

## NAGAMESE : THE COMMON LANGUAGE IN NAGALAND

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ASSAM : India.

1.00 Nagaland is the Sixteenth State of the Republic of India which came into existence on 1st of December 1963. In that very day, inaugurating this sixteenth state i.e. Nagaland, the then President of India Dr. Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan said "Let all past rancour and misunderstanding be forgotten and let a new chapter of progress, prosperity and good-will be written on a page which begins today". Formerly this administrative unit was known as the Naga Hills and Tuensang Area (NHTA) since 1st December, 1957, and it was renamed as Nagaland on 18th February 1961. Geographically and Culturally the present state Nagaland appears as a part within the state of Assam and formerly, it was within Assam for all political purposes. It comprises an area of 6,366 sq.miles, mainly consisting of rugged mountainous terrene with a population of more than six lacs. The state Nagaland is divided into seven districts<sup>2</sup> - Kohima, Mokakchung, Tuensang, Wokha, Zunheboto, Phek and Mon. The physique of the state Nagaland lies between 25°6 and 27°4 north of equator and between the longitudinal lines 93°20 E and 95°15 E. The state is bounded by Assam in the North and West by Burma and a part of Arunachal Pradesh in the East and Manipur in the

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1. Bareh, Dr.H(ed) 1970, Gazetter of India, Nagaland, Kohima District, p.56.
  2. Basic Facts of Nagaland, 1974, Nagaland Today, p.3.

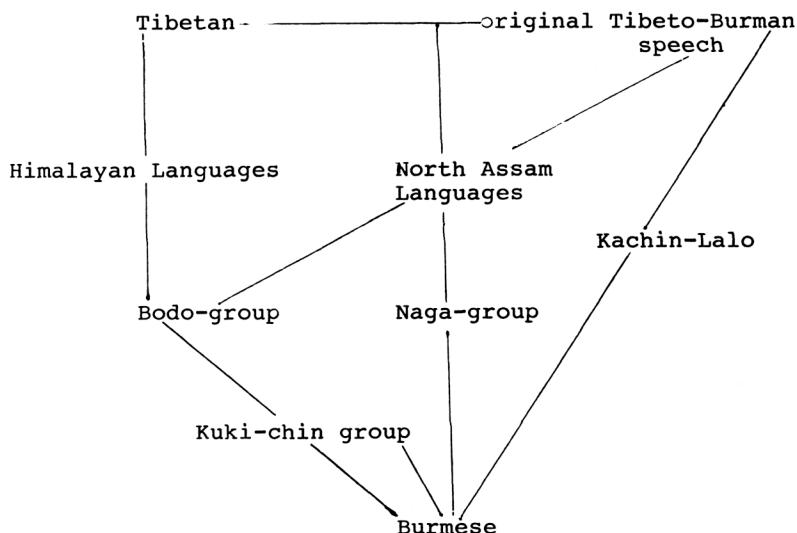
South and runs more or less to the left bank of great river of the region Brahmaputra.

The major Naga tribal groups in Nagaland are<sup>3</sup> - Konyak, Ao, Sema, Lotha, Angami, Chakhesang, Phom, Rengma, Chang, Sangtam, Yimchunger, Khenmungam, Kuki and Zeliang and other minor groups. Comparatively, Konyaks are more numerous than the Aos. Each of them has their own tongue which vary widely from one language to another. Dr. Grierson has divided the Naga languages into five Sub-group : as follows<sup>4</sup>-

- (a) Western sub-group : it includes Angami, Sema, Rengma and Kezhama;
- (b) Central sub-group : it includes Ao, Lhota, Tengsa, Thukumi and Yachumi;
- (c) Eastern sub-group : it includes Angwanku or Tablung, Chingmegnu or Tamlu, Banpara, Mutonia, Mohongia, Chang or Mojung, Assiringia, Moshang and Shangge;
- (d) Naga Bodo sub-group : It includes Mikir, Kachcha Naga, Kabui and Khoirao;
- (e) Naga-Kuki sub-group : it includes Sopvoma or Mao Naga, Maram, Miyangkhang, Kwoireng or Liyang, Luhupa or Luppa and Maring.

As noted by Dr. Grierson Naga speech community can be explained according to the following table - (Table 1)

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- 3. Directorate of : Nagaland At a Glance.p.3.  
Paxton, John (ed) 1972/1973 The Stateman's year Book  
p.374.
  - 4. Grierson, G.A. 1967, Linguistic Survey of India,  
Vol.3. Part II. p.193.



( Table - 1 )

2 .00 The racial group of the Nagas is one of the Mongolian groups :<sup>5</sup> evidently they have mixed feature. Though some writers ferer tht they are found in Assam, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Tripura, Mizoram, Manipur, Arunachal, Burma, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Sikim, Nepal, Tibbet, Himachal Pradesh and Kashmir of the Himalayan traety, yet they are mainly concentrated in Nagaland with their identification term Naga.

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5. Yonuo, Asoso : 1974 The Rising Nagas, p.6.

The origin of the word Naga is obscure<sup>6</sup>. There are different theories regarding the origin of the word Naga. Capt. J. Butler wanted to derive the term Naga either from the Bengali word 'nangta' or the Hindustani word "naga" which means 'naked', 'crude', 'barbarous', is quite irrelevant and hateful to the whole tribe. Few other scholars explained it as a derivative of 'nog' meaning 'Snake'. The etymology of Naga or Naga may be explained by the Sanskrit word 'nago' means 'hill', and 'naga' with the Suffix -a, which means 'definiteness' or the dwellers, or 'live in' indicates the hill dwellers. But Verrier Elwin<sup>7</sup>, Peal<sup>8</sup> and Hutton<sup>9</sup> have suggested another notable theory : According to them 'Naga' is a derivative from 'nok' which means 'people' or 'man'. They identify themselves as 'nok' man. It is observed that the different tribes settled in this North Eastern region of India also identify themselves in a similar way like the Nagas. The Garos Call themselves A°chik (hill man), Mande (the man) or A°chik Mande ; the Mizos as Mizo (Mi= man, Zo hill ); the Karbis as Arleng (Arleng = man), the Singphos as Singpho (= man); the Bodos as Boro (=man). The tendency is that each tribe considered the members of his own race alone to be human. This tendency is found more or less among all the tribesman of the Republic of India.

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6. Elwin, Verrier : 1961. Nagaland.p.4.  
 Bareh, Dr.H.(ed) 1970.Gazetter of India, Nagaland  
 p.19  
 Woodthorpe : J.R.A.I. XI, p.57.  
 Furness : JRAI XXXII, p.445.  
 Butler : J.A.S.B. 1875.I.p.309.
7. Elwin, Verrier 1961. Nagaland. p.4.
8. Peal : J.R.A.I. III.p.477.
9. Hatton, J.H. The Angami Nagas. p.351.f.

3.00 Nagaland has many uncultivated and mutually unintelligible languages, which belong to Assam-Burmese sub-family. These languages or dialects have got no script of their own. According to the Nagas popular belief they had their own script which was originally written on animal skin and ate up by somebody, and thus their script was lost. That traditional story still prevails in their society. They have adopted Roman Script to write their speeches. The districtwise geographical distribution of these languages mainly are as follows : -

- (a) Kohima - Angami, Kachari, Kuki, Zemi,  
Langmei, Rongmei, Rengma, Mao and Kheza.
- (b) Mokocheung - Ao (chungli, Mongsem, Chanki )
- (c) Mon - Konyak.
- (d) phek - Pochuri, chokri.
- (e) Thensang - Phom, Chang, Sangtam, Yimchunger,  
Khinmungum, Makware, Tirkhir, Chin.
- (f) Wokha - Lotha
- (g) Zunheboto - SEma.

It is indeed very interesting to note that a language or a dialect spoken in one Naga bosti (Naga village) is not easily understood by the tribe of another 'bosti' in the vicinity. Hence, Nagamese is the media of expression among the Naga tribes as well as the outsiders. Formerly, the language was called by differnt writers as Naga Assamese. Actually, the term nagamese is a blended or contaminated formation of Naga + Assamese, i.e. Assamese as spoken by the differnt Naga tribes, or a spoken Assamese developed in Nagaland. But after observation it is seen that though this language is originated from Assamese it has got its distinctive characters for which the language seems to be an independent one as those of Assamese, Bengali, Oriya,

etc. The word Nagamese was coined by the people of All India Radio Station, Kohima. Although the Nagaland Govt. has adopted English as the state official language, Nagamese has also occupied the same status in Government Administration and other Publicity medias (like oral and electronic ) unofficially.

4.00 To know about the origin of Nagamese it is essential to observe the relation of the Naga people with that of the Assamese Speaking population of the neighbouring plain areas. The Naga people had a relation with Assamese and that relation continued since the reign of the Ahom kings. In our old chronicles, systematic historical records of the Nagas are not available during the pre Ahom period except some stray references here and there. The slender accounts of the period of the Hindu kings of Kamarupa, between 4th and 12th century are silent regarding the Nagas. The Ahom Kingdom had brought a far reaching relationship with the Nagas marked, in turn, by hostility and friendship. The first tribal people with whom the Ahoms came into contact was the Eastern Nagas. Sukhapha, the founder king of the Ahom kingdom in Assam came through the land of the Nagas in the begining of the thirteenth century and the Ahom king treated the Nagas as their subjects and collect taxes from them in different forms, such as elephant tusks, spears, hand woven clothes and cotton. In return, the Ahom kings granted the Naga chiefs land etc. as if they were Assamese nobles. Thus it appears from the history that since the historical period the Nagas had a constant contact with the Assamese speakers of the plains till now. This life long relation of Assamese with the Nagas has not only helped to develop Nagamese in Nagaland but also helped the Nagas to contribute some elements to the life of Assamese.

Nagamese has developed as a spoken language among the different tribes in Nagaland. It has occupied an important position and status in the state. That is why, the politicians, the teachers, the Government employees, the tradesman etc., take the advantage of speaking and using this language to meet their aims and objectives. The contact situation for the development of Nagamese can be categorised under three heads -

- (i) Nagas speaking one language in contact with the Nagas speaking another language.
- (ii) Nagas in contact with the Non Nagas.
- (iii) Non-Nagas speaking one language in contact with the Non-Nagas speaking another language.

As there three contact situations are frequent in their day to day life, necessarily, Nagamese takes the advantage of rapid development in Nagaland.

Nagaland is considered as a common lingua-franca in Nagaland and the Nagas treat it as their most vital language for inter-communication. Further, it is observed that Assamese was necessarily used as a medium in the discourses and reports of the momentous Naga convention held at Kohima in 1957. The Government of Nagaland considers Nagamese as an important language for publicity purposes, and it is always telecasted in T.V. and announced from their broadcasting centre All India Radio Station. Kohima. Foreign writers like W.B. Smith<sup>10</sup>, Hutton<sup>11</sup> and Verrier Elwin<sup>13</sup> had observed it very perfectly. The European writer Hutton refers in his book that 'indeed, the Assamese language as used in the Naga Hills is peculiarly well adopted for the reproduction of Naga idioms, and as a vehicle of

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10. Smith, W.B. : The Ao Naga. p.117.

11. Hutton, J.H. 1968. The Sema Nagas, p.266.

12. Elwin, Verrier, : 1961. Nagaland, Shillong, p.13.

interpretation it makes a for better lingua-franca for the hills than Hindustani or English would, the substitution of which for Assamese has been occasionally suggested. Here it is to be noted that although the hill people in the surrounding areas of Assam speak broken Assamese for their common conversation yet no homogeneity in the form of speech is observed. The people of Arunachal Pradesh Speak Arunamese or Nefamese as a line language which is unlike the Nagamese language of Nagaland.

Nagamese has its distinctive features in respect of Phonology and Morphology. The Syntax bears almost the same rules as in Assamese language are simplification of Sanskrit tatsama words and coinage. The nagive use of Nagamese lays down the rules by which the Nagas let themselves be guided when learning it. Even the Assamese people do not find it quite easy at the beginning to understand Nagamese, and have to learn it before they are able to speak it properly. This happened due to some phonological, morphological and glossorial features of the Nagamese language.

For detailed study read the following books.

- (1) B.K. Boruah; 1993, Nagamese : The language of  
Nagaland,  
Mittal Publications, New Delhi  
PIN 110 059 ( India ).
2. Sreedhar M.V. Naga pidgin  
CIIL, Mysore, India.