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NAGAS CONTRIBUTIONS TOWARDS INDIA

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ABSTRACT

India being a land of multiculturalism has a unique history of its own and has contributed in the history of the world. Like any other Indian States, Nagaland; a small pinch in the North-Eastern part of India has its own side of contributions in the making of Indian history. After the coming of the British in the Naga Hills, the British administration changed their whole course of living; socially, economically and religiously. While some sections of the Naga people accepted these dominion changes some sections of the people started to act against the dominion nature of the British administration and started to recruit people to fight against the British for a free Naga country. The Nagas have not only contributed towards the making of Indian History but have also contributed in various fields like arts, music, dance, festivals, oral traditions, education, languages.

KEYWORDS: Battle of Kohima, Naga Club, Naga Independence, Animism, Messiah, Hornbill festival.

NAGAS CONTRIBUTION IN WWII

The Japanese army had pushed the British out of Burma and entered Naga Hills in 1944. It was here that some of the fiercest battles of the Second World War were fought.

The Second World War brought about a great transforming impact on the Nagas. The significance of the war for the Naga area may be seen from the statement of Lord Mountbatten: "The Battle of Kohima will probably go down as one of the greatest battles in history. It was in effect the Battle of Burma."¹ The Nagas, who had already become loyal subject of the British, sided with them and contributed in a big way to the success of the allies in the eastern sector of India. They served the allied forces as

military guides, guerrillas, regular forces, interpreters and informants.

In this fateful war, three Nagas in the regular force received the Military Cross, nine the Military Medal, one the I.D.M.S., and six Naga civilians, M.B.E.² moreover, the villagers of Lazami received a handsome cash award from the government for the capture of twenty six Japanese soldiers.³ On the whole, Nagas won great appreciation from the British soldiers with whom they fought shoulder to shoulder against the Japanese



invaders. Field Marshal Slim in his book 'Defeat into Victory' has paid fine tribute to them for the loyal and consistent service rendered to the allied forces. Speaking of the Nagas he wrote: "The gallant Nagas whose loyalty, even in the most depressing and the burning of their villages, they refused to aid the Japanese in every way or to betray our troops. This active help to us was beyond value or praise... They guided our columns, collected information, ambushed enemy patrols, carried our supplies, and brought in our wounded under the heaviest fire and thus, being the gentlemen they were, often refused all payments". He concludes that many a British and Indian soldiers owed his life to them, and no soldier of the Fourteenth Army who met them will ever think of them but with admiration and affection."⁴

FANOUS NAGA NATIONALISTS

A.Z. Phizo (1904-1990)

Phizo was born in May 1904 at Khonoma. Phizo's father KrusietsoDolie died when he was hardly 11 years old. Phizo did his middle school at Rev. Dr. Sidney White Rivenburgschool, Kohima and high school from Government High School, Shillong. Even as a young boy, Phizo was far ahead of his peer groups. He did not want to be under the control of anyone. While the rest of the educated Nagas wanted to become a Government officer, as in those days serving as Government officers held great prestige and respect in the eyes of the public. But for Phizo, he did not want to serve under the command of the British, though he dreamt of riches and power. He did not like the idea of serving the foreigners in his own land.

Though Phizo was still young, he was very much influenced by the formation of the Naga Club which was established in 1918, soon after the First World War with its primary objective to formulate and consolidate a distinct Naga Nationality and to look after the welfare and unity of the various Naga tribes. In 1921, Phizo became the Secretary of the Naga Club and he actively worked towards its objective.

In 1934 Phizo set out for Burma (now Myanmar) to try his fortune after many fail attempts back home. Phizo and his brother KeviYallay slowly started to flourish their business establishment. Phizo always dreamt of success and popularity and to achieve this Phizo and his brother decided to enter politics for a cause; Naga Independence.

In 1942 while in Burma, Phizo was invited by the Japanese officers for talks. During that time the Japanese and the INA (Indian National Army) under Subhas Chandra Bose were in working relation. The Japanese were at war with the British while the INA was fighting for Independence against the British and on the other hand Phizo wanted to liberate Nagaland from foreign dominion. After a series of meetings between the Japanese, I.N.A and Phizo, they came to an understanding that if Japan won the war, they would recognize the Independence of Naga country from the day it was liberated. But Phizo made it clear that helping the Japanese has nothing to do with anti-British or pro-Japanese as his main objective was to liberate Nagaland from foreign domination.

Meanwhile the Japanese forces were ready to move towards Kohima, and as planned they were to bypass Kohima and reach Assam at the earliest and cut off the railway bridge-head, which was the only railway line connected to the rest of India and from where the British forces receive their reinforcements and rations. With the railway line being cut-off, the British forces will have no reinforcements and rations for months and will have a hard time defending their position. But due to the over-confidence of the Japanese and differences between the Japanese Generals, the Japanese forces halted at Kohima and decided to defend it and thus the Japanese lost the surprise attack initiative.

In Naga Hills the Second World War was fought between the 31st Division of the Japanese Army and the 2nd Division of the Allied Forces. During the war the Nagas rendered all help to the British forces while some sympathetic Nagas helped the Japanese forces. The Nagas helped the British Forces mainly because the Nagas had no other option but to help their masters since Naga Hills was under British regime. Another reason was that, the Japanese forces forcibly took all the food stocks and live-stocks at gun point since the Japanese forces were out of rations. Their rude conduct was not favoured by the Nagas and thus the Nagas helped the British. On the other hand some Naga villages like Khonoma and Mezoma who were sympathetic towards the Japanese welcomed them and offered help in every possible way.

After the defeat of the Japanese, the British gained control of Burma and Phizo along with his brother KeviYallay and INA members were arrested for helping the Japanese. Though Phizo denied joining INA, he admitted collaborating with the Japanese with the sole intention of liberating Nagaland.

Thus, while some sections of the Nagas helped the British during the war, Phizo and his brother KeviYallay stood by the Japanese along with Subhas Chandra Bose. Phizo's main aim was to liberate Nagaland from British domination. Had the Japanese won the War, India as a whole would have been under the Japanese and Nagaland in particular would have been a totally different story.

HaipouJadonang (1905-1931)

HaipouJadonang was born in 1905 at Kambiron (Puiron). His father Thiudai died when he was about 1 year old. Jadonang was not so fortunate to have a formal education as in those days modern education had not reached his village. But he grew up around the richness of animistic customs, traditions, laws and cultures from his mother and villagers.

Jadonang was concerned with the degrading nature of the animistic society because of the spread of Christianity and the imposition of house taxes by the government and supply of labour and foodstuffs whenever government officials were on tour. He was also against the discriminating customs of the British administrations. In order to revive the animistic society and rise against the British, first he had to gain the confidence of his people. In order to win their confidence, Jadonang performed sorcery, supernatural power to heal sick people. And while doing so, he used to preach his new restated animism and called upon people to accept animism and discard Christianity. He used to preach people about how the goddess and spirits prescribe medicines in the form of plants and herbs in the jungles. In this way Jadonang attracted many people, even from the neighbouring villages.

In 1927, Jadonang was determined to build his own army of freedom fighters to fight against the British and restore Naga sovereignty. In order to recruit more armies, Jadonang sent his followers to different villages to spread the message that Jadonang was the one true Messiah king of the Nagas who will overthrow British Raj and liberate the Nagas. In the meantime, funds were raised for purchase of guns, daos and spears. Young and old were recruited and were trained to fight for their Independence.

By the end of 1930 the ideas and activities of Jadonang spread almost all over the Naga inhabited areas. The people now stood beside him to fight for their freedom. The movement reached such zenith that it posed great threat to the British and the British authorities had no other choice but to crush the movement before the movement spread to other parts of the Naga areas.

In 1931 while Jadonang and his followers were returning to Kambiron from Bhubon cave after having a worshipped God, a police constable disguised himself as one of his faithfuls invited Jadonang to his house for rest and food. Unaware of the heinous intention, Jadonang and Miss Gaidinliu along with five other girls went without any precautionary measures for security. After reaching the house, to his utter surprise, Jadonang and his faithful's were ambushed and arrested on 19th February 1931.

Rani Gaidinliu (1915-1993)

Gaidinliu was born on 26th January 1915 at Luangkao village in Manipur. At a very young age Gaidinliu was hard-working, quiet, calm and very sympathetic to the poor and needy. Gaidinliu heard about Jadonang and his freedom movement when she was young. Gaidinliu met Jadonang at Kambiron and she was deeply influenced by him. After joining his movement, Gaidinliu organized the female wing of army to fight against the British.

After Jadonang was executed, the leadership was passed to Gaidinliu in 1931 she was only 16 years old. Even though she was still young she displayed great devotion to the movement. She re-organized the movement, recruited more armies, re-energized her army and intensified the fight against the British. She ordered total non-cooperation with the British and encouraged her followers not to pay house taxes to the Government.

Under Gaidinliu's leadership the movement rapidly gained momentum and for the first time people from every corner rendered help and support for the freedom and unity of the Nagas. She was respected and

hailed as the Messiah sent from God.

The British Government on realizing that the movement under Gaidinliu was rapidly progressing and it posed a much greater threat than before brought the military punitive operations against Gaidinliu directly under the control of the Deputy Commissioner of the Naga Hills of Assam and ordered to bring an end to the movement and declared Miss Gaidinliu as "Wanted".

Several military operations were made to arrest Gaidinliu but Gaidinliu was able to escape each time. The Government was now determined and they now knew that to capture Gaidinliu would not be as easy as Jadonang was captured by a trap. Now the Government made long, well-planned operations to capture Gaidinliu dead or alive. Deputy Commissioner of the Naga Hills District, J.P. Mills was placed in direct control to carry out the military operations against Gaidinliu. All authority was given by the Assam Governor-in-Chief to draw out the 3rd and 4th Battalions of the Assam Rifles if needed to attain the objective.

Meanwhile under the command of Gaidinliu, a big fortification was being built at Pulomi village with the aim to accommodate three to four thousand warriors. On 15th October 1932, a British loyal Dr. Haralu informed the Extra Assistant Commissioner, Mr. Hari Blah, at Kohima about the presence and activities of Gaidinliu at Pulomi village. The British Government sent troops under Captain Macdonald to Poila. The troops of Assam Rifles and J.P. Mills who was at Imphal arrived on 19th October 1932 at Pulomi village and arrested Gaidinliu.

After the arrest, Gaidinliu was brought to Imphal for trial. After the trial she was sentenced to life imprisonment and was put in Guwahati Jail. Later she was shifted to Shillong, then to Aizwal and finally to Tura Jail. Gaidinliu was finally released in 1947 after India got Independence.

Cultural Contributions

"The richness of Naga heritage and tradition is revealed through majestic dances, songs and games in the festival. It transmits vibrant message to the world on the uniqueness of the Naga people and their culture and the need to revive and protect the same as to gain due recognition in the world."⁵ People of Nagaland comprises of sixteenth major tribes with rich traditions and distinctive cultures. Each tribe has its own clan with its traditional attires, language, beliefs, customs, festivals and traditions.

India is known as a multi-cultural nation comprising of various religion, castes and tribes. Each twenty-nine states of India consist of various culture, beliefs and traditions and as a whole contribute to what is known today as a multi-cultural nation. Nagaland; as one of the Indian States having an ethnic group of people with their own unique and rich cultures and traditions stands apart from the rest of the Indian states in terms of religion, customs and traditions. The state of Nagaland serves as a tourist hotspot for both domestic and international tourists, who want to catch a glimpse of the rich Naga culture. The state of Nagaland which is often called as the Land of festivals celebrates numerous festivals throughout the year. Each of the sixteen tribes of Nagaland has its own festival celebrating in different months of the year which is related to seed sowing and good harvest.

In addition to that, to promote cultural heritage and encourage inter-tribal interaction of Nagaland, the Government of Nagaland organizes the Hornbill festival every year from 1-10 December. The Hornbill festival was first started in the year 2000. The Hornbill festival is being held every year at the Naga Heritage Village, Kisama which is about 12 km away from Kohima. All tribes of Nagaland takes part in this festival in showcasing their attires, dances, folk-songs, foods, handicrafts and various other activities under one roof. The main aim of this festival is to revive and protect the rich culture of Nagaland and display its extravaganza and traditions. The Hornbill festival not only attracts the local people but also attracts tourists from both domestic and international who wants to explore and experience the rich Naga Culture and an opportunity to experience the food, songs, dances and customs of Nagaland.

Travel and Tourism

Nagaland is a small hill state located in the far North-Eastern part of India. The state of Nagaland which is often called as the Switzerland of the East makes an amazing tourist destination with its vast forests lands, breath-taking valleys and beautiful landscapes. Some of the famous hotspots destinations are; Japfu peak

located some 15 km from Kohima, The WWII Cemetery located at the heart of Kohima City, Capital of Nagaland, Kisama Heritage Village located around 12 km away from Kohima, The Kohima Cathedral, The Dzukou Valley located at the border of the States of Nagaland and Manipur, the Kachari Ruins and Rangapahar Reserve Forest in Dimapur, Langpangkong Cave, Fusen Kei and Mongzuki Caves in Mokochung, Doyang River and Mount Tiyi in Wokha, Naganimora in Mon, Shilloi Lake in Phek, Saramati Peak and the twin stones in Kiphire.

CONCLUSION

The Nagas contributions towards India have different aspects which contributed in the various form of Nationalist freedom fighter figures like A.Z. Phizo, Haipou Jadonang and Rani Gaidinliu. Phizo was of the view to eradicate the British rule from Nagaland. His principles of life do not govern him to remain under any foreign rule or government in his own land. So he was in favour of the Japanese in order to chase out the British from his land. Whereas Jadonang and Gaidinliu also revolted against the British because of the spread of Christianity in their land as they were strong animist worshippers. They disliked the new changes that were brought due to the conversion of Christianity. India being known as the land of diverse culture, Nagaland has also contributed diversity of cultures. The state has sixteen major tribes and each tribe varies in customs and traditions, attires, languages and festivals.

The State of Nagaland serves as a tourist hotspot for adventurers for its natural terrain of hilly region with beautiful landscape. It also consists of historical sites that contributes in the history of India.

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