga-China affair, is believed to be capable of alleviating Nagas' nationalism, in line with European nationalism. Nagas, like the rest, view Europe as a Christian continent established on Christian political theology; by incorporating theology into nationalism, 'Naga hopes to garner spiritual empathy from Europe, especially the United Kingdom with whom

Naga had a brief political affair when it was colonised' (Field work communication, 2015). It was, perhaps, also an attempt to remind the larger Baptist Church(es), in the United States of America, that Nagas did not abandon Christ for Soviet Union's revolutionary, socialist-communist ideologies, and hopes that through the Baptist Church it may draw the attention of the Americans, at least those who are members of the Baptist institution, and thereby Washington. 'Since the United Nations' headquarter being located in the United States, lobbying the United States'(Field work communication, 2015) through political theology was the Nagas' theological nationalism's interpretation. In a way, nationalism is also the agenda of Nagas' theology; in fact, it also wants to disprove the socialist-communist, revolutionary, ideologies' mode of movement.

Coming to the political theology in the nationalism, Nagalim as the ultimate nation-state 'should only be divinely ordained' (Field work communication, 2015) , 'otherwise it is not modern' (Field work communication, 2015). By modernity, it is about an established legal sanctity: this modernity is, and always, interpreted from 'Europe centric model' (Fabian, 1983). However, even if Europe is viewed as model, and the foundation, for Nagas modernity and nationalism, 'the secular Europe is not what the Nagas' romanticised' (Field work communication, 2015); unfortunately, 'the stuck in time' (Fabian, 1983) theology syllabus from the middle age (the dark age) is dominant, that is, the Nagas' interpretation of Europe as being a Christian continent, and defender of Christianity, is romanticised from the period of the Church's (Roman Catholic and Christian Roman Empire) political hegemony. The French Revolution is viewed in stringent negativity, and considered as 'the act of religious treachery, political sin and sin against God' (Field work communication, 2015). It is not clear, quite contradictory, how the Nagas' *romanticised divine rights of the kings* as a legitimate authority? And the French Revolution is being interpreted as the French' departure from God's divinely anointed institution, the king. Similar interpretation was held for the Russian Revolution, which Nagas blame for the moral and spiritual corruption during the Soviet's era.

Nagalim, or Naga nationalism, is 'expected to not take the French's path' (Field work communication, 2015); even the word 'revolution' sounds so socialist. The interpretation of socialism-communism is theoretically and practically negative; a Naga activist (Field work communication, 2015) condemns the French Revolution as mother of socialism, destroyer of 'old' systems, disobedience of God and imposition of man's rule: Rights of man should not replace God's divine institution, to be elaborative- the French Revolution encouraged separation of state and Church, the storming of Bastille is ultimate spiritual damnation, and this resulted in the propaganda that the church is evil and should be destroyed. Marx's statement in the Manifesto of the Communist Party (1966) '*Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of the soulless condition. It is the opium of the people*' is too much for Nagas to comprehend: the primary reason of considering socialism-communism as pure evil, any Nagas' attempt to incorporate the French

Revolution (socialism), 'Rights of Man' (Paine & Bonner, 1921) and Marxism (communism) is disobedience against God, and theology's nationalism (through the Baptist Church's link to USA) will be in jeopardy; constructed as the reason for Nagas' failed nationalism. The brief affair with revolutionary ideologies can be atoned only if theological interpretations and recommendations are incorporated and promoted into nationalism.

Nagas' dream is also to have the 'Church of Nagalim' (Field work communication, 2015), this time the Baptist Church. This national church vision is 'discriminative of other Christian institutions/denominations and traditional Naga religions' (Field work communication, 2015); so much so, 'the non-Christian Gaidinliu, a prominent Naga nationalist leader, was branded a political witch and anti-Naga by religious Nagas; somewhere in the discourse, when the nationalist institute (the NNC) went ahead with its Nagaland for Christ programme, Gaidinliu's Heraka movement, a social-cultural reformation/movement among the Zeliangrong Nagas, is branded anti-Naga and theologically sinful not suitable for Nagas' (Field work communication, 2015). Even though the 'Yezhabo (Constitution) recognises Christianity and Naga religions, nationalism remains the game for Christianity, while the Naga (animistic) religions is deemed to not provide any spiritual deliverance or political solutions' (Field work communication, 2015). It is confusing to arrive at strategic nationalist positions when the path to nationalism, (through intervention of theology), sways right-left, physical-spiritual, or is it even a nationalism worth nationalism, or theology is confusing the Nagas in its zeal to establish itself? 'God is the provider, the creator, provider and distributor of sovereignty to/among the human beings', this is the elementary national philosophy. Nagalim to the Nagas is a sacred trust from God, its sovereignty depends on God's will: God-Christ is the alpha and omega, Nagalim should bear the torch of Christ?

According to the Nagas, is nationalism a political repentance to bring back Nagalim to Christ? The NNC and the NSCN (nationalist institutions) are to acknowledge Christ, and Church? Nagalim should be theocratic, not secular? In fact, Rousseau's state as '*the social contract*' (1968) can be paraphrased for the Nagas as '*State is a theological contract*': Nagas should be religious, Nagalim will materialise only with Jesus Christ. 'Nagalim is a biblically inspired nation, following the footsteps of Israelites: Nagalim is the promise land; national movements are the forty years in wilderness. God punished Israelites for disobedience; similarly Nagas are/will be punished by God.' (Field work communication, 2016). To avoid this spiritual crisis in nationalism, it has become the responsibility of theologians to take the Mosaic role of guiding Nagas to deliverance; for, to the Nagas- God is politics, as observed in the shrewd incorporation of God into principles of nation-building.

Naga Nationalism is not only deriving its inspiration from the Bible, but it has also adopted the churches' slogan, Nagaland for Christ (Nagalim for Christ), involving itself in theological appraisal. Nationalism is elucidated and rectified from the perspective of God; nationalism is traced to God. Nationalism is now the 'light' phase,



it guides the Nagas from darkness to light politically and spiritually. This manifestation and methodology can be put as the onto-theology for meanings to Naga nationalism.

### **Concluding Discussion**

Nagas are desperate for modern authoritative and institutional systems to assert their right to self determination for sovereignty of their nation and state. Traditional Naga institutions could not provide enough rationale in the modern world, as tribal political institutions are globally considered not contemporary. Tribals are not nations, ethnicity is not nation; Nagas need an answer, a deliverance from this state of tribal image. Christianity provides that space, recognition, allowing the Nagas to be confident and feel modern; on top of that, since western political thoughts are the product of Christian legacies, it provides them moral explanation and spiritual boost.

Nagalim, as a modern state, is to assert its contemporary existence, being modern. Since modernity was introduced via Christianity, it is clear that Nagas, like newly converts, will defend their new acquired fate. Modernity was too quick, nationalism came a little quick, Nagas were ideologically and psychologically not yet prepared to engage with modern nationalism discourses. In fact, Nagas are caught in the political and spiritual dilemma. In events of political violence, Indo-Naga conflict and Burma-Naga conflict, the church was the only institution to which Nagas can turn for hope, to ease their psychological fear, to continue their existence; as such, Nagas cannot deny God in their nationalism. God is a modern institution, nation is a modern institution; both are introduced to Nagas. God Bless My Nagaland is a patriotic theme, inspired from God Bless America; thus, Nagalim for Christ is a theological-political call to atone nationalism's past sins, and to seek divine recognition: Nagalim is the promise land, a land where Nagas spiritual and political values are safe.

As conclusion, the mixing of theology and politics in Nagaland nationalism is, in practice, controversial and for convenience. It is highly misinterpreted out of context without understanding the evolution of this mix nationalist methodology, and many times Nagas are politicised as Christian rebels resisting Hindu-India and Buddhist-Burma. This may be true to certain context, but it does not explain the dynamics within the Naga nation rather it imposes religious stereotypes. Nagas don't see themselves as Christian nation, even if the vision was a Christianised Naga and Nagalim being theologically grounded. Naga nationalism, in short, is complicated: it is a heterogeneous mixture of theology, political ideology, ethnicity and resistance, and somewhere in the discourse, it is also a question of primitive versus modern, a desperate attempt for self deliverance.

### **Notes**

1. The general term used is non-Naga, or outsider; this paper is using not-Naga for objective purpose.
2. Casual discussions; it is difficult to have political discussion, moral concerns, rather than ethical concerns that limits free flow of communications.

3. It is indeed difficult for an insider, Naga, to have critical view on the Naga; sentimental patriotism limits objective challenge, there is an unconscious fear of being picketed by the own, Nagas, as anti-Naga. In fact, anti-Naga is misused rampantly if any views challenge the sanctity of the nation.
4. China is generally portrayed as sowing seeds of anti-India, lending arms support to Naga rebels (the Naga Army); however, the paper and subsequent discussion will not deal with the arms involvement (supplying arms to Naga army), as the objective and the subject is to not a debate of Indo-Naga war.
5. General conclusion ; otherwise, it strictly refers to the research participants, including default individuals

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