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Nagaland in Transition



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PREFACE

IT was the year 1958—the month of May. Along with the fastest squall that I ever saw, it rained and it rained very hard indeed. For a moment I thought that the place was Cherapunji. The smoke like grey clouds flying at a very low level converged from all directions to let loose a sea of water on the earth. Moving about I thought that the services of a boat would be essential but as soon as the cloud lifted the water left the ground as fast as it had poured.

And when it did not rain the heat of the sun and the humidity of the dense green jungle was enough to make me feel miserable both by day and by night.

I was in one of the north-eastern corners of India, what is now known as Nagaland.

Late in the evening, perspiring profusely, I sat on an improvised bamboo chair in the dim light of a hurricane lamp. To protect myself from the mosquitoes that came in phalanxes, I had tucked my olive green trousers into the gumboots.

In addition to a door and a window in the room where I was sitting there were also two bullet holes to look through. For this the credit goes to the Naga rebels who ejected this pair of bullets through their rifles very kindly much before I had moved in. Through these openings and many other apertures in the bamboo mat wall, I could see the lighted fire across the track and the Konyaks preparing for the night's rest. In darkness all around, I tried to look at the Nagas who were physically only across the track but culturally far away. They seemed to be in an age which had lived itself. The process of transformation was not easily comprehensible, and to meet them in their own ground meant going more than half way.

The way of life seemed to be changing fast for the Nagas. There is no doubt that some of the features of these primitive cultures will become extinct with the passage of time.

The Nagas, as I saw them, were generally poor, sometimes pitiable, but always proud. They seemed to be passing through a very unusual stage—marching towards a future, to attain which a definite time must pass away while the not-too-distant past domi-

nated their day-to-day life and conditioned their inner thinking. The shackles of the past could not be broken entirely, and at the same time the future appeared remote. In the days gone by, bringing home the head of an enemy was a cause for celebration while the present set-up did not permit this and the younger generation looked upon it as a heinous crime.

Since I stayed for short periods with the Semas, Konyaks, Aos and Angamis—the major Naga tribes—my observations are about them. However, I have referred to a few other tribes of North East Frontier Agency, of Nagaland and of places in India to put what I said into a wider perspective.

The aim in narrating my accounts has been to present a composite picture of the entire Nagaland and not of one particular tribe or area. In general I have compared the field notes taken during my stay with the various tribes and tried to give a brief account of the tribal community of Nagaland. Actually collection of information is no small problem when changes are taking place very fast and the tribesmen give different versions, half out of ignorance and half out of indifference to their own past. My generalizations, therefore, do not preclude the scope for deviations. It is quite possible that another observer might have seen or heard something quite different from what I have stated.

I must clearly point out that the views expressed in this book are entirely those of an individual traveller and in no way those of some military or civil authority.

I must mention that this book has been written by a person who does not claim to be a specialist on the subject and I do not except the experts to agree with all my observations entirely. But I am confident that the experts will appreciate and encourage such efforts by non-specialists and view the book with a discerning eye. I am very thankful to the late Dr. Verrier Elwin for his frank and constructive comments on my first manuscript which were sent to me in 1960. I am indebted to him for the advice, and encouragement and for permitting a Sapper officer's intrusion into the out post of anthropology. I wish also to acknowledge my indebtedness to Shri J. P. Guha of Hansraj College, Delhi, for helping me with the editing of this book.

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Chapter 1

THE TRIBAL IMBROGLIO

IN INDIA, in any modern city, you may see in the midst of massive and high buildings, in the middle of the concrete road, a herd of humble cows wandering back to their shed under the light of the overhead neon lamps. Behind the cattle the herdsman walks casually in his *dhoti*, his only clothing. His long stick is thrown across his right shoulder and from the end of the stick, pointing towards the sky, hangs a piece of muslin in which he carries his midday meals. He starts from home early in the morning towards the pasture grounds. His *dhoti* is of a very coarse cloth, golden ringlets dangle from his ears, his face has been unshaven for a number of days and he has forgotten when he had his last haircut. He is barefooted and you can see cracks in his hard skin on the heels when he lifts them up. He moves as innocently as the humble cows in the middle of the road. Suddenly a twenty-foot-long car or a double decker bus bursts past with a loud and sharp horn and the cowboy dropping his stick is seen running with the cows in all possible directions except the right one. The young herdsman after having pocketed a curse or two from the vehicle driver unwittingly starts collecting his cattle and starts moving behind them unconsciously once again right in the middle of the road.

In India time seems to have suddenly compressed itself. That proverbial 'once upon a time' is still alive in India. The old and the new live cheek by jowl.

India is a country where all that are found in a continent can be experienced without any difficulty. Actually, you can see different centuries unrolling their corresponding periods, periods that are full of chequered history and complex cultural traits. Culturally India is like a revolving stage where each set presents a different group of people with different traits, customs and traditions. Social institutions, economic conditions and dietary habits vary from one region to another.

It does not take very long to move from the temple-studded city of Varanasi to the ultra-modern Chandigarh. Compare the barren and desolate deserts of Rajasthan with the ever-green dense jungles at the foothills of the Himalayas. Imagine yourself rolling down from the snow-clad peaks of the Himalayas to the flat fertile lands of Uttar Pradesh. In this country you may find the rugged, dry and barren hills of Ladakh, the ever-green mountains all along the Himalayas and along the Eastern and Western Ghats, the fertile plains of the Indo-Gangetic plain, the not-too-ungenerous climate of the raised plateau in the south, and the picturesque beaches along the eastern and the western coasts. India's geography is like a tapestry in which every colour stands by itself. The temperature varies from sub-zero to the blazing heat in the north while in the south the climate is cool and moderate. In Assam you find the wettest places in the world and in the higher ranges of Ladakh, you may not see greenery all your life.

In addition to all the above geographical and climatic disparities, India is the home and birthplace of many popular religions. People of different complexions, creeds, and origins have further added to the colourful cultural mosaic of India.

Different regions of India have produced a marked and significant effect on local populations. It takes hundreds, probably thousands, of years before a community adopts a particular pattern of culture; a culture cannot be annihilated in a short time because of certain characteristics which are the result of the environment and surroundings. It is well known that certain instinctive attributes which may again be acquired or inherited cannot be easily eliminated without changing the geographical features, climatic conditions, and food habit that have gone a long way in making the history of that culture. The change in the way of life could be effected by the unfettered and indigenous development in the scientific ideas, but this would make it a very long drawn process. The more you try and interfere with a culture by the show of force or threats, the more adamantly the people resist it. Even if you try to change a cultural pattern by persuasion, love and brotherly feeling there are likely to be certain psychological maladjustments which may not be the result of careless thinking on the part of the initiators of

the change, or lack of enough scientific data or information about the community in question but because of certain unknown elements of the culture which start floating on the surface only when the change has started taking place. With all the previous study of the various cases of cultural changes and the entire science of anthropology and sociology at your disposal you may still not be able to foresee the future of a rapidly changing culture.

Unfortunately the science that deals with human beings is not a very exact science. In order to analyse the reactions and the effects that a certain change might produce you have, however, to think steadily and whole. The reason being that you are dealing with living human beings as the subject-matter of your study. Unlike the science of physics or chemistry where the experiments are conducted with a limited number of cases in a laboratory under, more or less, controlled conditions, here the field for research is as open as the widespread land and the objects of research are not the chemicals and the laboratory apparatus but human beings forming large communities. It does not end here. You have to know a great deal about each human being—his origin, the history of his tribe, clan and subclan in which he finds himself as an individual, his dress, his weapons, his food, his occupation and social institutions such as kinship and marriage, his religion, and superstitions, myths and a host of other traditions and customs as well as the organization of his family and the position and status of the various members of the two sexes in different ages.

Truly speaking, no civilization has been able to remain isolated from the interference of alien cultures. We know the history of our own country and the intermingling of the cultures that took place whenever a stronger race rubbed shoulders against the people south of the Himalayas and finally occupied the territory to settle down permanently. From those who captured the lands because of their physical strength, the local inhabitants acquired many of their cultural traits. In early days of our civilization there was very little trade and the means of communication and transportation almost did not exist. Often the impact of one culture on the other took shape when one superior race subjugated the other. The conqueror always stood

as a Gulliver superior in all respects, a master who could whip off the skin of the vanquished. And the basic instinct of man to appear superior to everybody else proved an effective instrument in the imitation of the way of life of the victor by the down-graded group.

At the same time there have been certain races or ethnic strains in various nooks and corners of India who have withstood all changes and are still clinging to their past ineffective habits. Usually these primitive tribal groups inhabit the inaccessible hills in the midst of thick unnegotiable jungles. Without going into the critical analysis of their origin, history, colour of skin, eyes and hair, measurements of heads and other limbs, blood reaction, etc., we can broadly classify the tribes sprinkled all over India into four major geographical groups or distinct territorial divisions.

Starting from the Bay of Bengal we see the islands of Andaman and Nicobar studded with the Jarawa, north Sentinelese, Onge, Nicobarese and other small tribal groups. Though small in strength some of the islands have been notorious for their hostilities towards the foreigners.

Moving a little up, south of river Krishna, we see the tribes like the Kurumba, Badaga, Kadar, Kota, Toda and many others. Though these tribes appear to be primitive and uncivilized these are perhaps the oldest members of our society. They reached this state as a result of gradual submission and seclusion. These tribes have been comparatively peaceful.

In the land between river Krishna and the Indo-Gangetic plain we come across tribes consisting of the Bhil, Baiga, Kandh, Gond, Munda, Oraon, Santhal and many others.

The last and most important tribal pocket lies in the north-east of India. This area is a world by itself not for the anthropologist alone but for the traveller as well. There are nearly forty tribes in this region, each having its own dialect and a different way of life. Through the passage of time, the general term 'Nagas' embracing all the tribes of Nagaland has come into being through the term does not include all the tribes of NEFA.

North-east of India is an undulating area with mountain ranges, interspersed by valleys forming the water-line in the rainy

season. For the residents it is a life full of rigours and hardships. The region is beautiful containing all that nature can bestow but its beauty is wild. The tribal inhabitants of the area are hospitable by nature. They range from Buddhist peace-makers to the savage head-hunting tribes. The climate varies from the snow-capped hills in the Himalayas to the sultry and humid areas in the south-eastern part. On account of the restrictions imposed by the terrain and climate shifting cultivation and terrace fields have been resorted to but this does not result in rich yield. Compared to the effort the produce is far less. The Nagas eat all that can be found or produced in the form of roots, cereals, animals, fish and fowl.

Their resources are meagre, but their life is rich and full of varied activities. They are materially poor but morally rich. Their sources of entertainment and pleasure are few but their life is not without excitement and adventure. Their agricultural yield is little and restricted in variety, but even so they make a wholesome diet out of it. Their way of life and approach to various problems may appear to be crude and inconclusive but their life is not.

What should be our attitude towards the Naga community that has come into contact with us after a long period of uninterrupted separation? What should be our code of conduct towards them? What type of relationship should we develop towards them? What type of organization and administration would such a community need? What about the future of their local social and legal institutions? What about their aspirations of being members of an up to date community?

Whatever we may do or think we must not believe that a particular community which had stopped growing culturally is in any way inferior to us. They have their many weak points and their approach to life may be completely different from ours. What is virtue for one may be a vice for another. Every custom, every tradition, and every moral code and convention changes as a civilization advances. What may be immoral today, the casuist might consider it perfectly justified tomorrow. Therefore differences are bound to occur between communities of the same age; but these differences, we must not forget, are due to different cultural traits.

It would be quite relevant here to see what means and measures could be adopted to bridge the gap between such communities which belong to different cultural compartments, with the ultimate aim of producing that happy synthesis of the two in which the good points of both the cultures are absorbed, the aim being to develop a richer life which further contributes towards the growth of culture of the communities concerned.

Every such case of cultural differences will have its own peculiarities and will have to be dealt with on its own merits. We just cannot afford to accept a standard solution; nor should we accept any trial and error method for the pursuance of such a policy, because the effects of such a method cannot be correctly anticipated and this may have serious repercussions. The exact exposition of the case, its background, its correct interpretation and the just and fair solution have stirred the imagination of many learned people—scientists, philosophers and national leaders all over the world.

Though part of the same great family to which we all belong, the tribesmen distributed all over India have got their own individual and distinctive approach towards life. Their backwardness should in no way indicate that they are backward in culture and religion, in social organization, and in food and clothing. They have very strong points in favour of their own way of life and it would be quite improper to impose upon them any other culture by force or persuasion unless such a change is desired by them by their own free will. Mr. Nehru on more than one occasion has categorically stated that we should help the tribesmen in such a way as to make them live their own way of life according to their own genius and tradition. In general it can be said that Indian Government's policy aims at neither keeping the tribesmen locked up in their own inaccessible areas secluded from the rest of the country nor forcing the tribal culture to get assimilated and thus become extinct in due course. Unless liberal protection is provided to a minority culture, it is bound to suffer a serious setback on coming in contact with the so-called superior culture. There have been cases where tribesmen have been exploited by the popularization of opium smoking, slave trade, and employment of tribal labourers in the nearby estates and industries,

This results in the reduced agricultural output for the tribal community since many able-bodied persons get uprooted from the fields. The gradual shrinking of natural resources and decline of man power cause the disruption of the community's social and economic life. In this way the well-knit unit is split up which is the beginning of the end of the tribal life. Also due to lack of medical relief and the continued insufficient intake of certain vitamins, diseases start spreading and, in the absence of effective treatment, death takes a heavy toll of the local population. The universally practised polygamy and in certain cases, as amongst the Todas, polyandry further hastens the spread of many contagious and hereditary diseases. Veneral diseases have been quite common amongst some of the tribes which lived in close association with the people belonging to the neighbouring civilization. Diseases hitherto unknown to the tribesmen spread amongst them very quickly since they possess no resistance to them having had no contacts at all with such germs for generations.

It was in the early part of the year 1958 when I went to the land of the Nagas. In this area there was nothing which was not new to me and I sat down to write my observations about those wonderful people.

But who are those people in the Nagaland? Whence they came? Where do they exactly live? How do they live and what do they do to live? And finally, what do they live for? These are questions which I asked myself.

And to find answers I travelled hundreds of miles, visited the tribal villages and their huts, met the young and old Nagas and their women folk, addressed them and heard them, discussed with them their problems and at the same time endeavoured to appreciate their attitude to life and death and life after death.

Chapter 2

THE JOURNEY'S END

I JOURNEYED to the land of the Nagas from Poona located in the lap of the old and the rugged Western Ghats. Mokokchung about 4500 feet above the sea level in the North-Eastern hilly region of India is separated from Poona by a distance of about 2000 miles. If you travel by train or make a trip by road, you will observe a gradual difference and change in terrain, climate, vegetation, and in the structure of villages, in dress and in social behaviour. The Western Ghats, and more so the region around Poona, where the great warrior Shivaji struck mighty blows to his adversaries, is a land of enchanting beauty of green valleys. This is the land where under the apron of the bluish grey clouds numerous seasonal waterfalls and springs are born. The reflection of the sun's rays from the tiny droplets of water hanging from the point-ends of the green leaves piercing through the fragrance of the early morning breeze, the formation of a number of rainbows against the expansive blue sky spotted with clouds intercepted by a crest line, hundreds of lotus flowers swinging along with the ripples in the muddy ponds, the smoke-like dark clouds rising from the adjoining Arabian Sea and many other blessings of the monsoon open up a chapter of wonderful beauty. There is too much for the eye to register and for the heart to respond.

Then comes the arid and the parched land of Rajasthan—the land of the old brave Rajputs who went to the battlefield determined not to return till victory crowned their heads. Extending as far as your eye can see, the land is sandy and dry. Except around the wet spots, there is hardly any vegetation or greenery to be seen. But the river Chambal is there which brings solace to the tired and the thirsty. This huge sheet of water comes rolling down to give to the people their life-giving water. At the same time the gorges and ravines along this great river give shelter to dacoits who operate from their hideouts. The

Chambal is the life and death for the people in Central India.

After Rajasthan, you find yourself entering into the plains which were once the centres of the great Moghul Empire. The Ganga and the Jamuna with their many tributaries run through the entire land. Here farmers had just to throw seeds to see the crops standing shoulder high after a few months. People had to work little for their lives and could, therefore, afford to indulge in cultural and social activities. But the easy and lazy life reduced these men, the lovers of woman, wine, and chess, to a state of perpetual torpor and thus whenever the hardy races came marching down to the plains from the north of the Himalayas, they found no resistance that could match their valour. An unwilling submission awaited them.

Then you set foot on the mineral riches of Bihar which was once a great seat of our old civilization. Adjoining this State, further east, you find the daughter of Brahamaputra, i.e. Bengal. The never-ending green fields of paddy, the betel leaf creepers climbing up the raised bamboo platforms and a group of shrouded huts distinguish Bengal from the rest of India.

And now you are in Assam, full of tea gardens which look like a green carpet spread over the earth. Then go further east, to the extreme end, and you are in Nagaland about which you know so little. The people of this little known land have a world of their own in which their dreams and superstitions are interpreted according to their own wisdom; their inconclusive sayings and folklore about the various natural phenomena, their origin and their epics which are all very interesting reflect their culture; their vigorous life full of ceremonies, taboos, hunting expeditions, inter-village feuds and head-hunting raids (now a thing of the past) attract your admiration as well as sympathy. You see the colourful dress of the Nagas—it is a novelty for you. Their dances are rhythmic, savagely enchanting and dazzlingly colourful. You want to live with them, to understand them for they are a very hospitable set of innocent folks.

The tribesmen of this region, known by the general term 'Nagas', do not know as to how the name 'Naga' came to be applied to them. Various interpretations are given but the truth is yet to be established. It could not have been derived from the Sanskrit word *naga* meaning snake as the Nagas do not seem to

have had any association with snakes in particular. In case there was a clan having some totemistic association with the snake, the snake ensign and the name Naga would have been quite appropriate. But there is no available evidence of this association in the incomplete history of the Nagas.

It is probable that the name 'Naga' was derived from the Hindustani word *nanga* meaning naked. It could be a very appropriate name given by those neighbouring communities who must have looked with apathy on a set of naked people. We know of the term *nangas* used for those *sadhus* who stay only in their natural suit of skin and are often seen marching in great processions during the religious festivals.

Again the word 'Naga' could as well have been connected with the Sanskrit word *naga* meaning a hill or the word might have been derived from *nok* meaning people speaking the dialect of the Aos.

Chapter 3

THE LITTLE KNOWN LAND

THE UNCHECKED howling winds screamed through the chinks and the various open spaces in the *basha*. It sounded like a million devils tiring their throats in a pandemonium. And the entire *basha* shook as if a mighty, long-horned bison was rolling under the ground. The kerosene lamp, hung from the horizontal pole, swang unrhythmically casting varying shadows on the roughly intertwined bamboo walls.

It was the month of January. Deep in the Sema area, under the misty shadows of the Himalayan peaks which seemed to touch the sky, wrapped up in my woollens, I came out of my *basha* to see the night sentries who had taken their posts about half an hour earlier. The breeze which came roaring with a blade-like cutting effect sent a chill right down to the innermost parts of my body. It was dark all around but for the stars which overcast the sky. After exposing myself to the inclement weather for a few minutes, I found that my fingers had become numb. I felt as if I had lost my ears and nose. The velocity of wind here is not less than sixty miles an hour and your carelessness in fixing the pegs might cause you the loss of the tent which might get wafted from one valley to another.

But the huts of the Nagas were never blown off and the Nagas stand this severe climate all alone without even a yard-length of cloth on their bare bodies. Naga life is a saga of fight by the unaided man against the cruel forces of nature.

The weather in this region remains like that from November to February. These hills, particularly at high altitudes, are extremely cold. Frost at night and dense fog during the day are quite common. Off the monsoon season, the days are generally bright. During the months from May to October the monsoon from the Bay of Bengal plays havoc. It keeps on raining without break for weeks and people have to remain indoors. As it happens in Simla clouds are often seen inside your tents and

before you can take any precautions, your clothes are moist. Even during the wintry months, it rains occasionally making the weather still more severe. The annual rainfall in the area varies from seventy-five to a hundred inches.

The region consists of a narrow strip of hilly country with a mean length as the crow flies of about a hundred and fifty miles. Nothing except hills and narrow valleys can be seen. Some of the hills have a gradual slope but as you go north the slopes start getting steeper and it takes a lion's heart and a bull's stamina to climb one of them without stopping for rest every now and then. The Japvo is the highest mountain, its pinnacle being at a height of 9890 feet above the sea level. Though many hills of about 6000 feet height are to be found, generally the area lies between 3000 and 5000 feet high above sea level.

Most of the hills up to a height of about 5000 feet have been cultivated occasionally and thus cleared of the bamboo, grass, forest shrubs, and all. At such places the large trees are not to be seen but this does not mean that the area is deficient in good timber. Often due to indiscriminate cutting of trees, mature timber may not be found in abundance but the higher hills still remain covered with ever-green trees.

The rivers run in a serpentine manner in between these mountains. You can see their turnings, left and right, at least twenty times in a mile. During the monsoons the entire region looks like a collection of streams small and big. This makes communications very difficult. Though the streams flow full to the brim none of them assumes such proportions as to flood the area around because before the attainment of this stage the water is drained out from the tumbling streams to rivers like Dhansiri, Diyung, Dikhu and Tizu which further lead on by fairly easy gradients.

Although this land of lofty hills and low valleys is separated in the east by the Burmese boundary, we find across the border, which is not fully demarcated, similar tribal cultures. Across the western boundary lies the Brahmaputra valley of Assam. For a short stretch in the north-east, the Tirap Frontier Division, of NEFA butts against Nagaland. The southern boundary is formed completely by Manipur.

The newly created State of Nagaland covers an area

of 6366 square miles with an aggregate population of about 3.7 lakhs. The entire tribal population which is divided amongst fifteen major tribes like the Konyak, Ao, Sema, Angami, Chakhasang, Lotha, Chang, Phom, Sangtam, Khinmungan, Imchungar, Rengma, Zelieng is split up in about 700 villages mostly situated at the hill tops or steep slopes or ridges. About 1.25 lakh Nagas reside in northern Manipur. The areas across the border in Burma are occupied by about one lakh Nagas.

NEFA, the adjoining territory of Nagaland, starts from the foothills and continues rising along the Himalayas, leaving Tibet in the north and Bhutan in the west. The east is bounded by Burma and towards the south are found the fertile plains of Assam. Thus NEFA covers a total area of about 31,400 square miles, roughly five times that of Nagaland, and has a population of about 3.4 lakhs which comes to about 11 persons per square mile, while Nagaland has almost 58 persons per square mile. In addition to about 40,000 Nagas, there are no less than twenty-five tribes in NEFA. The geographical and climatic conditions in NEFA are not very different from the neighbouring tribal area. Rainfall in NEFA might measure two hundred inches a year at certain places.

After independence the means of communication have been much improved in this region. Almost all the important places have been connected by road. In Nagaland in particular most of the villages are accessible by jeepable roads. Of course occasionally roads have proved very treacherous as landslides have been responsible for taking the lives of many travellers.

Nagaland being within the deadly beat of the monsoon for almost half of the year, on certain hills not an inch of land is to be found which is without vegetation and the visibility at certain places is as little as six feet. Some of the trees are seventy-five feet tall with absolutely straight trunks. The ground is broken to the extent that in certain areas you may find at least four separate ranges with a corresponding number of valleys in a mile. Further, the entire area being covered with a thick impregnable blanket of green growth, it might take a few days before you could cut your way through one mile of such a terrain.

High quality timber trees which are so expensive in the plains grow wildly unchecked. A patch with unlimited bamboo

growth or a banana grove is another very common sight. Various other varieties of unclassified timber also exist. Many trees from which scents could be extracted on a large scale or which have medicinal value are also to be found in their natural wild state. Of course, they have to be hunted for.

Rice is the staple food of the Nagas and a few other cereals that are popular are grown. Paddy is the main crop. Maize is also cultivated at certain places. Garlic, ginger, rye, roots and a few other vegetables are generally grown. Chilli is grown and relished. Betel leaves and nuts are also very popular. At certain places papaya and pineapples are also grown and oranges grow wild. It has been said that the officers who went to Mokokchung in early 1956 did not drink water till they got fed up with the orange juice because the oranges at that time were being sold at the rate of one rupee per hundred or so.

Treacherous clay soil covers the hill sides of the hills and they are slippery after heavy rainfall. Landslides are a very common feature after a new cut has been made. Some deposits of lime embedded in soil have been discovered. Coal is also found though in a meagre quantity and mined at a few places.

A Naga eats anything from an eagle to a dog, from rice to young bamboo shoots, and from fowls to a *mithun*. There are many animals found in this region, namely elephant, tiger, bear, leopard, bison, buffalo, sambhur, hogdeer, barking deer, and wild pig. Fowls like partridges and pheasants are a common sight. *Mithun* (*bos frontalis*) is the prestige animal and hence plays an important part in the life of the Nagas. Though not used for milking, its possession directly affects the status of a person. It is possibly related to both the cow and the buffalo. With a face resembling that of a cow it has the bulky body of a buffalo. It may be dark brown or black in colour or piebald.

One could sit down on the high bank of a stream to throw the line down and at the same time keep a gun loaded to fire at any wild fowl. Also one could go out for a big game along with the Nagas who are seasoned *shikaris* and enjoy the trip thoroughly. Nagaland—a great sports ground—offers unlimited adventures and thrills to a person who has lived all his life in the walled cities walking on bitumen roads or moving by buses and trams.

Chapter 4

THOSE BYGONE DAYS

RECORDED HISTORY does not tell us much about the origin of tribesmen in Nagaland: who they were and whence they came. To say something about their early history is more of a guesswork than a fact of chronicle. It appears that the plains of Assam being very rich and fertile attracted many tribes from the north-east. Probably the hard and enduring nomadic tribes from the north and north-east of India came to these plains in search of fertile lands and finding the region congenial settled down. Here life was easy and climate more hospitable than that of their original home which gave them nothing but biting cold in abundance. Crops could be grown here with much less labour and thus the procuring of food became an easy affair. The tough and hardy tribes finding the living conditions very favourable did not have to do much in the way of physical hardship. As a result, it may be conjectured, that they paid a lot of their attention to cultural and social activities. In this way the tribes that came next were able to defeat the tribes that had settled earlier and had taken to the leisurely way of cultured life. Always the invader proved stronger while the defender having become weaker was the loser. The victor occupied the plains and the victim had to run about to save his skin. And in that region he took shelter in the hills of Khasi, Jaintia, Garo and so on. Further encroachment by the neighbouring tribes and the periodic efforts for occupation by the new tribes forced the weaker communities to go out in search of such settlements as could be safe from attacks. In this way at different times various tribes shifted to the hilly areas now called North East Frontier Agency and Nagaland.

Waves after waves came and subsequently ran helter-skelter to take refuge in the neighbouring hills or to muster up and re-organize their tribes after the attack of the invaders. But it appears that they could seldom launch a counter-attack to

recover their lost land and thus gradually submitted themselves to a subordinate position. It is probable that the plains of Assam were mere battlefields, battles taking place every now and then and tribesmen running amuck.

The tribesmen who now occupy this hilly region belong to an Indo-Mongoloid group. They possess a very well-built and developed body and are of medium stature, their complexion varying from light yellow to brown with straight black hair. Their nose is generally flat, prominently fitted in a round face.

Irrespective of their origin and time of arrival, you find today that all the tribes of Nagaland are in the same stage of development. On account of complete seclusion these tribes, though situated at different places, have been trying to develop themselves in their own way but it may be safely said that their development has been very tardy.

Other tribes that are in a similar stage of civilization can well be found in various other parts of the world, for example, in Burma, in Philippines, in Borneo, in New Guinea, in Australia, and in other places in Africa and America. Some of the social customs and traits of the Nagas are quite similar and sometimes even just the same when compared with other corresponding cultures which are separated by thousands of miles and have had no inter-communication among them for many centuries. Why do the tribes of Borneo indulge in deadly head-hunting? The reason for this is almost the same as you would get from a Konyak of Tuensang District of Nagaland. The belief in ghosts and spirits is almost universally maintained by most of the tribes. Is this all an accident or a natural stage through which every developing civilization must pass or is it because all these tribes originally belonged to one stock but in course of time were separated due to higher civilization overpowering them and thus forcing them to live in isolation in small pockets in inaccessible areas?

Centuries before Christ it was believed that this fertile land around the river Brahmaputra was inhabited by Austric people who later on, due to the force of circumstances, shifted to the Khasi and Jaintia hills. But not much information is available till the Ahom rulers brought this territory under their sword. History sits with its lips tight. Occasional references are, of course, available in the form of mythological

stories. Myths and epics throw some light on their origin and ancestors but all this cannot be very faithfully relied upon. The compilation and collection of such information to form a composite chapter of history amounts to sewing a garment from the tatters collected all around the expanseless valley of Brahmaputra.

Consequently we straightway jump to the thirteenth century when the Ahoms, an offshoot of the mighty Shan race, came to know about this land. The allurements were enough to set them marching through the thickly overgrown hilly regions of the north-east.

The Ahoms who came into this fabulous valley as tough and hardy soldiers took a big step in amalgamating themselves with the tribesmen by adopting their children and marrying the girls from amongst the tribal stock. But it was not a one way traffic. There have been some instances when the Ahom kings married their daughters to the brave Nagas. At the same time on many occasions military expeditions were sent in case the tribesmen ignored to pay heed to the Ahom authority.

There were many open clashes and battles between the Ahom kings and the Nagas were not uncommon, but soon after the conclusion of the encounter, the Ahom kings, wisely enough, established treaties of friendship and peace with the vanquished tribal chiefs. For this purpose many special officials had been appointed. The rulers went a step further and offered land, paddy, vegetables, etc., and allowed the use of the fishing tanks to the tribesmen. Trade was encouraged though it was strictly regulated. In return the tribal chiefs paid tribute to the Ahoms in the form of presents. In general, the tribesmen were kept under control and to make good any loss of life or property due to the tribal activities, the gates of the bazaars were closed for the tribes. This action invariably proved effective.

Ultimately, the Ahoms fell an easy prey to this cornucopia. In the fertile land of abundance they started losing their physical strength and the desire for the continuance of military achievements began to diminish. They fought the tribesmen, they fought the Muslim invaders, they fought the Moghuls during the end of the 17th century, but they could not subdue the haunting tribes and failed to overcome the soporific climate of

the valley.

Cultural and religious activities became more lucrative for them and their administration became corrupt. The physical and moral degradation coupled with the softening effect of the Hindu religion which they started patronizing brought their ruin nearer and ultimately in 1838 they succumbed to the British, leaving the Nagas as turbulent as they were before the Ahom arms embraced them.

Though Capt. Jenkins entered the Angami area in 1832, it was three years later, in 1835, that the East India Company started interfering with the tribes of Nagaland. By then the Nagas had started raiding the villages around their territory. The only effective check to bring an end to such heinous activities of the tribesmen lay in sending military expeditions. British efforts to control the Angami area bordering Manipur by rendering direct assistance to the Raja of Manipur and Tularam Senapati did not prove very successful. By about 1850 not less than ten expeditions had been sent on punitive role.

Such expeditions became a day-to-day affair and the British found their pocket too tight to finance such promenades. At the same time some officers genuinely felt that stringent measures against the Nagas and direct physical interference would not result in any improvement of the situation. As a result, Lord Dalhousie formulated the policy of trade with them as long as they were peaceful and rigidly excluding them from all communications either to sell what they had got or to buy what they wanted if they became turbulent and troublesome. The jungle line could not be guarded and after the implementation of the above policy, there were as many as twenty-two Naga raids in which an aggregate of fifty-five persons were killed. In a way the policy of non-interference failed and the local officers started repeatedly asking the Government for some bold action. In 1862 the Commissioner of the area requested for a complete reversal of policy in the following words: "It is not creditable to our Government that such atrocities should recur annually and with unvarying certainty and that we should be powerless alike to protect our

*Government of India, *Frontier & Overseas Expeditions from India* Vol. IV, 1913, pp. 203—24.

subjects or punish the aggressors. It is quite certain that our relations with the Nagas could not possibly be on a worse footing than they are now. The non-interference policy is excellent in theory, but the Government will be probably inclined to think it must be abandoned!"

Subsequently in 1866, Lieut. Gregory was sent as Deputy Commissioner to Samaguting and the already existing skeleton outpost was further expanded, it became possible for the authorities to take prompt punitive action against the few raids conducted soon after by the Angamis. This drive against the tribal raids in no way discouraged the inter-tribal feuds which kept on continuing at the same frequency and with the same savage ferocity.

To achieve effective control over the tribal activities, the year 1878 saw the beginning of the establishment of Naga Hills District and by 1888 seats for administration had been established at places like Kohima, Wokha, and Mokokchung. In spite of all this the Angamis, Aos, and Semas still kept on giving occasional trouble and the practice of head-hunting still continued in the Tuensang area, the area which from 1902 onwards was being administered by the Governor of Assam on behalf of the Governor-General of India. In 1935 Tuensang was declared a Tribal Area. It has been quite a notorious place, for the Konyaks practised the art of head-hunting till as late as 1958.

Before the twentieth century saw light, many ugly incidents had taken place which confirmed the already existing misunderstanding between the tribes and the authorities. In 1874 the Nagas attacked a survey party and treacherously killed a British Officer and eighty men and wounded another officer and fifty men. As a consequence of this, a punitive expedition of 308 men was marched through the area destroying all the implicated villages. Various other Naga raids ended with similar or greater loss for the Nagas.

The internal relations among the Nagas were similar to those of the Pathans of the North West Frontier. The tribes which were further split up into various sub-divisions, did not always have recognized chiefs. Normally the various tribes, clans or villages remained at perpetual hostility to each other and deadly feuds took place generation after generation, but sometimes they

joined hands for a larger purpose. The main excitement and the aim behind these attacks was the desire for the collection of heads, as the possession of human skull, according to the Nagas, was a prized trophy and a man was not worth his name till he had collected at least one.

While considering the past of the Nagas, we cannot ignore the tribesmen in NEFA because the inhabitants of NEFA and Nagaland have many things in common. It will be essential therefore to study the tribes of NEFA as well. In many cases the same tribe is found across the boundary in the adjacent district or division. People of Nagaland appear somewhat similar to their neighbouring tribes. All the tribes in the region seem to have reached almost the same level of development though, no doubt, a few groups of tribes due to the activities of the Christian missionaries have advanced comparatively more.

Soon after the disintegration of the Ahom authority, the British, as in the case of Naga Hills, started extending their authority into the tribal area of NEFA. An Assistant Political Officer, in 1882, was appointed at Sadiya. In spite of all the raids, ambushes and treacherous murders, the British managed to extend their administration and the year 1919 saw the entire tribal area being divided into Balipara Frontier Tract and Sadiya Frontier Tract. Later on in 1942 Tirap Frontier Tract was sliced off from Sadiya Frontier Tract.

Along with the administrative changes, the British to some extent did protect the tribesmen against the exploitation of the crafty business men from the plains. In the year 1873 the Inner Line Regulation was enacted. The aim of this act was to ensure that no encroachments were made into the tribal areas and to enforce strict travel regulation into the tribal area. It also made rules for trade. Any student of tribal history would appreciate this act which aimed at protecting the rights, privileges, customs, traditions and way of life of the tribesmen. The enforcement of such regulations which required a person to be in possession of a permit before he could step into the tribal area should not in any way be taken as a political move on the part of the British to isolate the hills from the plains. Actually such a policy was the outcome of genuine and sincere thinking and of dire necessity. And had such a treatment not been given to the tribesmen, the

consequences could have been serious. The tribes would have become extinct either because of poor economic conditions due to exploitation or the various deadly feuds that would have taken place against the plainsmen and amongst themselves.

But so far as NEFA is concerned this was not the last stage of development. The authorities endeavoured to introduce the many administrative changes gradually to ensure that the tribal institutions were preserved. The sudden changes brought overnight could have had serious repercussions on the morale of the people and their attitude towards the administration.

Along with these changes, something along the Indian border with Tibet started brewing and its impact was felt far beyond. It will be seen that after the British conquest of Assam and the surrounding tribal areas, not much serious attention was paid to this region, for the country was very rough and mountainous. There were jungles infested with wild beasts and poisonous insects. The inhabitants appeared to be wild and provocative, the mineral wealth did not show much promise and the land did not appear to be agriculturally rich either. There was, therefore, a period of lull as far as development and modernization were concerned. It was only in 1911 when the Chinese Government, announcing suzerainty over Tibet, declared that a portion of the north-east hills of India fell under their jurisdiction that the Government paid earnest attention to this area. This declaration was not acceptable to the British. In order to define the exact line of demarcation between the two countries talks were held between China, Tibet, and India in 1914. Sir Henry McMahon was the representative of India. The principle of watershed being the basis for demarcation, a boundary along the Himalayas, which till now is known as the McMahon Line, was fixed. After this a few military and semi-military posts were set up but the means of transport and communication were still very poor.

So in between the Inner Line and the McMahon Line lay the green hills, formed up in the shape of a horse-shoe, almost completely cut off and disconnected from the rest of the country and the world around.

The gong struck twelve on the night of 14/15th August in 1947 and India though partitioned became free. Then began a

new era for the tribesmen of India.

Our leaders, fully determined to develop our country into a welfare State, set out on the hard task of putting her on the road to progress. Under the able and matchless guidance of the great leader, Mr. Jawaharlal Nehru, the Cabinet was formed and the portfolios were given to deserving freedom fighters. Similarly other high posts vacated by the British officials were made open to the Indians. The problems facing India at that time were of considerable magnitude and called for seasoned administrators but the stalwarts of Independence Movement though new to the task showed a remarkable genius in grappling with the situation.

Some Indian leaders proved a great asset as Ministers. Sardar Patel, the Iron Man of India, very ably dealt with some five hundred and odd States all over India which had been left with unsettled political status. In the winter of 1947 trouble started in Kashmir. Then came the police action in Hyderabad and the big food problem cast its black shadows over India while the refugees from Pakistan still slept on the footpaths of the Queens-way of New Delhi. The devastating floods and the earthquakes did not spare the ill-fated Assam in 1950. The Government very correctly realized the need for unity of India and the Prime Minister in 1952 said: "After the achievement of Independence, the basic problem of India taken as a whole is one of integration and consolidation." The planned development of the country started with the First Five Year Plan. India started becoming a great moral force in the world.

In spite of these phenomenal events taking place one after another soon after Independence, the tribesmen were never kept out of sight. Actually to start with, the Constitution provided a number of special considerations and safeguards for them and no time was lost in giving such considerations a practical shape.

By 1948, the Balipara Frontier Tract and the already reduced Sadiya Frontier Tract had been further sub-divided into Subansiri Area and Sela Sub Agency, Abor Hills, and Mishmi Hills, respectively. In 1951 the Tribal Area was redesignated as Tuensang and merged with NEFA as an additional division.

In 1954 another reorganization took place and the entire region, excluding Naga Hills, was divided into six frontier

divisions, namely Kameng, Subansiri, Siang, Lohit, Tirap, and Tuensang, the first two being from Balipara Frontier Tract, and the remaining four from the Sadiya Frontier Tract. This new set up of six frontier divisions was termed as North East Frontier Agency (NEFA).

Another change was yet to take place. The Tuensang Frontier Division was amalgamated with Naga Hills to form the Naga Hills Tuensang Area (NHTA). This was further subdivided into three districts of Kohima, Mokokchung and Tuensang. This change, unlike the previous ones, had a political background. Its origin takes us back to the early forties when a socio-political body by the name of Naga National Council (NNC) came into being. It was, then, a very welcome development since there was no organization or society amongst the Nagas which could represent the people as a whole or through their spokesman.

In 1945 the Council in one of its resolutions asked for local autonomy to safeguard the Naga interests. Later in 1946 its stand further shifted; the Council asked the Government to place the Naga Hills District of Assam under Central Administration. The proposal could not be accepted as its approval would have affected the status of Assam, of which Naga Hills was an integral district. This demand kept on hanging in the balance till 1952 when Mr. Phizo took over the Presidentship of NNC. Then came in the demand for independence and in 1955 under the leadership of Mr. Phizo an armed conflict against the Government officials and those Nagas who did not show sympathy for this move was set afoot. After the climax of the hostilities, Mr. Phizo's popularity began to wane as fast as it had waxed. The 'Redeemer' was becoming a nuisance to his own people. Ultimately due to the atrocities committed against his own associates and people, the political control gradually started slipping into the hands of the moderate forces.

Finally, on the recommendations of the Naga Peoples Convention (NPC) which categorically rejected the demand for independence, the Government agreed to unite Tuensang with Naga Hills and place the new unit NHTA under the Central Administration. A bill to that effect was moved in the Parliament on 29th November, 1957, to which the President of India

gave his assent. NPC was an outcome of the frustration among the masses, lack of faith in the leadership of NNC and a general awakening that the Nagas were as much Indians as the Punjabis or Gujaratis.

This new set-up by itself did not end the hostilities but considerably reduced the rebel actions. Many of them saw the light of the day and gave up the mad idea in favour of becoming peaceful citizens. Some got arrested by the police and a few were killed in action fighting against security troops but their hard core still remained in hiding.

With the popular support from the people and enhanced economic and material aid from the Government, the new organization started moving gradually towards the fulfilment of the objective for which a section of Nagas had gone on the warpath.

The most significant administrative change that ever took place for the Nagas was announced by the Prime Minister, Mr. Nehru, in the Parliament on 1st August, 1960. New Delhi took a bold step in accepting the demand of the 15-member Naga delegation of creating the sixteenth State by the name of Nagaland within the Indian Union. This State with an annual income of round about Rs. 5 lakhs comprised the Naga Hills Tuensang Area which was till then being administered by the President of India through the Governor of Assam as his agent.

The Naga delegation which represented all the tribes of NHTA agreed to have the Governor of Assam as their Governor of Nagaland as well. As per the 16-point Memorandum, the new State was to have a council of ministers, a legislature, representation both in Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha and the annual subsidy to meet the expenditure on development schemes and the cost of administration. It was further agreed that for some time the new State would be placed directly under the Ministry of External Affairs and that an Interim Body representing all the tribes of Nagaland would be set up to advise the Governor during the transitional period. Another important point of agreement was about the authority to be given to the Nagaland administration to deal with the social and religious practices, Naga customary law, the ownership and transfer of land and other assets, and the civil and criminal cases as long

as they affected the Naga customary law only. For administration, each tribe was to have its own village, and tribal councils. Since Tuensang District came under administrative control much later, it was agreed that a Regional Council consisting of elected members from all the tribes be set up to administer the District for a period of ten years after which the situation would be reviewed. This Council was not obliged to accept the decisions of the Legislative Assembly of Nagaland.

The acceptance of the above and a few other points gave the Nagas an opportunity to develop according to their own way with all the assistance from the technically advanced neighbours. But these proposed changes did not satisfy the hostile tribesmen who stricken with megalomania, shot down an Air Force Dakota in August 1960 as a mark of protest and after it they captured its entire crew of five. After about twenty months of captivity, during which they were moved from one place to another, these personnel were released in the Burmese territory.

Though such incidents did disturb the peace, the disorganized rebel activities indicated little power and less hostility. In the meantime on 4th September, 1962, Nagaland became a reality when the President gave his assent to the State of Nagaland and the Constitution amendment acts. More damage was caused to the prestige of the rebels when President Radhakrishnan officially inaugurated the State of Nagaland as the sixteenth State of Indian Union at Kohima on 1st December, 1963. Mr. Shilu Ao, hitherto Chairman of the Executive Council, thus became the first Chief Minister.

Peace prevailed. Nagaland is now on the threshold of a new era. The Nagas tasted peace after a prolonged period; it is unlikely that the rebel Nagas will command the same loyalty and sympathy of the masses as they did with considerable success in the middle fifties. Naga liberalism has taken firm roots and the length of time up to which the rebels can sustain themselves will depend, to a very great extent, on the leadership that the new system can provide.

Chapter 5

INTO THE JUNGLES

IT WAS on the morning of 8th January, 1958, while waiting at Amingaon railway terminus for the steamer to ferry us across river Brahmaputra, that I came across a gentleman by the name of Mr. Govind Sagar, whose revelations made me feel ill at ease. An employee of one of the tea gardens of Assam, he was on his way to Lucknow and seemed to be rather upset about the various insurrectionist activities of the Nagas. Probably seeing me in olive green—it could not have been that solitary star on my shoulders which impressed him—he came very close to me and in a very patronizing tone asked me if I was proceeding to Naga Hills. Half out of ignorance and half not knowing what to say, being taken unaware by his sudden question, I waved my head to mean 'no'. Then he settled down to talking for good fifteen minutes. He narrated to me the ghastly stories regarding the Naga rebels—a small section of the tribal population of Naga Hills District—which demanded independence. Their attacks on the police posts, railway stations, and running trains, on post and telegraph offices, shops in busy marketing centres, on the houses of moderate and liberal Nagas and Government officials, as well as kidnapping of men and burning of houses and looting of granaries were all projected before me in only a few breathless sentences like a sixteen millimetre film on a private screen.

He further narrated an incident about a 'human being' who had been killed as an offering for sacrifice. I do not know how this news reached him through the thick jungle. The thing that put me into grim meditation was the news that the Nagas till then indulged in head-hunting and the rich would buy a slave just to chop his head off to display his skull hanging round their necks as a trophy or as a battle honour.

Without making sure even once whether I was attentively listening to him, he kept on talking. Eventually he got very excited

and started staggering in his speech. If his train had not whistled in time, saliva would have started foaming out of his mouth.

I waited for another ten minutes before the steamer touched our bank. In the meantime I witnessed only a massive endless sheet of water in front of me. I could hardly see the far bank. I gazed at the softly waving water and my mind started wandering about the land and its people across the river. If what Mr. Govind Sagar, an unskilled labourer employed in the tea gardens (as I came to know at the tail-end of my conversation), told me was a fact then my going to Naga Hills was asking for a short cut to the heavens. I had not yet gathered all my thoughts when a porter carrying three steel boxes on his head, nudged me with his shoulders to make his way. I was just displaced by a few feet and was not disturbed at all for the water-line was still fifty yards away from where I stood.

The steamer touched the near bank. There was a mad rush, an endless beeline of porters compressed at the entrance to the steamer like a Ventury tube. The porters had all sorts of packing cases around them, over their heads, at their backs, under their arms and in the clenched hands. The whole area was huddled with things like boxes of various size and shape and holdalls of all colours. Attache cases, kit bags, hand bags, fruit cases, bundles in bed covers of colourful check designs, *durris*, blankets, quilts, etc., and many other articles were on parade.

A multitude of Bhutias—I do not know where they were up to—were moving in all directions. Right in the open, in bright sunshine, a middle-aged woman with her hair uncombed sat on the bare ground openly feeding her child at her left breast. A few miserable looking hawkers who had not shaved their beards for days paced the area sluggishly. It appeared that they had no intention of selling their stale eats.

As the boat touched the bank, every one tried to enter earlier than the others, with the result that there was a near stampede. The situation would have turned ugly but for the timely arrival of the Railway Police. It reminded me of the partition days: an unlimited mass of refugees without money, without clothes and without food trying to board the earliest train. Anyway, I was not prepared to renew that terrible feeling of human injustice and suffering. I started looking ahead.

Gradually everything became calm. It gave me the feeling of having gone through a paroxysm. The passengers of all classes and categories had settled down and packed the little ship like the black seeds in a water-melon. There was a loud croggy whistle and with the increasing churning noise of the water, the boat steamed off.

She moved making a hissing sound slowly like a caterpillar, leaving a fading white trail behind in the placid river which had on many occasions, when in turmoil, washed away half the country around leaving it in a dreadful state of misery.

Soon the boat touched Pandu—the railway station on the opposite bank where the connecting train was waiting. I got my luggage dumped and before the green signal was up, Mr. Govind Sagar's brief but effective though not very authentic talk, and the tiresome changeover in the journey, had lulled me to sleep. I was heading for Jorhat.

It was nearing dusk when the train rolled along a nearly deserted platform. Well, it was Jorhat town. There being no porter available, I had to literally throw my luggage out before the train could whisk off with a few of my packets.

As I went through the town, it became quite dark. Things seemed to be just as normal as anywhere else. People moved about and the town appeared to be full of activity and as my friend forecast at Amingaon, nothing actively hostile seemed to be threatening. I thought perhaps dusk was the time of respite.

Next morning after the night's good sleep at Jorhat, I was ready for Amguri, about twenty-five miles towards Mokokchung, for my first entry into the tribal area. It was a chilly morning and in addition to my angola shirt and a jersey I slung a woollen scarf round my neck. There was a shrill long blow from the whistle and the convoy marched off towards Mokokchung, sixty-five miles away.

After a few miles of level road we entered the gradually rising country—the road followed the country very faithfully. First, it went rising along the side of a particular range, then it came to a saddle and took the other side of another range. Suddenly it would make a hairpin bend and then go up a steep slope, leaving a deep vertically edged gorge on one side. Innumerable

bridges and culverts came in the way giving passage to the rivers and streams. When half-way, for some distance the road went parallel to a deep running stream whose bank of rock stood almost vertical. It was a captivating sight. The bluish water running along the road about fifty feet below its level, tall green trees on either side, the fragrance of fresh green leaves, the chirping of the birds, occasional call of some wild animals, water rushing down the springs along the hill side and an endless mass of green hill ranges in front superimposing one another, all these made me spellbound. Everything was so natural that it took time to believe that the entire set-up was not artificial. It just happens that one fails to believe some time a phenomenon because it is too natural to be true.

This beautiful territory belonged to the Ao tribe. I passed by many villages and noticed many similarities. On top of a lofty hill or on a steep slope stood a group of huts normally in an arranged pattern. The huts generally had the same shape and size. It appeared to be comparatively easy to construct huts on the top of a ridge where some flat areas or gradual slopes could be found. The selection of a steep slope for this purpose entailed the cutting of large areas of hill sides and the provision of quite a few timber posts.

In the area around the villages lay the *jhum* fields where the tribesmen cultivated their paddy. Dispersed all along the fields on the surrounding hill sides you could see huts where the Nagas would rest during the working seasons. Certain hill faces had been completely burnt. This was essential because the method of cultivation adopted by the Aos was of shifting crops. At the lower areas and other such places where water during the monsoon ran in plenty, banana trees of all sizes could be seen and from a distance the entire area looked like a bunch of large green flowers.

Bamboo trees in large pockets grew wild at random and almost in the vicinity of every village fresh water-springs are the main source of water. In a particular village where a water-spring did not exist or the existing water-spring had probably dried up or had started supplying insufficient quantity of water I found an indigenous way of procuring water. I saw along the road for about a mile a continuous chain of half split

bamboos of about four inches to six inches in diameter either spiked or supported on vertical poles. These followed the slope of the road and each bamboo drain at the higher level drained water into the one that was just below. This was a marvellous innovation.

At the end of my journey I could realize that a hill top, a number of banana plantations, groves of thick and tall bamboos and, the most important, a water-spring are the essential requirements of a tribal village.

Darkness fell and Mokokchung town from a distance looked like two large trees joined at the top and lit by small yellow bulbs. It appeared to be very close but we had to go through many ups and downs before we could reach that little town. Most of the houses were made out of thatch and bamboos and many had tin roofs. Passing through the main road, I found the town humming with brisk activity. There was a busy crowd at the few general stores, some tea shops set up along the road-side were thronged by customers and many people moved up and down the water-bound stone road. It was a fairly wide road for two-way traffic.

It was quite cold at that height of about 4500 feet. It was bitter cold in the morning—at least that was my feeling the next day. I stayed at Mokokchung, the centre of the Ao culture, for a short while before I moved to another camp in the same territory. We kept on moving our camps as and when the road on either side up to about seven to ten miles got completed. Later on I stayed for some time with the Sema tribe.

In this part of India, in the early fifties you could not find any roads. For most of the distances the loads had to be carried till the Army Engineers started spreading a wide network of roads. By the time I went, the means of communication had become reasonably effective and had it not been for these roads, I could not have been able to tour such extensive area conveniently. Now one can move about in a jeep and a station wagon can approach almost any village. In addition to poor means of communication and transport, there were many other difficulties which a soldier had to face, leave alone a sophisticated traveller, the primary one being the fear of the tribesmen who were considered to be savagely cruel and instinctively treach-

erous. Another difficulty was the food and accommodation which in conjunction with the lack of knowledge of the tribal dialects and severe cold and heavy rainfall kept the visitor shy of the area.

The other important restriction was the conditions laid down by the Government from time to time to regulate the entry of the visitors. Though a controversial issue, the restriction proved a great safeguard for the tribal culture. The aim of these measures was to protect them from the exploitation by the outsiders which the tribesmen could not understand, being unfamiliar with their way of life. If we study carefully the causes of the various Naga raids, we would come to the conclusion that the blood spilling could be, to a very great extent, attributed to the misunderstanding of the authorities, or provocative and malicious behaviour on the part of the neighbouring communities or an official, or the zest for introducing improvements in the social or economic life of the tribesmen without understanding the implication of such proposed radical changes. Many members of a few survey parties that were sent to Naga hills were hacked by the *dao* because the local people felt suspicious about their intentions. Many times orders prohibiting the carrying of weapons in markets, which the tribesmen considered their birthright, were met with stiff resistance. In another tribal community the declaration of infanticide as an illegal act produced widespread opposition. Examples of cruel and inhuman treatment could be cited from incidents that took place in the Andaman Islands, where a group of tribesmen had earned the notoriety of killing and then cutting into pieces any outsider who happened to land or be in their vicinity. Though the poor foreigner might have come with the intention of a sincere explorer or to seek refuge in case of a maritime disaster nearby, the tribesmen never waited for an explanation. The blame for this continued outrage rests on those who, it is believed, started raiding the islands to pull out the menfolk for slave trade and thus angered the feelings of the innocent tribesmen.

Besides, economic exploitation in many forms resulted in strained relations. The tribesmen on a few occasions complained that their lands were being encroached upon by the planters. Often traders from surrounding areas cheated the innocent

tribesmen; sold to them things at grossly excessive prices; bartered with them goods at huge loss to the local people; did not fulfil the promised transactions and on occasions refused to pay back the agreed amount or goods worth that sum. Thus, on the realization that the tribesmen were being fooled or deceived, a split was caused. Here I must narrate a very illuminating incident which took place when I was in the Konyak area of Tuensang. It was about 9.30 p.m. There being neither a painter nor any paint with us, I was myself obliged to paint the board made out of light grey corrugated galvanized sheets with a four-inch brush and the black preservative as paint. It was dark and silence prevailed everywhere except for the humming of the hundreds of mosquitoes. Though I was putting on hand gloves and gumboots with pants tucked in and had applied anti-mosquito cream, I could not get rid of all these pests. I was just thumping the extra paint from the brush into the tin when I heard a sudden banging on the timber deck of the bridge which was about seventy-five yards away. The opening ceremony of this and two other bridges was to be performed by the Commissioner of NHTA, Col. Luthra, the next day. I felt that a few persons were running across the bridge. I just ignored and almost forgot the incident when the *chowkidar* came running to me breathless. Coming from a *basha* where he was staying along with some other Konyaks just about forty yards away from where I was, he was perspiring, more out of fear and excitement than out of exhaustion due to running. "*Sahib*, two hostile people came and have run away with Bansuri's pay. Give me the jeep. We will follow them. They have just gone on this road. They had two pistols with them." He spoke these words in short quick sentences almost breathlessly.

Bansuri was one of the Konyaks who was rather feminine in behaviour though very tall and well built. Not being able to call his long name every time, we had started calling him Bansuri for he had a very sweet voice. Meanwhile Bansuri also came as I had sent for him. It was later on revealed that two boys from Sibsagar had come to show a few items of magic to the Konyak folks. One of the tricksters asked Bansuri to produce a one-rupee note. On presentation, he set it on fire and produced two one-rupee notes from the ashes of the first one.

Similarly he made four out of two and asked Bansuri to go and buy rice out of the four rupees from the grocer's shop which was just fifty paces away. In joy Bansuri ran to the shop, whereupon the two magicians pulled out his seventy-five rupees from the nook where he had kept them and whisked off. Thinking that hearing the name of hostile people I would send my men running after the rogues and probably recover his money, he fabricated this story.

There had been many other cases when the innocent people were cheated. Such information and interesting facts came to light only when one stayed with them.

I was fortunate that I had very intimate contacts with the Aos, then with the Semas and Angamis and at the end with the Konyaks. Though most of them did not know the three Rs many of them appeared to be very sensible indeed. I often took part in their conversations, often with the aid of an interpreter and thus tried to get a feel of their ideas. On many occasions while having food with them and attending some of their ceremonies, my aim had always been to find out their approach to life, which was unique and attracted any newcomer's attention. At certain places my acquaintance with the entire village helped me to have a close look on their community life which demanded of its member to owe as much loyalty to his village as to his own family. Most of the hundreds of Nagas who worked with me on various occasions and at various places seemed to be very keen and sincere and greatly inspired by the all-round development work. Being so close, I got the rare opportunity of talking to them like one free man to another. Thus they came out with their inner ideas and views which often revealed very interesting details about their way of life.

The tribesmen of this area are not what they were a few decades back. Lots of changes had taken place. On account of the activities of the Christian missionaries, many Nagas have embraced Christianity and have developed a rigid faith in Christ; they have given up their reverence for the Sun and the Moon which have been relegated to a secondary position.

With the incoming of the security forces some of the tribal communities who had never dressed for ages saw for the first time men wearing clothes. This feature of the troops evoked a very quick response from the Nagas. Soon many among them

started covering their naked bodies with clothes. Naga boys could often be seen putting on very colourful shirts and smartly tailored shorts. Some of them had even started feeling shy in exposing their bodies to the caresses of nature, which their forefathers were so fond of.

The notorious head-hunters are not to be found among them now. It is a story of the past. The tribesmen have given up many of their customs and think of their century-old traditions rather lightly. I found most of the young Naga boys and girls without any tattoo marks on their bodies.

Their chiefs had been reduced to a nominal stature without much hold over the people. Unlike the Spartan discipline of the past you could see the Nagas arguing or discussing with their chiefs or headmen.

As they are a set of democratic people, decisions could not be thrust or dictated by an individual unless the village council approved of them. But this wonderful institution seemed to be losing its significance and the Nagas have started ignoring its claim as their final authority.

Along with their usual food which consists of rice and plenty of *madhu*, I found them relishing things like *halwa*, *khir*, *dals*, *chapati* and *puri* whenever these were offered to them. Some of the educated or those Nagas who had been to other cities had even learnt to cook them and their preparation was considered to be a matter of pride. Out of all the sweet dishes, *jalebi* seemed to have a great fascination for some of them.

The presence of the security forces had an accelerating effect on the fast changing Nagaland. Their presence has very much hastened the process of development. Not only have the Army personnel helped to improve or introduce at many places the means of communication and protected the peaceful citizens from the sudden hostile foray of a small section of Naga population, but have in their dealings with the Nagas exhibited fraternal attitude which has gone a long way in promoting the cordial atmosphere.

With the improved conditions, the Government very wisely started implementing the schemes for development. Many community development centres, dispensaries, hospitals, art and craft schools, weaving and knitting centres for girls, schools, post

offices, canteens and many other helpful agencies have been set up. This has greatly helped the Nagas during their difficult periods of bad harvests. It has given them an opportunity to earn while they learn. In this regard we find that for the first time, some concrete steps have been taken to preserve the arts of the Nagas.

The Government went to the extent of air-dropping food-grains at certain places whenever an acute shortage was anticipated. This was in addition to the supplies which had to be dropped for the security forces. Almost all the posts deep in the interior were fed by air. It would be interesting to be a spectator at one of the air-droppings at Mokokchung or Zuneboto and observe the thudding sound of rice and flour bags being dropped from the sky. Vegetables, fruit, milk tins, petrol, oil cans, rum bottles and finally the live goats and sheep are all dropped by air. Rice and flour bags are just pushed through the hatch as the plane dives down. It flies so low that one could even see the pilot. Though the animals are aided by the parachutes one could hear those little animals yelling half-way in the air and staring nervously at the ground through the openings of the wooden framework. It was only when the parachute did not open in some cases that nothing could save the package from shattering into pieces and the contents turning into paste. One witnesses at such occasion the fragments lying piece by piece at far off places. What a pitiable sight it is! One does not find a single complete limb out of the entire wreck. The whole lot of it is reduced to pulp and the spot turned red and then maroon with blood. The land for which many men had laid down their lives swallowed a few goats! Perhaps the Mother Earth takes her own share of the sacrifice!

I remember an incident when a packet on being jettisoned out of the doorway got stuck in it. The open parachute had almost half come out of plane when the remaining portion got stuck somewhere inside and could not come out any further. It was very cold at Mokokchung and we had just started our breakfast which we used to eat outside in bright sunshine when we saw the packet floating about in the mid air half way out. This was one of the rounds of a freight Dakota out of the various circuits that it had to make in order to drop all the supplies. On

seeing this rare phenomenon we were all very much amused but not for long. We immediately realized that the plane was going to cross right over our heads and if somehow the huge packet fell on us we would be reduced to a large sized omelette.

The plane was about two furlongs away and soon just a hundred yards, from where we were sitting, the large packet load still sticking out of it and waving in the air. The packet could get disconnected any time and crash on our heads. After a second the plane was seen whizzing over our heads and just a few hundred yards above. I did not have the time or the nerve to look at the other officers, but I am sure everyone was following the movement of the packet and not the plane, because it was that bundle bound in hay that could get disconnected any time and fall on us like a zooming bomb on a petrol dump. Well, we all escaped the impending death and so every one resumed his breathing and heaved a sigh of relief when the ill-fated packet fell into a deep ravine about five-hundred yards away. This created quite a stir all around the area and confirmed the feeling of the spectators that they could be as unsafe as the packets dropped from above.

Chapter 6

WITH SEMAS AT WORK

THE RADIANT sun is the giver of life. And with the early morning sun the Sema village comes to life. The cold mist disappears beyond the horizon and leaves a trail of warmth for the day and the occupants come out of their huts to harness the rigours of wild life. The firewood which was lit last evening is turned into a heap of ash by morning. The rising smoke finding no passage keeps on collecting on the already deposited soot on the ceiling.

Outside the hut, on the naked floor, wearing an indigenous woven shawl sat the children of the brave Sema warriors—the children of the soil, most of them completely naked, observing the deep valleys right in front or the casually moving train of pigs. Hens ran all around and over the hut, and the little pup sprawled rubbing its tail against the nose of the child who tried to crawl on his fours.

Sometimes a few of these young Sema boys joined together and took up a job. Their task might have been to cut a log. Two of them would grip at the log while the third got on the job with a little *dao*. The fourth one simply surveyed the work or carried his younger brother at his back in the sling and the infant kept on lying on his back without crying or even moving any limb. Perhaps he felt cosy in the warmth of his brother's back.

Sema children are very obedient and hardy. Right from the time they started walking, they became a source of help to their parents. They could carry heavy loads at a very young age.

The mother too sat in the sun, either weaving or beating the paddy. After serving a few handful of cooked rice to the children she again got busy with her job which could be harvesting the crops, beating the paddy, winnowing the rice or cooking food or weaving. She assisted in house building, jungle clearing, sowing and many other activities besides rearing the

children. The housewife knows the art of making beautiful and attractive garments like shawls, *chaddars* and bags. This brought additional income as such goods have become immensely popular all over India and therefore could be sold or bartered to other tribal communities.

Currency was a very late discovery to the Semas. Barter was the only system of trade known particularly to those communities which lived deep in the interior. For instance, paddy could be exchanged for handicrafts. Things could change many hands through this process of exchange. Thus the Daflas of the Subansiri Division of NEFA produced cotton and exchanged it for salt from Lakhimpur. Then the Daflas gave a portion of salt to the Apas and took millets from them in exchange. In some of the villages around Mon people were eager to acquire things like aluminium utensils, steel trunks, money bags, belts, lanterns and enamelled mugs in exchange for their vegetable crops and roots.

Nagas are becoming famous for their handicrafts and their artistic riches is now found in many other corners of India. The improved means of communication and transportation and the publicity given by the administration has gone a long way in reminding the people across the west of the jungle line that there exists another culture on the high hills. Nagas have a very keen eye and nimble hands to give expression to their artistic sensibility.

Besides paying attention to their handicrafts and hard work in the fields, the Semas work on the roads and this involves many other operations like cutting and blasting of rocks, filling of certain area, raising embankments, making drains and culverts and the like. But these they do with great interest and zeal, not merely for the sake of money but because they know the importance of the task. All these involve hard labour but the ingenuity of the Nagas, their power of endurance have made their work really enjoyable.

A responsible person from the village is made incharge for a certain mileage of road. He is to maintain that stretch of road allotted to the village. Being more or less a representative of the administration, he is responsible for arranging the labour with the assistance of the village headmen as and

when required. While moving on the road he often carries with him a bamboo stick which is as long as the required width of the road. He moves along the road with an air of importance for being one of the few well versed in the technicalities of road construction. With the help of a little Hindustani and gesticulations he expresses himself, but on a few occasions interpreters are required. This person really knows a lot about road construction. He can invariably show you the new possible alignments, the number of available labourers, natural resources and other details regarding the area as well as details about the jungle and the people. He is a sort of a ready reckoner as far as local information is concerned. At the same time he takes on the job of the labour representative, whip and the local supervisor and organizer—all in one.

Instead of giving contracts to people from outside the region, tribal villages are made responsible for the construction of roads. The sum paid to the villagers is quite reasonable and they feel quite satisfied with the arrangement. This is a good way of giving employment to the local peace loving Nagas and it was felt that the system would improve their standard of living.

Certainly it did improve their material possessions and made the Nagas a little mercenary. At the same time the sudden influx of money unbalanced the economy of the village where currency was a very rare thing till then. Barter—the erstwhile system of trade—started giving place to currency transactions. Previously one had to pay about half a sack of rice to get one pig in return but with the changing conditions, instead of rice a sum of, say, Rs. 15 could also be acceptable. With pockets jingling with the money, the brave Nagas would be seen moving out in the market places to buy fancy clothes and luxury items. Often one could see young girls of Mokokchung wearing plastic clips on their hair, and one could even come across Naga 'damsels' using lipstick and applying powder and face creams. Many amongst the younger generation started wearing tailored clothes of Western style instead of the traditional ones. This could have given a setback to the traditional arts and crafts of the Nagas but the administration did well in opening up training and sales centres, thus encouraging the Nagas to continue making their rich handicrafts.

Another effect of employing the Nagas on the road-side was the casual attitude developed amongst some of them towards the age-old profession of agriculture. Some of them seeing ready money easily available started ignoring their crops which always had an element of uncertainty about them. But their limited land, poor means of cultivation, lack of tools, fewer working hands, as well as animals, natural calamities and disturbances gave little dividends in agriculture. Cash money was a good substitute for the paddy they cultivated, animals they reared, and the handicrafts they made because in this way they can procure most of their household needs. But the real human values and true aspirations of a freedom loving individual being more dear to the Nagas, they could be employed only during the slack periods of agriculture. This policy greatly altered the changing attitude of the Naga agriculturists and helped them to continue their vocation of cultivation with vigour.

Wherever and whenever the Nagas worked, one quality which could not be doubted was their sincerity. Coupled with this quality was their spirit of co-operation and understanding. They discussed matters in details and often at length with the aim of finding right solutions.

On the road-side the *moharar* controlled the activities. If there were three villages which got contract for widening, say, a four-mile bit, the *moharar* and the respective *gaon burhas* met at a place, discussed the number of hands available from each village, their agricultural programme, the weather, the benefits to be given to each village and then arrived at a decision. The road length was divided amongst the villages; the allocation of work depended on the strength of the village, proximity to the road, the nature of work at each section and other minor considerations.

Then the headmen would pick out responsible members from the families of their villages, and would take them to the sites and distribute the work among the families. The *gaon burhas* clearly explain to them the nature and extent of work. Bamboo pegs are fixed and the areas clearly demarcated.

From what has been said above it is apparent that the Nagas do not lack either logic or judgment. Nor do they lack in worldly wisdom. They always work very sensibly and

systematically. All matters are settled in a friendly atmosphere and everyone makes an unabashed exposition of his ideas and views.

A few days after the distribution of work you could see that the work started. Men, women, both young and old, boys and girls and even young children sometimes turn up with all their implements—pickaxes, shovels, crowbars and many other locally designed contrivances. Whatever be the implements the attachment to *dao* was universal. The children had their own small sized *daos*. Wherever the Nagas go the *dao* accompanies them. It is a wonderful sight. The cheery Nagas in their colourful attire swarm the entire hillside in different groups.

First of all, the overgrowth is removed and for cutting the trees and the thicket they use the *dao*. Nothing could be more useful than the *dao*. The Nagas could cut any number of trees in a very short time. On one of the occasions while trying the usefulness of the *dao*, I had felled only one tree while a Naga who was beside me hacked off three during the same time without getting any blisters.

The younger generation takes up the toughest task. They would generally go up the hillside and begin the operation. The loose earth would slide down. Big boulders are raked out of their places and large chunks of granite come rolling down at one time from a height of about three hundred feet. The handling of explosives being a dangerous business, the Nagas have to resort to their own methods of dislodging huge rocks. With the crowbars rocks are cut into smaller pieces and then rolled down. On many occasions it took days to clear one boulder. If the rock could be tackled by the combined human energy, then the Nagas would join together and roll the boulder with the help of crowbars and *bullis*.

The older men and the womenfolk stand at the base waiting for the earth, boulders, and bushes to tumble down. The crowd standing below clear all that comes from top.

Most of them, including the women, enjoy smoking while at work. Many have highly artistically engraved wooden tobacco pipes. With one old lady I saw a long silver pipe in the Sema area. Wherever a group worked, fire was lit at the base. The raw tobacco which burns in the tobacco pipe is lighted from

the smoulders. Safety matches have become known to the Semas but they are too expensive for them to use every time fire is to be lighted. Occasionally some Nagas would come to the fire to warm their hands for a few minutes and then again go back to their job.

Thus the Nagas work in their own way—the young men and the hardy boys get the job of dismembering the rock, the old men pull out the vegetation and the women and the children help in pushing the broken boulders, in cutting bushes and in loosening earth down into the deep valley.

Another group could be seen making a retaining wall some distance away. At another place could be seen a culvert being constructed. Fresh green tree trunks are brought and put in place of the old decayed ones. At the same time the *moharar* could be seen walking about with the air of a technician with his bamboo pole, checking the width of the road and advising the workers. Actually very few problems arise as the Nagas themselves find solutions to most of the cases. Nothing seems to be impossible for them.

Road construction is only one aspect of their life. This was probably as well known to them as the art of house making and house keeping which would have been difficult to practice had there been no bamboos in that area. *Dao* is another versatile implement for the Nagas. With bamboo and *dao* they could create anything they desired. At certain places their hut is almost entirely a product of bamboo. With his *dao* hanging at his back or stuck in his belt the Naga goes to the nearby jungle and with the assistance of his children or neighbours brings a few straight logs for the skeleton of the hut. The required piece of land has already been in the meantime levelled up by the remaining members of the family which is by no means a small one. The young children start peeling the raw green bark of the freshly brought logs. The father measures the distance with the help of any stick readily available and with the help of another friend digs holes for the poles to be fixed in. Then he quickly places the poles in the sockets made one by one and after packing the gaps with stones rams them thoroughly. The mother and the children start cutting the bamboos into two half cylinders and then make flat

strips out of the halves which are ultimately interwoven into a mat.

Now it is time for the midday meals. The work stops and the mother brings in a wooden bowl some boiled rice. Boiled rye and green chillies sometimes supplement the staple food. A few gulps of *madhu* and the meal is ended and the work starts once again.

Much before the sun goes behind the hills, the framework of the hut and the bamboo walls are made ready. Then the entire family gets on with the job of roofing the hut. Purlins of bamboo are placed and fixed over the wooden joists. Then comes the layer of thatch which is rigidly fixed between the purlin below and bamboo batons on top.

No rope, no nail, no hammer, and no saw are employed and yet the hut gets ready in about a day. It can stand all the rains, of course with occasional leakage. It can stand the worst storms without being blown off. The hut has no windows or ventilators except the entrance which had no door.

Bamboo is the life of the Nagas, it being as important as the warm rays of the sun. The Nagas do not use either tubs, buckets, cups or tumblers. Water is carried and stored in broad bamboo pipes. Bamboo mugs and food containers are the order of the day. The beds and other items of furniture are all made of bamboo or timber. Split bamboo is used in making drains for conveying water from a higher level to the lower region. Another bamboo novelty was the tobacco pipe. Raw shoots of bamboo are also cooked to form a part of their food. Bamboo has been equally useful in making *punjis*. Bows and arrows and a variety of traps for animals are all made of bamboo.

In one of the villages I saw a complete bed with four legs made out of one tree trunk. The thing that astonished me still more was the fact that this bed had been carved with the help of only one instrument—namely *dao*. To a Naga, *dao* is like his shadow which never leaves him.

Another thing which set me thinking was the suspension bridges made out of cane in the Tuensang area. It was revealed that in areas where wild cane grows in plenty hanging bridges are quite a common means of going across the deep streams where during monsoon water would flow with incredible

speed. Of all other means of river crossing like felling a tree across the gap, constructing a temporary bridge with the help of a number of logs or making a composite structure with boulders, logs, bamboo and cane, the hanging cane bridges are the most fascinating feat of engineering.

Thousands of feet of fresh cane are cut and then passed round strong trees on either side of the river. The cane is passed round many times and additional support is given at the ends depending on the gap and the required strength of the bridge. Then all these longitudinally suspended canes are further interlocked by transverse canes at many points and the entire structure looks like a long tunnel with an oval or elliptical cross-section. The base is made firm by adding more cane or bamboos. Ultimately, the bridge looks like a sagging cylindrical tube of cane-mesh connecting the two banks.

It is quite true to say that this bridge could carry all along its span men with their additional loads on their backs. This ingenious construction gives an idea of the engineering skill of the Nagas. The Nagas dispense with many days' of designing and calculations, rolls of sketches and drawings, truckloads of equipment and numerous types of materials and a chain of highly trained personnel. To the Nagas making a bridge is as easy as constructing a hut.

The Sema women specialize in weaving *chaddars* and their *mekhelas* are probably the most beautiful in that region. In the winter season men, women and children all use *chaddars* which are woven out of cotton or silk or both in very neat and colourful patterns. Among the Nagas the use of black overcoat is very popular and the well-to-do people among them do not spare the opportunity of exhibiting their riches by using it sometimes when the weather did not demand its use.

Tobacco pipe is another item which the Semas like very much and it has many varieties and sizes. Generally made out of the locally available materials, it is a very impressive piece of handicraft.

The Semas have very well built bodies and their stern face is expressive of their rigorous life which is full of natural calamities and hazards. But at the same time they are not devoid of humour—they have it in plenty. The spirited folk have

learnt to reconcile themselves to the difficult conditions. Once after an unsuccessful hunting trip which took us far away into a deep valley one of the Nagas remarked:

“Good, we did not get at the animal, next time when we go shooting it would be a much bigger animal.”

Chapter 7

ZHEKIYA'S INNOCENT CHARMS

ALL AROUND Zhekiya, a small village at a height of about 6000 feet above the sea level, in the Sema area, the green jungle broken by crests and valleys stretched out with open arms to meet the misty horizon. It was a vast sea of greenery interspersed with steep hills. The entire area was inconceivably beautiful. The natural setting of the landscape which unrolled itself like a wall-painting blended with the unsophisticated beauty of the rustic dwellers to form a perfect union between man and nature. Nature seemed to have come down on the earth in its full trousseau. The lofty hills, the picturesque valleys, the dense jungle, the colour and variety in flowers, the animals in their natural habitat, the free and unbounded but thoroughly organized life of the tribesmen combined to form a masterpiece of nature's creation.

Early in the morning one saw the rising sun peeping through the gaps between the green leaves. In the easternmost part of India, the time of sun rise appeared to be rather appreciably early. But for the local tribesmen it was just the way their forefathers lived. The Naga with his other members of the family sets out for the work in the fields or on the road construction site. He carries with him his *chaddar*, a cane basket, his digging tool, boiled rice with *madhu* in a glass bottle or bamboo tube and the *dao*. While coming home he brings with him mustard or other green leaves or root vegetables that he might have cultivated in his fields or discovered in the dense jungle. Life is simple and slow but not without the adventure of wild life which is missed so much in our modern cities.

There were occasions which demand of him great courage and skill on the part of the local tribesmen. To live in a mountain country blessed with green jungles requires both hard work and resourcefulness. The life of a Naga is a life of constant fight against the destructive forces of nature. Unaided

by modern science, he fought his way out to make himself the all-powerful in the midst of other living creatures. This speaks of his will to survive, which forces his ingenuity to devise new ways and means to collect food and protect himself against the natural and the man-made dangers, the latter being the more serious and frequent.

Looking down from the top of the hill on which we had set up our camp, I could see clearly the whole of Zhekiya village which was located on one of the slopes. The road ran at a level much lower than the village and you could see it curling up along the hillside for quite some distance.

Being a Sapper unit, we spent half the day on the construction sites. The tribesmen were given the task of supplementing our effort and they found it very profitable to earn money when they had no work in their fields. Of course, a little planning had to be done to ensure that a particular group did not make all the money and thus the same people did not absent themselves from their own local activities all the time. During the harvesting and sowing period the Nagas got very busy with their own jobs, and so we had to rely on ourselves completely.

Nevertheless, because of our joint activities, I came to know the village headman, who was the agent responsible for providing us with the Naga labourers when asked for.

My liking for their simplicity and reciprocal feeling of appreciation for the work that we were doing in improving the means of communication helped to build mutual confidence. Moreover we always worked with the feeling that we were not in way superior to them.

One day I was just returning from work after having supervised construction of a minor retaining wall, when I saw a long line of Nagas meandering up the road. From that distance, the load carried by them at their back appeared to be touching the nose of the person immediately behind and their rhythmic movements and steady steps gave the impression of a miniature train squirming its way slowly along the zig-zag road but surely. As they came nearer they stopped—all at the same instant. Some of them raised their right hands up to their forehead and said *Jai Hind*. One of them spoke something in Sema language which, of course, I could not follow as I was not familiar with their dialects.

The interpreter who was himself a Sema Naga and was standing beside me said that they were paying compliments for the road that had been constructed by us. I recognized some of them, for just a few weeks back they had been working with us and a full gleaming smile on their faces confirmed their recognition.

All of them were carrying a funnel-shaped basket at their back. They were all bending forward and the older people carried a stick each in their hands. Evidently, the loads were very heavy; they were perspiring and sweat was trickling down their chins which did not have much growth of hair. But surprisingly enough everyone of them was smiling.

Through the interpreter I asked them what they were carrying and where they were coming from. As is the reaction of an innocent child, my second question was replied first and one of them, a short but stocky Naga, said that they were coming from Satakha. I knew that a relief centre had been opened up by the Government in the next village and salt which is usually very scarce in the hills was being distributed to the Nagas. But just to have some conversation I asked them: "How far is Satakha?" "Two tobacco pipes," came the blunt reply. Well, was he trying to put a riddle through? It was a new unit of measure of which even an engineer could not have any idea. Seeing my face blank like a student who is suddenly asked a question from a book which he has not read, the interpreter said, "Miles are not known to us. We do not have watches and the hour is not the measure of time for us. The distance covered during the consumption of tobacco in the pipe is considered as one unit and the number of times a traveller filled his tobacco pipe while covering a particular stretch was the length of the journey."

At the face of it, I was very much impressed till I rolled my eyes over the various tobacco pipes stuck in everyone's lips to realize that some of them were almost double the size as compared with the others. This unit may not have been very correct, but at the same time it did give you an idea of the distance not completely out of proportion, because they all had a fairly good sense of judgment and standards.

I was just pondering over this new idea when the interpreter shock me by my belt and started muttering staggeringly

again in Hindustani.

"*Sahib* these people have come from an interior village to collect salt and are not familiar with the unit you use in measuring road. Miles and furlongs are not known to them; not even yards and feet. The smallest unit of measurement is their *dao* and while constructing anything they utilize their *dao* in measuring the dimensions. They express the height, width, length and other dimensions of their huts in terms of *dao* only."

As he finished the last word, he sneezed with such a mighty salvo right into my face that I had to remove my goggles to wipe out the material deposited by his innocent action. Undisturbed, he bent his head and blew his nose hard. I was not shocked when the droppings fell on my boots. He pulled out the front of his shirt and after mopping up his nose went on with the talk with his right hand forefinger and eyes pointing towards Satakha.

"You see, Satakha is about four miles from here and so one tobacco pipe stands for about two miles or so."

I being without a pipe at that time could not use this method of determining distance and had to stick to the one I was taught in my school. Yes, later on I acquired one bamboo pipe from the interpreter and got to know the new method of judging distance.

Chapter 8

AROUND THE TIJET

THE HISTORY of the bridge over river Tijet in one of the remote corners of Tuensang District of Nagaland is known only to the Nagas living nearby or to those men who took part in the construction work.

In this corner of India the rivers are swift. They bring along with them huge boulders and brushwood. The breeze took the form of storm and the rain came in torrents. The pitch-black clouds changed the day into night. Many trees—which were very very tall, tumbled down bringing out tons of earth, thus disrupting the communications till the entire length of the fallen trees was cut into small pieces and removed. In a few hours the level of the rivers rose by feet and made them unfordable. The jungles were so dark that even at noon it looked as if you are taking a night march.

But it did not matter to the local Nagas. These frightening environments did not disturb them. Their sturdy physique, their sincerity of purpose, their skilled approach and last of all their knack for using local resources were a great asset to all the engineers.

I had just landed at the Jorhat airport after having had a brief spell of leave at Delhi when I was informed that the next day I had to take charge of a platoon which was to leave for river Tijet, about eighty miles from Jorhat, for constructing a few bridges of spans greater than hundred feet before the ensuing monsoon. As regards the nature of the river and the type of equipment to be used, there was no information available. Many things had to be sorted out on reaching the site. There was very little time for the preparation of the move. Looking hurriedly at the map I found out that the area of our future operations was located in one of the thickest growing areas of Tuensang District.

Next day a platoon which was previously employed on road construction and had earned a reputation for finishing the

task much ahead of the scheduled time arrived at Jorhat. Capt M.K. Dutt, AMC, who was to join us as our medical officer also reached Jorhat and we, with Capt Ashoke Datta—our Second-in-Command—carried out an intensive inspection and replacement of equipment and clothing of the platoon. Torn mosquito nets were replaced, extra clothing was issued, packets of Paludrin and multi-vitamin tablets were procured and, the most important thing, anti-mosquito cream was collected. It was very essential that the platoon which was to function as an independent detachment a hundred and fifty miles away from the Headquarters should be well equipped and made self-sufficient in all respects, more so when the living conditions and the weather had yet to be known by actually moving to the site.

Just a few days before we left, I was informed that the construction of the abutments of the bridges was in progress and soon the equipment of Inglis bridges would start pouring in at the construction sites. I thought it quite useful to lay my hands on a pamphlet which dealt with the subject and which had been very kindly procured by Major N.P. Manaktala, our Officer Commanding.

A preliminary reconnaissance showed that we could take 3-ton trucks only up to the road junction on the main road from where the *kachha* road branched off. This junction was right in the centre of Sonari Bazar and was sixty miles from Jorhat. Most part of this road was metalled and though there were a few bad patches, our journey up to that point was very smooth and secure. The next twenty miles consisted of a dusty *kachha* track which wound its way through the tea gardens and undulating ground. Before we could reach our camp, we had to cross about ten *nullahs*, out of which three swelled up to form threatening streams during the monsoon.

In the early morning of 24th March, 1958, we left Jorhat in three-ton trucks. On reaching the Sonari Bazar, we found that the two PWD one-ton trucks which were supposed to lift us, our equipment and our rations from Sonari Bazar to river Tijek had not arrived. Keeping in view the fact that the timber culverts which had decayed due to long use and lack of maintenance might give way under the three-ton trucks, the PWD authorities had agreed to lift us up in their light

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vehicles from Sonari Bazar junction to our camp. We could not wait there indefinitely. A big crowd had gathered around us and those who could read, very unsparingly murmured "Engineers! Engineers!!" Perhaps we were the first Indian Army troops to go to that area. Of course, no Sappers had been there and we were the first body of Army Engineers who were to take charge of construction of bridges from the PWD.

The road appeared to be good and there being no other alternative except to head for the camp in three-ton trucks, I thought of moving and going as far as the road could take us. We went through narrow tea garden cuttings and irregular embankments. The *nullahs* had to be forded and at certain places where it was thought that the culverts were not strong enough to bear the load of the truck, we had to make diversions and thus came to use the pick and the shovel in which our Sappers were quite expert. The streams had high gradients with slippery and steep banks, and it was the four-wheel drive of the trucks that pulled the weight up. The growth of the jungle was so unchecked that we had to cut tree branches on either side of the road to make headway.

I had never seen so green and dense jungles as I witnessed on my first journey to this area. And it was here that for the first time, I came across the Konyak tribe which still maintained its ancestral way of life. Here I saw that some tribesmen did not use even loin cloth. Here I saw the jet black teeth of the tribesmen. The barter system of trade was still being practised as I could see the Naga traders bringing their local commodities and returning with exchanged goods. Here I observed that the women of the tribe were as free as the men and had a peculiar way of tattooing their bodies.

Tijet, a mountain river, whose average width is one hundred and fifty feet, was quiet and its water moved softly. Its banks which were about thirty feet high at certain places were nearly vertical and rocky.

Our camp was almost ready. The Naga labourers, all unskilled, were still working on the huts when we arrived. The speed with which they worked convinced me that they would not take long to complete the job. About eighty of our men including the complement of the Pioneers had to be accom-

modated. The PWD had very kindly placed at our disposal the little Inspection Bungalow—as it was called—where we set up our miniature Office and the Medical Inspection room (MI room). I do not fight shy of disclosing the fact that the Office did not have a single table or a chair. Of course, the MI room had all the paraphernalia and a highly qualified doctor. In his absence I was there since I had learnt the use of the syringe by then. My first and the last patient was the doctor himself. Soon after our arrival the Sappers joined the Konyaks and the camp started taking shape.

Tuensang is the eastern most portion of India, and we were not very far from the Burma border. Before going to sleep I went out to have a final look at the camp and I found the men fast asleep though not very comfortable as many out of them who were six footers with hefty bodies were asleep on the narrow bamboo beds. As I could see when I lighted the torch, the bed of Sapper Pritam Singh, 'weight lifter' had gone concave and the centre was almost touching the ground. But, unconcerned he was snoring. Anyway, the JCO gave me the usual answer: "*Sab theek hai sahib*".

The day was too tiring for me to help me from going to bed.

Suddenly I was woken up by a collective houl which sounded to my imagination more like a war cry or a head-hunting dance yell. I had never heard such voices before and I started pondering seriously.

"What could it be? Are we going to be attacked?"

It appeared that midnight had not passed, but when I looked at my half faded luminous watch, it showed 4.50 a.m. I took my torch and opened the door, but it was getting bright outside and the sun was about to rise. I forgot that we were about 2,000 miles east of Poona and that the sun would rise very early.

But what about the noise? Well, it was a sight indeed. I could see a great mass of human beings—some of them with only a loin cloth, a few with a loosely hanging flap in front but their buttocks bare and the rest stark-naked.

They were Konyaks making the approach road for the bridge and were digging vigorously with their *khurdras*. They

had made improvised bamboo baskets with cane handles to scrape the loosened earth.

No sooner had I flung the door open than I saw one of them coming running towards me. He had a chicken in one hand and a glistening *dao* in the other. Soon he was very close to me but still sprinting at the same speed, his two dark eyes staring right into mine and mine into his. For a moment my thoughts ran faster than light.

"What's the matter?" I asked. I was uncertain in my mind that he was going to kill the sleeky chicken or perhaps was coming to chop my head off with his one stroke of *dao*.

"Was my skull to lie round his neck in future as a trophy of war?" I questioned myself.

He was grinning with his mouth wide open and the black set of teeth showing up like those of a devil. He wore a horn at each ear, his face was pricked with tattoo marks, and his hair abruptly ended at his ear level all around his head. He had almost no beard but his pubic hair were prominent as he was stark-naked.

The nearer he came, the faster ran my thoughts. However I prepared myself for a hand-to-hand fight if that stage came. The surprising thing was that nobody seemed to notice the incident which in my view would make headlines the next day, but kept himself busy with the work.

"Maybe life is not important here", I thought. He came and stood in front of me. My heart must have missed a few beats as he raised his *dao* and placed the chicken in my hands.

"Perhaps it is the tradition among the Konyaks to present chicken before hunting the head." This was how I tried to argue. I thought I was very close to death. At that time I almost agreed with what Mr. Govind Sagar had told me at Amingaon.

I accepted the chicken without a nod. I can now imagine my face must have turned red as I watched the *dao* and instantaneously was in a state of readiness to lift my own hands in defence and offence when suddenly he became serious. His lips closed and I could see his black teeth no more. He threw his *dao* on the ground and started mumbling in his own dialect. My heart once again started beating and my muscles relieved

themselves of the tension.

In the meantime the doctor came out. He knew Assamese very well and was thus always of great help to me. He told me that that was a form of greeting and a token of friendship. Well, I wanted nothing else, particularly at that self-made critical moment. I was too happy in having them as my friends just as I had friends at many other villages. In return I gave him a tin of cigarettes and a packet of sweets; the former they valued very much.

He belonged to a chief's family and had come running to me to be the first to win my friendship. Of course later on he was the first to ask me for a bottle of rum. Many others came to me in a similar way. I could not refuse their gifts which were even two eggs sometimes as it would hurt their feelings and our future good relations which were very important. I wanted to be accepted as one of them in their villages so as to see them actually living their real tribal life and to take some special photographs. They were normally very shy and it was only their good friends who were able to take photographs of them. Moreover it was not the material value of the presents which guided our friendship but the feelings and the sentiments and of course I never found the Konyaks lacking in these.

In return I gave them presents too. By the time the last man came my stock of cigarettes had run out. I had to pull out one of my shorts from my suitcase, as it was not a traditionally sound proposition to send him without a gift. He put the shorts on and he never took it off as long as I was there.

Though slightly less active as compared to Semas or Aos, the Knyaks were a set of very simple and innocent people who would readily respond to good gestures. We had no right to think low of these people, even though if they wear no clothes and are primitive. After all it was a way of life which they evolved after long trial and error, probably as good as ours, if not better in some respects. They were one of us, a part of us and it always paid to have such feelings of brotherhood.

The Inspection Bungalow had a hedge of pineapple plants. At the same time it had a few papaya trees. The *chowkidar* who was an old caretaker of the hutment would often pick fruit for us. He also brought for us sugarcane from the neigh-

bouring villages. A very hospitable man in the true spirit of the Nagas.

The first day he took me round the hutment and showed me the window through which the hostile Naga rebels had tried to riddle the inmates with bullets. I could identify clearly two bullet marks. Then he took me to the spot where the rebels had shot at two PWD labourers who were working on the road. I was told that the incident proved so demoralizing that all the labourers left their jobs and fled to the nearest town without asking for their wages.

Then I saw the remnants of the hanging cane bridge across the river Tijet. The rebels had destroyed it mercilessly. The *chowkidar* told me that hundreds of Konyaks had worked at it for days and in no time the rebels set fire to it disrupting the trade and life of the peace loving people. The rebels had no justification in pulling down their own installations and structures which were not only a source of great convenience for the continuance of normal tribal life but represented the unique and rare skill and art of the great Naga community.

Chapter 9

WITH KNOYAKS AT BRIDGE SITE

A FEW days after our arrival the work at the bridge-site started in right earnest. Our primary job, to start with, was to convert the equipment into a condition fit for use. It was quite a tedious job rubbing the equipment with the old rags dipped in oil.

The equipment had rusted as it remained untouched for a long time. The parts could not fit in unless the rust was removed by the application of kerosene oil. To rotate the nuts grease had to be liberally used. In my verandah so many tins of oil, grease, preservatives, primers and paints had got collected that it looked like a goods yard without a railway track.

In the evenings, after the day's work was over, I would go to the Konyak villages with their headmen. I never forgot to carry my haversack which contained my little Agfa folding camera, a few spare films and cigarettes and sweets in abundance. The Nagas of the surrounding villages went to the extent of accepting me as an honorary member of their class. They invited me to their festivals and showed me their dances, and mock fights which required quick use of their indigenous muzzle loaders in addition to bows and arrows. I went round and saw their women weaving bags and *chaddars*. They have a very fine sense of colour.

In one of their villages they loaded my neck with their bead necklaces. I hastened to put one of their hats on my head and before I could ask the doctor for a snap, he had already clicked his camera.

The equipment was nearly complete and thus ready for use. The abutments had had their curing period and the concrete was in a fit condition to take the load. But the gantry equipment with which we were supposed to launch the bridge was not complete. The missing parts had perhaps been used at some other places. We did not have any cranes and a few parts which had to

be joined before they could be lifted and fitted into their respective position weighed about 1,000 lbs. The deck level was at a height from the river bed sufficient to render the handling of the equipment from the ground impossible.

Something had to be done to find a substitute for the gantry. And the bridge had to be up before the onset of the rains. To add to our troubles, the rain set in much before we had thought, though in a meagre way. Nagas could not be entrusted with this skilled job as their lack of familiarity with the equipment could cause many fatal accidents. They had never seen this type of work and it would have been wrong to employ them unless we could write off our own skulls as well.

One day I happened to see a number of Konyaks digging earth. And seeing the numerous straight trees all round in the jungle I thought: Would the Nagas cut the trees so that a false bridge could be made which would help us to construct the real bridge and then pull out the logs when the bridge was in position?

The Assistant Engineer who was administratively responsible for the Naga labourers readily agreed to my suggestion and without any loss of time hundreds of Konyaks were set on the task of felling trees. I knew that I was using unseasoned timber but there was no other course open to us. We could either save the timber which grew like wild grass in that area, or have the bridges constructed before the onset of the monsoon.

Instead of the hauling machinery of which we could not have even dreamt under those conditions, the Konyaks rendered the services. To eliminate the gantry method, we started constructing a false bridge and instead of the cranes we were to make use of the trained limbs and muscles of our Sappers.

Day in and day out the Nagas felled the trees, brought them to the site, erected them and tied them with other horizontal and cross members using only the bark of the trees. They used no saws, no hammers, no nails, no chains, no ropes, no jacks, but still managed to erect a platform with the assistance of our Sappers. This was about twenty-five feet high from the bed of the river, about hundred feet long, and about fifteen feet wide.

I learnt from the Nagas those aspects of construction which

a university could not have taught me. I saw them successfully employing a pole for a rope and a rope for a pole. They really have a great engineering sense.

We had been working for two days through scorching sun and torrential rain. The metallic parts used to get so hot that rags had to be employed to protect the hands.

It was the third day. We were dismayed but a great astonishment was awaiting us. On the completion of the two halves of the bridge, we found that one half of the bridge was about two inches lower than the other half at the centre. A portion of the false bridge had sunk because the soil under it was soft at a lower depth, which I discovered later. The two would not fit in as the ends could not be made to coincide because of differences in level.

But there is always a way out. We collected all our Sappers—even those in the kitchen and with one pull we tried to heave the lower portion up. But it went down by another inch. I had also joined and all of us were sweating after the unsuccessful attempt. The breeze was so fast that the droplets struck you almost horizontally. In a hilly region the level of a river could rise to a great extent even after a little rainfall and Tijeet would be no exception. It could bring along with it a few tree trunks which on striking the supports of the false bridge could dislodge the poles and so our 'Inglis bridge' from the abutments. In this way, I thought, there could be a major disaster.

After putting some packing at the river bed we were again ready for the heave. This time we called in even the contractor's men to join us. Once again we failed but the redeeming feature was that the false bridge did not sink any more and its position remained unaltered.

Then we sent for the Nagas who by that time had started lighting their evening fire and were relaxing. It was getting dark. The contractor, a kind Sikh gentleman, seeing us in distress brought his petromax. In this way we had gathered about hundred men. The lamp was held near the man who was to join the two separated portions in the centre.

A few adjustments here and there, a little redistribution and reorganization to get the maximum effective pull, a few words of encouragement and the announcement of a drink

gave a little extra vigour to the men. At the last word 'PULL' there was a thudding noise, and the bridge which weighed in tons was shaken up and the key man did not miss the long awaited opportunity and the two portions were joined. Thus the bridge was completed.

Every one felt jubilant over it. For a moment we all joined the Konyaks in their dance which was mixed up with Punjabi Bhangra. Soon we were back to the camp for the promised drink.

This task which would have normally taken about ten days under the prevailing conditions was done in three days by working about twelve to fifteen hours a day. With our success on that day, our discomfiture vanished. We had achieved something substantial.

Next morning I saw a line of Nagas following up the road. They had come from the nearby village and were on their way to Sonari Bazar. This was the first time that the Konyaks of that remote village had seen this bridge. One of them came running on seeing this new structure and touched the bridge with his knuckle to make sure that it did not sound like a cracked earthen pot. Well, they had their own way of testing things. A few would not touch it thinking that there was something evil in it. Those who could appreciate congratulated us in their own simple way.

On the morning of the fourth day we started decking the bridge. This was not expected to take long, possibly about half a day, and then we proposed to have a day of rest. We deserved it, I felt.

I was standing at the bank of the river, when suddenly I was jolted by what I thought was a collision. It came with such a momentum that my feet lost contact with the ground. It gave me the feeling of a cannon ball just out of its muzzle. I plunged headlong into the river. Before I could recover from the shock I saw a joist landing from the bridge right where I stood. Had that Naga not pushed me into water, I would not have survived. The current was quite fast and it had dragged me a few yards away before I could swim back to the bank. I must have swallowed a pint or so of Tijet water during the 'lost' condition as I felt terribly dizzy afterwards.

A Naga friend of mine had given me a tip when I was at Zhekiya: 'Nagas are bad enemies but good friends.' It proved to be true as the Konyak who pushed me was the same whom I had presented the tin of cigarette. My friendship had saved my life.

In much the same way but with less difficulties we completed another bridge and had started rubbing and oiling the equipment for the third bridge. By now we had been there for about fifty days.

A noticeable feature of this area was the frequency with which the snakes visited our residential areas. One day, I remember, when I was having my food late in the evening a small snake just fell down near our table. It came from the roof. On another occasion, one of our Sappers found a snake in his shoe when he had shoved half his foot inside. There had been numerous such incidents. Consequently I had to pass an order that every one would carry an unused sharp blade and a yard length of chord on his hat as a first aid measure.

There had been many such reports, so we dug anti-snake trenches all round, deep and absolutely vertical. We burnt the jungle beyond the perimeter of our area for about a hundred yards. After these precautions we heard and saw very little of snakes.

I cannot forget the day when the squall came. It blew away our camp's roof. The CGI sheets could be found anywhere up to a distance of three hundred yards to the leeward side. A seventy-five feet long tree got uprooted and fell just short of our Inspection Bungalow, and its roots pulled out so much of earth that a fifteen feet deep crater was formed.

Then came the rain with all its ferocity. The contractor's rations were in danger. Corn flour from his hut was already flowing in a precipitate form, and after about ten minutes I saw the contractor running after his bills which were all floating in water and had started drifting towards the river. Water was trickling down his beard, his turban was undone and with his drenched clothes he was making desperate attempts to gather his papers.

I was watching all this through my window. His hut was just across the road almost opposite to ours. He ran fast. The

water was just below his knees. Probably some obstruction came in his way and he tumbled over into the water. When he recovered from the mishap and again was on his feet, he had no turban on his head. It had also started floating and the air having swelled it up, it looked like a big jungle snake in water.

Suddenly a gush of air came with a great velocity. The window which opened outside slammed with a thud hitting straight at my nose. I had become too curious in the contractor's affairs and was looking with my face half out of the window. I had a tough nose. I can suppose so, as it did not bleed.

Finally, the three bridges were complete. They looked majestic in their silver aluminium paint. It had taken us weeks to bring them to that regal state. The old green paint had to be scrubbed with caustic soda, then a yellow primer had to be applied and when it got dry only then we resorted to the final coat of silver paint. Our overalls had become multi-coloured with different shades of green, black, yellow and aluminium paint. I am sure they would have formed very good pieces for jungle warfare as they blended with the surrounding country in perfect harmony.

It was really heartening to see the inexhaustible store of stamina and determination which our men possessed. When we roared to lift heavy equipment I am sure the farthest village must have heard us.

The three bridges looked like three maidens clad in their best apparel and when the date came for the opening ceremony the bridges were glittering in light as the sky was clear and the sun's rays were striking straight at them.

Col. Luthra, the then Commissioner of NHTA, while performing the opening ceremony of these bridges on 25th May, 1958, declared that by constructing these bridges the Engineers had added something more to their glorious stay in NHTA. The Commissioner also said that the Sappers had left a monument in NHTA and the people of the area would never be able to forget the assistance rendered by the Military Engineers. The Nagas themselves held similar views.

Soon after the ceremony we started packing. Next day when the convoy was lined up and everything had been loaded the *chowkidar* came running and presented a few papayas and a cane

stick each to me and to the doctor. The doctor had been taking special care of the local people. He had won their admiration and they had both love and respect for him.

I was feeling rather sad to leave that place. I had developed an attachment to that place: the little hut I had stayed in, the road in front of my hut and the beautiful jungle all around which looked like an endless green sky. The greenery, the clouds, the rain, the birds and the innumerable butterflies in all the colours of the rainbow had all become very dear to me. We had developed immense liking for the Konyaks and had become so fond of them that the departure touched us deeply. The Konyaks, too, seemed to be sad. They had treated us as their own and did not easily reconcile to the idea of our separation.

The convoy was ready. I waved my hands in farewell to the many Nagas who stood on the road. They, too, made similar gesture without understanding the meaning of it.

Lovable and innocent Konyaks!

Chapter 10

VILLAGES ON HILL TOPS

THE MOST striking and consistent feature of the villages of almost the entire Nagaland is their location. The bamboo and thatch huts stand conspicuously on top of steep hills or sharp slopes. The primary consideration for such a selection of site was the basic need for defence. As already pointed out, these areas, at different periods, were attacked by various outside communities resulting in the subjugation of the original inhabitants. At the same time when a period of comparative peace reigned, there were always inter-tribal and inter-village feuds which sometimes continued for generations. The simple act of clipping off a three-foot long bamboo stick from the territory of a neighbouring village or the accepting of an invitation of a chief and then not attending the function could lead to an inter-village feud. In such feuds many heads were lost. The tactical setting of the village was, thus, of utmost importance, which was invariably a place difficult to reach. Hill tops with steep climbs invariably giving all-round view were the ideal sites. A ridge with steep gradients and a spur with a steeply rising slope from which one could observe movements of the enemy were naturally attractive locations from the point of view of defence.

Other considerations like proximity to water sources and abundance of cultivable land also influenced the choice of a site. Normally a river or a stream was considered essential for any habitation but in Sema area I saw many villagers depending solely on spring water. I seldom found the villagers making liberal use of water. But the effort required to fetch water uphill from a distance which ran up to hundreds of yards in many cases was so great that the Nagas exercised parsimony in the use of water. As it was, the water was neither wholesome nor clean and their further hesitation to use it manifested itself in their bodies and in the dirty surroundings. This, of course, became one of the main causes for the

spread of various diseases of skin and bowels.

Before a village site is selected, a party of responsible members would first of all go and stay at the tentatively selected place and study if the site was secure and safe. Then they would check if it was good for cultivation also and had water resources. Finally, its suitability from the point of view of building material would be examined. The members who came early naturally reserved the right of constructing the house at the choicest areas. Seniority of a particular family could also earn preference in choice.

A new village normally sprang up on account of increase in population. Other reasons could be insufficient lands, fire or epidemic disease or quarrel amongst the villagers. Normally, though contrary to my earlier impression, the houses are situated in some order facing each other. A large village is divided into smaller sections called *khels*. Each *khel* is treated like a separate entity by itself with its own separate organization. Ungma village is an example.

Well-built, though short in stature, some of the Nagas can easily be taken as having no trace of Dravidian or Mongolian blood. The Aos usually have well-cut features with complexion ranging from fair to light yellow. They have generally prominent nose with bulging cheek bones. Their hair is straight, varying in colours from black to dark brown. Very few have curly hair. The women normally keep a bun at the back while some young children have completely shaven heads. The Nagas are given a very peculiar haircut. Where scissors are not known, they would place the tuft of the hair on a wooden piece and then beat it with a sharp edged weapon like *dao* which would cut the hair. In this way the executioner would move the wooden piece and the *dao* all around the head of the person and ultimately leave him with hair ending all round at the same level above the ears. Often an old man could be seen sitting in the sun with a young person moving about all round his head with the *dao*. Of course, this operation would keep the two engaged for quite some time. They have a very unwilling growth of beard and whiskers and by and large they do not patronize their unobstructed growth.

On account of the services of Christian missionaries, many

changes had taken place by the time I visited them. Instead of their traditional *mekhela* the womenfolk had started using skirts and blouses. Many had even given up their traditionally woven beautiful *chaddars* and I was surprised to see some of the teenagers in slacks and jeans. They appeared to be swayed by the modern dress in village, with the result that their own arts and crafts are on the decline. Dr. Verrier Elwin had in a masterly way been able to influence the authorities to take various positive steps with a view to arresting the decline of the local arts. Otherwise this sudden transformation could ultimately disrupt the socio-economic set-up of the area. The indigenous production of *mekhelas* and *chaddars* is far superior in texture, colour, design and durability to some of the cheap imported varieties which are just good enough for fashion and a false sense of exhibitionism. During my stay in Sema area, I saw rare varieties of cotton shawls which I had not seen before. The Sangtham *chaddars* are still prettier and when I went to Tuensang, I bought some from the showroom. And I may be allowed to say that because of my inability to purchase the whole store, my relations with my sisters and mother were about to be strained on my arrival home. Anyway, I got them more through VPP.

Amongst menfolk, trousers, particularly black, and shorts seemed to be very popular. A scarf or a multi-coloured muffler was another popular wear for some of them, particularly in the months of winter. At the same time, during severe winter, I have seen some Aos of the old generation braving the chill barefooted, their bodies uncovered and unprotected. Normally they had a small flap in front to cover their loins. That was all their clothing. Some I saw wrapped up in just a single cotton *chaddar*.

In their well established villages, you could at the same time see the Aos in their traditional hair style. Their long log drums for war dances and various skulls of animals would remind people of antiquity. In their ceremonial dress, with their spears tied in various colourful hair, their bows and arrows, a variety of swords and shields decorated in very artistically blended colours, the Nagas seemed to merge with the surrounding beauty while they danced to the tune of their war drums. Their

bracelets, bangles, ringlets and necklaces, made out of beads of stone, china-clay and wood, are very attractive indeed. The necklaces are big enough to cover up their chests completely. They had given up pinning their ears with bamboo pieces and instead used the thin and light metallic ringlets. The practice of tattooing the bodies appeared to be on the decline. Previously, as I could make out after seeing the tribesmen of old generation, the women used to tattoo their face, legs, and wrists, but this, too, appeared to be dying out.

I was told that tattooing was an art known only to a few women who would roam about from place to place. The parents would force their children to go through this painful process of pricking and then filling up the holes with a local black coloured paste. It is likely that in the past the design varied from clan to clan. The tattooing which took a few years to complete, as every year something was added, was generally resorted to in the winter. This resulted in quick healing of the sores. The practitioners were normally paid in kind or services.

The enchantment of beauty and decoration of the face could be the likely reason for this practice. Even among some foreign tribes, the practice of colouring the face and body in some designs is quite common. Another motive could be the necessity to look ferocious during an encounter with the enemy. Tattooing could as well have started originally with the point of view of distinguishing one group from another, in order to differentiate the foe from the friend in case of a war which was fought with arrows, spears, or *daos*. In London and many other seaports of very advanced countries till today they have tattooing saloons where many people particularly sailors take great pride in adorning their bodies. I did not come across any case of sacrifice, probably it was not in vogue there. Many had their ears pierced and decorated with plugs made of bamboo, ivory, stone and metallic rings.

The Aos had been famous for having had the tradition of possessing very large and colossal log drums which had a great religious importance and had many images of *mithuns* and other animals boldly carved on them. They showed great respect for their drums which were kept in the *morung*. These drums or xylophones are made from large sized straight tree

trunks and have to be repaired or replaced whenever damaged. These were often beaten during village or other ceremonies and became very significant during an oath-taking ceremony. Drums had great association with the ceremonies connected with raids and feuds.

The Naga of yesterday lived in his own world with loyalty to his family and village. He had his own culture and way of life as imposed by the physical conditions and environments. While resorting to shifting crops, the Nagas distributed land according to their own unwritten laws. Their village councils were the primary institutions for the regulation of their village life and inter-village relations. Their way of dispensing justice was appropriate and therefore effective.

Chapter 11

NO OATS! NO MILK!!

TING LI was to be our guide and we were getting ready for a shikar trip to the nearby thicket, just a few miles away from our construction site. It had been earlier reported that the hoof marks of barking deer had been seen very often in the river bed area and according to Ting Li's calculation the deer must be visiting that area for water round about six in the morning. Ting Li was a queer fish. He generally spoke very little and often kept quiet for long intervals. He was living with a woman who had been given up by her previous husband. I could not gather the details. Though Ting Li had an impressive physique he did not look healthy. On account of cataract he was blind by one eye. He was exceptionally brave and courageous and was extremely tender in his dealings.

We were a party of five including Ting Li, and had with us all types of weapons ranging from the indigenous *dao* to semi-automatic .30" carbine. Having had no previous dealings with the itch plant and leeches we had tried to cover as much of the body as possible with scarfs, anklets, caps, gloves and all.

After walking for a while along the road, we started moving in single file on the dried bed of a brook which went on widening as we advanced. We had just moved on the bed of boulders for about half a mile when suddenly we saw in front of us a level ground. From there radiated innumerable tracks and Ting Li led us to one of them without making any ado. There came in our way many such meeting points of tracks but the guide never fumbled as he took us to the right point. In such matters a Naga employed his sixth sense.

The spot was a little depression where some water had collected and one could see innumerable pug marks of many animals. Ting Li started to examine the footprints very seriously to find out the possibility of tracing the direction of the barking deer.

Suddenly, we saw a leech crawling up the behind of his leg. The doctor ran and shouted: "Leech! Leech!!" Ting Li put his right forefinger on his lips and signalled to keep silent. Perhaps he sensed some animal around. Then he very calmly took his *dao* in his left hand and keeping the sharp edge near the top of the leech, which was half swollen by then, shaved it off. And when the worm fell on the ground, he knocked the wriggling thing with the broad end of the *dao* twice. Similarly many leeches tried to squeeze the blood out of the solid figure of our guide who wore nothing but a flap in front which hung from his cane belt. He followed the same procedure exactly every time without any visible trace of anxiety or worry. Once with a very gingerish smile he borrowed a cigarette from the doctor, put the lighted end on top of the leech and the beast rolled out instantaneously and went crawling on the ground. At this he gave a smile with his only eye turned to the right side which indicated that he had adopted this new procedure just for our entertainment. In one way this method of getting rid of the leeches was better as the insect did not leave its tentacle inside the skin and thus reduced the period of bleeding which could otherwise last for a few days. Anyway, I felt very happy that with my ammunition boots and anklets, the leeches had no chance of intruding into my body and I in my own mind ridiculed Ting Li for being so foolish as to walk naked in a leech-infested jungle like that.

Often we had to move stealthily from one point to another or squat quietly at the only pimple-like feature overlooking the entire valley. Here we loaded all the weapons and were waiting to press the trigger at any animal that showed up out of the man-high undergrowth.

As far as bagging an animal was concerned, the trip was totally disappointing as not even a rat turned up. It was a good experience, going out for a shikar with a Naga guide. We came back the same way as we went. Of course none of us, except the guide, could make that out.

On taking off my boots after the trip, I discovered that I had as many bleeding points as Ting Li had. This was the first time when I learnt that the leeches which were about half an inch long could make their way through the eyelets of the boots

and further penetrate through the woollen socks right onto the skin and their bite was so soft that you could not find out when they had started sucking our blood. The blood oozing out through the many points made me feel quite loathesome but as my encounters with those blood suckers increased, I got so used to them, that chopping off a leech from the skin was like biting a finger nail. Later, it came to be known that by giving a coating of tobacco water or a mixture of salt water to the socks one could ward off the pesky insects.

From Ting Li and many other Nagas I came to learn of the many ways that they adopt for killing the animals. Nagas go for hunting in groups in which the young men of the entire village take part. Such hunting is a highly organized affair and requires a lot of ceremonies. This adventure and search for flesh is generally resorted to during the lean period after the harvest. The organization of various parties, distribution of duties and the disposal of meat and trophies are done on the basis of strict regulations evolved through the passage of time.

But the community hunting does not restrict the activities of enthusiastic Nagas who desire to go individually or in groups of their own according to their convenience.

The Nagas had evolved extremely interesting and effective ways of fixing traps for the animals, birds and fish. By drum-beating and shouting they would attract animals to the desired place where the traps could be laid and archers could be hidden. They would use stockades and leave the gates open for the animals to get in. False ground could be prepared over deep ditches and arrows could be got thrown at the slightest touch of the animal. Many noose traps and other such means of killing or catching the animals alive are still practised.

For catching fish again there are quite a few simple ways, the easiest one being to catch fish by hand or when the water is not very deep by pelting stones. At one place I saw fish being successfully caught by beating a wooden baton. Traps made out of bamboos are also in vogue at certain places. Often water is channelized and when drained out fish are left behind. There are various other ways. Another method is flooding a higher ground by damming a river first and then drain-

ing the water off by bursting the dam. This leaves a large number of fish on the higher ground. The most effective way the Nagas adopt is by poisoning the water of a river at a particular place and thus killing all the fish in that area. It is very commonly adopted at the village level in which everyone gets his share. This often results in the indiscriminate killing of the small fish which could otherwise grow and provide greater amount of food at a future date. No doubt, it is the easiest way of catching a large amount of fish in a very short period. It costs them nothing as the poison could be easily procured from the jungle.

Search for meat, therefore, not only provides food for the Naga community but it is also a source of recreation and besides making them hard and tough, it develops in them that zest for adventure and militant spirit, the possession of which is very essential for their survival. During the slack periods of agricultural activity hunting occupies spare time and thus keep the Nagas busy.

Depending upon mood of the spirits and gods, there are many days when the Naga gets no meat. If the deity is pleased, all of a sudden a few animals walk into the trap or get shot by the poisoned arrows. To preserve the bulk of meat, fish and other eatables, Nagas smoke them over their hearth and hung a few bamboo-mesh platforms one above the other like a swing with more than one seat. On top of these, they leave the eatables, the toughest food like meat being kept on the rack nearest to fire and the softest like vegetables could go to the top one. Similarly fish and millets could find a rack for themselves. The preserved food is thus put away for a rainy day.

Nagas have generally no reservations about the type of animals to be used for eating and no distinction is therefore entertained on ground of size, sex, colour, taste and the use to which the animal could be put. Unlike the Hindus for whom beef eating would be the most irreligious act and the Muslims for whom nothing could be more disgusting than eating pork, the Nagas relish both or any other animal that they can find easily. They would eat anything ranging from an elephant to a squirrel; wild bear, deer, monkey and rats are all welcome. The dog's meat could be a speciality and among certain tribes the

flesh of a black dog is a delicacy. Eggs and hens are greatly consumed during the innumerable ceremonies. During very important ceremonies, however, *mithuns*, pigs and goats are hacked or killed after they had been made to undergo an infinite number of sufferings. At the same time killing and eating of certain animals, fish and birds was a taboo among some tribes.

It would be interesting to learn that the Nagas did not milk the *mithuns*. Some of the tribes considered it an impure food. 'If we are going to eat the flesh of the animal, why should we milk her?' was what one Sema Naga told me. Therefore milk was unknown to the Nagas. Likewise all food products like clarified butter, curd, butter milk and cheese had never been known to them. Rice-beer which has many names is the only drink which, besides being essential for religious and ceremonial functions, forms a part of the daily food and goes a long way in enriching it. To prepare it, rice or millets or both are boiled for about half an hour and then kept for cooling after which some indigenous fermenting material prepared from the local herbs is added. These contents are enclosed in some baskets or leaves and allowed to ferment for a few days. After fermentation the contents are poured into bamboo or cane tubes or waterproof baskets made of bamboo and a little quantity of water is added to it. After two to four days the mixture is ready for drinking, often it is strained through some sort of locally made bamboo or cane net by adding water. The rice-beer so made must be consumed the same day, otherwise it could get spoiled. The fermented mixture, however, could be retained for a number of days in a covered container.

During one of the Bihu festival celebrations in a Konyak village I had the opportunity of taking a lot of it in banana leaf cones. Besides having a very pleasant taste, it produced a little wild intoxicating effect. It looked somewhat like butter milk and had a similar flavour. Tea is not unknown to the Nagas, but since sugar or jaggery is not available and cows are not milked, they consume tea without these.

Tamul in raw form which initially tastes a little bitter was quite popular amongst the Nagas. It gives you the feeling as if

you have taken half a glass of beer. Tobacco smoking in pipes is something universal among all the tribes. It is quite popular with women—more so with the old ones. The local tobacco is difficult to smoke. My throat almost got choked when I inhaled the first few puffs. One thing which I did not try and for which I now feel sad is opium smoking. Many Nagas smoke opium in their long pipes. They produce their own poppy seeds in spite of the fact that the Government had been trying to discourage this practice.

The main food of the Nagas consists of boiled rice, with some vegetables and occasionally supplemented by meat or fish. Ginger, onions, chillies, and millets are also added. Rice-beer is very regularly consumed. Depending upon the local growth, roots, tubers, wild vegetables, mushrooms, gourds, bamboo shoots, beans, potatoes, rye, mustard plants and fruit like orange, papaya, banana, and pineapple, whenever available are taken either separately or along with other food. Maize, sugarcane and millets introduce variety to their food. Nagas do not wash the rice and other grains; the pot used for boiling is kept enclosed and the surplus water is not drained. This helps in retaining all the calories. As stated earlier, butter and oils seldom form a part of their diet.

Cotton is also produced in Nagaland. Their requirement of clothing is met partly by their own production and partly by procuring cloth from the neighbouring tribes or plains through barter.

Nagas had neither tractors nor any ploughs, still with their age-old implements they rip open the slopes of the hills to produce grains, roots, and vegetables. The soil being generally loamy is reasonably fertile. Loam mixed with gravel or as in the low-lying area, the alluvial clay is also found. The jungles covering these endless hills besides assisting soil conservation and control of flood enrich the soil through the constant fall of the organic material from the trees and the periodic decomposition of the vegetation. The Nagas like many other tribal societies have adopted the process of shifting crops, thereby making good use of natural manure.

Nagas divide their villages into residential areas, cultivable lands, and hunting grounds. Their village boundaries are

natural like rivers and ridges. The entire cultivable land which lies on the slopes of the hills is divided into many sectors. Only a few of these sectors are taken up in one year for cultivation. Each year a new sector is picked up and the one which had been in use for about two to four years is given up and left to nature for a period of about ten to fifteen years, during which period the bald hills are adorned with green overgrowth of tall trees and scrubs by sun and shower. During this period of growth and periodic decay the soil becomes richer in organic manure. This technique of cultivation, popularly known as *jhumming*, entails also the cutting of all the trees and undergrowth and drying up before it could be burnt and finally the raking of the land with hand tools before the seeds could be sown.

Nagas conduct the entire operation of cultivation very systematically with a great many ceremonies. First of all the area is selected and then it is distributed for the work of slashing the overgrowth and then burning of it on the family basis. The work is taken up by the village as a whole. Cultivation on separate patches is generally not encouraged as this would further increase the task of making new tracks and erecting all-round fencing for protection against wild animals.

After the ground has been made ready, seeds are cast. Agriculture still being the only way of procuring one's own grain, there is hardly any Naga who does not have his own paddy field. Unlike the city dwellers every Naga is a farmer, soldier, hunter, mason and carpenter and almost every woman knows weaving. In their household needs, they are generally self-sufficient.

The Nagas grow maize and millets in their fields at the same time. To protect the grains from damage on account of wild animals or fire which could often engulf a Naga hut, a separate granary is put up in the fields before the harvesting season starts. The granary is generally kept a few feet above the ground level. Huts are built during the harvesting season for resting and it is quite common for the Nagas to spend a few nights in these temporary abodes.

The Angamis and Semas practise also the method of terrace cultivation. Looking from a distance the entire hillside

appears like a staircase rising from the depths of the smoky valleys and merging with the misty horizons. The hillside is cut into small terraces along the contours and irrigated by the small streams formed during the rainy season. The Angamis think that the rice grows better on these terraces than in *jhum* fields. The spread of the fields depends on the slope of the hill and the direction of the contours. On a gentle slope fields could be very wide and at places where the gradient was too much, the width of the field could be only three feet. This division is resorted to because at the lower side of the fields, a wall is erected to prevent the soil from being washed away by the rain water that runs down the slopes. Stones are used to make these walls at the lower end of each field. The height of these walls can be as much as six feet or even more. Small channels are made and the water flowing in the low-lying areas is carefully distributed among these fields.

Terrace cultivation entails very hard work in the initial stages but it requires very little effort subsequently. In the *jhum* fields after every few years people have to go through the laborious process of slashing and burning the jungles. Unlike many other tribes the Angamis store the paddy in big baskets in their own houses.

To a Naga his land is his life and there is nothing more pleasing to him than the rain-washed lush green paddy crops swinging in gay abandon under the fast moving grey clouds. Nagas do not chain their *mithuns*. They are only put in captivity when required for sacrifices. The Nagas recognize their animals and the animals respond to their masters' peculiar way of calling. Till they are called for their last rite, the animals move about in the jungles unattended.

But at the same time we must remember that slavery was practised in Nagaland, though in a very mild form. It is surprising that in a land where even hired labour is unheard of, slavery existed. There are many ways in which a man or a woman can be turned into a slave. In many cases, he or she was kidnapped at a young age during one of the raids. One's inability to pay a fine imposed by the community because of one's misdeeds could also turn him into a slave. Again many inherit slavery from their parents. Though a slave

could change many hands, he is generally well treated. Amongst some of the NEFA tribes a few slaves had risen high enough to be the village headmen. A slave can redeem himself either by escape or by rendering very sincere services to his master. A free citizen who wants to marry a slave has himself to step down to that status.

The limited food products both in quantity and variety, the hard rugged life, and the fear of enemy intrusions never bind the Nagas to the limits of their huts. Along with their rigorous life, they have developed various media of spontaneous expression of their aesthetic sense. When they dance with thumping steps and arms clinging to each other to the beat of a long drum, the misty horizons recede further and further and the melody and rhythm reaches far beyond the clouds and the depths of the valleys. The melody of their music and the unsophisticated movements of the feet speak of their simple life, unadulterated by the alien cultures of distant lands.

Every Naga tribe has its own pet colours. The Angami's loin cloth is of a dark blue colour embroidered with cowries while those of the Semas and Lothas is a combination of white and blue. The Aos are fond of blue and red and the Sangthams prefer embroidery work. Many tribes wear feathers and skins of many birds and animals on their hair, ears and on their hats. The Aos in their ceremonial dress, with their spears wrapped in coloured hair, and bows, arrows, swords and shields decorated in all combinations of primitive paint take great pride in their dances and songs. The young boys and girls dressed in their best often listen to their various mythological stories and battle scenes. The Angami and Sema dances are indeed extremely charming and vigorous.

Chapter 12

LOVE AND MARRIAGE

LIFE IS burdensome to a pessimist. To him it is nothing short of going through punishment and the brightest things are nothing but evil shadows with sinister designs. Every good gesture on any one's part is construed by him as a cold calculated move, and sincere advice appears to be a malicious idea and good deeds are nothing but ugly acts in disguise. Even the dearest friends appear to be farthest away.

How would this conception help in attaining the intellectual and moral development of man? Realities of life must be given their due place and things must be accepted as they exist, because human behaviour can never reach the ideal nor can it be exact. Human nature, being most fluctuating, affects all human relations. Knowing this fully well man still tries to achieve that state of life where every thing is well with the world, because basically man is a peace-loving social animal. Knowing fully the drawbacks and failings of social institutions, man still continues to practise them, for the simple reason that the advantages and values attributed to these greatly outweigh their shortcomings and occasional failures.

Marriage is one such institution which has been known even to the earliest man. It has passed through many stages of change. Probably the earliest man took it very casually and it would not be wrong to say that there were no moral considerations or legal obligations which bound one man to a particular woman amongst the herd of men and women that formed the community. We need not go into the details as to find out how the idea regarding marriage came to be what it is today, how monogamy came into existence. It is a subject by itself. A very general study of the conditions, circumstances and ways of marriage adopted by the Nagas would attempt to clarify many points and throw light on the realistic approach of the tribesmen towards this institution. Though very different from our present

standards, it contributed to their happiness as it took into consideration their local conditions and requirements. Our present marriage system is probably still not the best way of cohabitation between a man and a woman. It is subject to revision and modification by culture and social environment. Examining the issue with an unbiased mind our marriage pattern is probably as good or as bad as that of the Nagas—may be each is justified at its own place and their juxtaposition may upset the social harmony of either culture.

Before we proceed further, we must realize that in any society relationship between man and woman whether restricted or loose is bound to exist in many forms because of the flexibility in human nature—thoughts, actions, sentiments and emotions. Though satisfaction of sex appetite is the primary force, social obligations and restrictions which are dependent on the standards of cultural development greatly influence such relations.

Emperors may have a number of queens, wealthy Sheikhs may have a harem to play about, kings may have a train of concubines following them, the prosperous businessmen could take the liberty of having keeps and a woman artiste from Hollywood may change her husband as often as she changed her car. At the same time there have been amongst many cultures cases of child marriage and girls at the age of twelve have become mothers. In India every now and then there has been an odd case of sati, where the wife had jumped into the pyre. Cases of adultery amongst the married couples are not unknown to us and perverted assaults, rapes, and seductions have as well polluted the social atmosphere. At the same time amongst the Todas of Nilgiri Hills in south India defloration of a young maiden was till recently a public ceremony. At this stage it can be said that ideas and practices regulating man-woman relationship range from most conservative to such liberal latitudes as to appear perverse. But who is the one authorized and by which ultimate authority to pass the verdict? Which is that last book on moral code where the fundamental truth can be found?

There is no limit to such institutions and the one that is practised by a particular culture is an outcome of its ex-

perience. Like many other primitive communities of the world quite a few tribes amongst the Nagas have adopted what is known as the dormitories for the unmarried girls, an institution which is now on its last legs. There could be one such dormitory in each village or one per family group, in case there were more than one clan in the same village. Here all the grown-up unmarried girls stay during the night. They are permitted to work in their houses or in the fields during daytime. They assist their parents in all other household activities and they are full-fledged members of the family. But as the girl attains maturity, she is expected to spend the night with other girls of the village of the same age group in the community dormitory.

This institution is kept under the charge of a senior lady who is responsible to the village for proper running of the dormitory, training of the young girls and helping them to acquire such arts as would make them worthy and useful housewives. At home they are trained to brew and prepare rice-beer, weave and make other essential household articles. Dancing and singing are essential qualifications which a tribal girl must acquire and these are taught in the dormitories. Here the girls have to bring firewood and water and learn to sit around the fireplace. Generally the girls of same age group form a section of their own.

One of the reasons for starting these boys and girls dormitories could be to give greater freedom to the parents to perform their wordly duties when the children are grown up. When the first child attains the age of puberty the parents are still young and capable of making love. The house being of a rather open construction and with almost no doors to bolt from inside, it must have been embarrassing for the parents to share the same bed when their grown-up children could easily walk in though inadvertently. But the main reason for setting up dormitories must have been to ensure that the children were brought up in a disciplined manner. With the fear of a war lurking always in their minds, it was essential that young boys grew up to be good warriors and the girls capable of supporting their husbands in their war effort by good house keeping, helping them in the fields and by nourishing good healthy children for the protection of the community.

The most interesting thing associated with the girls,

dormitory was the liberty given to the young girls to choose their partners for life. When the young girls join this institution, they are absolutely innocent of, and unfamiliar with, love episodes that circulate there. Gradually they learn the ways of life by seeing other girls of older age group. It is quite customary and proper for the young boys to visit the girls' hostel after sunset and the elders never look upon this as an immoral practice, for they did the same when they were young. During these visits inmates of the boys' hostel develop relations with the members of the opposite sex. A girl is permitted to be friendly with the boys but she is expected to have intimate relations with only one boy with whom she is ultimately expected to get married. This courtship could continue for any length of time. There had been cases when the girl found herself in the family way without being married. But this is not frowned upon by the villagers. The stay in the hostel is a period of training for the girls in matters of sex. Here the boys and the girls mix with each other and some couples often develop extreme liking for each other; here the courtship is a period of adjustments and trials, at the end of which the two are in a position to conclude if their permanent union would be a success. By mixing in this way they learn about each other's habits, way of life, likes and dislikes, physical fitness and sex potency. If at any stage one found that the prospective partner would not fulfil the requirements, a break in the relations could take place but this is not considered a stigma either for the girl or for the boy. They just continue their life as normal and start looking out for other suitable partners. In case the girl conceives during this period of trials and adjustments which is of course not without sentimental and emotional attachments and due to some reason the boy is not prepared to marry her immediately or at a later stage, a fine is imposed upon him to compensate for not concluding the affair.

In case the two agree to get married a word is sent to their parents either directly by themselves or indirectly, if they felt shy, by their close friends. Then the two parties start negotiations to fix up the bride price. Those who are accustomed to the dowry system of the type in which the girl's parents present gifts, the other party would probably ridicule

at the converse of this being adopted by some communities. Well, their reasoning fully supports this custom. One of the *gaon burhas* in the Sema area put it this way. 'It is all right when a girl stays with her parents. She prepares *madhu* for them, collects water and firewood, assists in the fields, weaves and prepares household articles for the other members and helps in the cooking. On getting married the parents are deprived of all these services and the same are now rendered for the husband.' Thus the parents become poorer and therefore this reduction in the working members is to be compensated for by the boy by presenting certain gifts of utility items.

It must be observed here that the idea of paying in terms of gifts is not to purchase a merchandise but to realize the importance of women. Admitted that the women do not play a very important part in the administration of the village, we must not think on that score that they do not enjoy a very significant social status or equality in the household affairs.

Coming back to the bride price, it must be noted that it is subject to extreme variations, depending on the social status and the economic condition of the bridegroom. The nature of marriage would also directly affect the nature of gifts. Other factors like the local tribal customs, proficiency of the girl in the arts and crafts, her reputation, previous records regarding love affairs, marriages and divorces, number of children, her own state of health and as also her personal charms, all these and many others affect the contributions.

What we call love-marriage is quite a common affair amongst the Nagas. Usually the boy and the girl after having had a period of courtship get their decision conveyed to their parents, who in turn negotiate among themselves and arrive at some conclusion regarding the gifts to be presented by the boy. The amount of gifts could be just nominal in case the boy came of a poor family. A few baskets of rice, rice-beer, a few pigs and one goat could be the entire bride price. But in case the man is of a high status or belong to a very rich family, the gifts could include a number of *mithuns* in addition to the many other articles. The practice of staging a mock fight between the two parties still exists in some remote areas of Nagaland. This was done to fulfil the old standing tradition of

kidnapping the girl. After this fight which sometimes takes a few hours, the girl's parents throws a lavish party to the boy and his relations and other associates who accompany him. They are all entertained with good food, meat and rice-beer being the two main items. There are a number of other interesting details connected with each tribe but here we shall limit ourselves only to a few salient features.

There are generally no hard and fast rules as to where the girl should live after the marriage. In case the boy does not have a separate house to himself, which is normally the case, the girl can live with her parents till a house is built or till the first child is born. The boy however maintains normal relations with his wife during her stay with her parents.

Marriage to the Nagas is quite a ceremonial affair in case it is a maiden attempt, otherwise the two could just settle down in a hut and start living as a married couple. This is done without much frowning from their neighbours. At the same time there is no restriction to the number of wives a man could have. It all depends upon the disposition of the man, the size of his pocket and his social status. The greater the number of wives a man possess, the better status he attains. A poor man can hardly afford to pay gifts for one wife and then after his marriage he has to work hard to maintain the family. Given one wife, the husband's opportunities to make love with her are limited because of the various taboos and restrictions imposed by the society on various occasions like pregnancy, child birth, death, etc. A man with a moderate economic status has to exercise restraint during such periods of sex inactivity but a man who is economically well off and exercise great social influences over the community takes another wife to fill in the voids. Some Nagas have as many as six wives. Polygamy seldom produces any ill feelings or jealousies amongst the wives. In fact, many wives suggest to their husbands to take other wives in addition to themselves as the new ladies would considerably reduce their load of work and at the same time add to the social status of the husband. Polygamy further increases the number of offsprings which no doubt is an asset for a community where there is no hired labour. The boys when grown up assist their parents in the

cultivation while the girls on getting married bring them gifts and thus help to increase household belongings of their parents.

But marriage is not always a smooth affair with the Nagas. There have been many cases when the rich parents of a girl ignore the wishes of the daughter and press her to get married to a different person expecting better returns from the party. Some girls very violently oppose such business-like approach to their marriage and get married on their own accord to their selected bridegrooms. This can result in everlasting quarrels and hostility between the parents of the girl and the bridegroom. Cases of elopement have also been registered. Married women leaving behind their children have run away with their paramours who are supposedly more attractive than their husbands.

Another way of acquiring a wife for those who are too poor to pay the bride price is to serve in the house of the proposed in-laws for a period that is mutually agreed upon. After having paid the bride price in terms of services, the man can get married to the daughter of the master and later start his independent married life.

For desperate lovers, in case they do not have enough resources to pay the bride price or cannot win over the girl or obtain her parents' approval, abduction has also been practised as a means to getting married.

Thus illicit sexual relations between married or unmarried people, separations, divorces and widow remarriages are not uncommon. It is true that there is a great deal of sexual laxity permitted by the unwritten Naga marriage code. Variations do occur from tribe to tribe. A wife can get rid of her husband by just paying back the bride price that her husband pays for her. Then as a separated woman she can co-habit with another man without any ceremonial initiation. Later she can leave him also and another man can get married to her by paying her bride price. In certain cases there can be no end to such relationships. The Aos appeared to be rather liberal and pre-marital relations are quite a normal affair with them. Relatively speaking, the Semas are a conservative community.

In case of the husband's death a widow is expected to get married to one of the very near male relations of the

deceased—whether it was the eldest or younger brother, or some other members of the family, depended upon the customs of the particular tribe. In case she desires to get married to someone outside the deceased husband's family, compensation has to be paid by the intruder. There are various other rules that govern the conduct of a widow, her remarriage, her claim over the property, her children and her social status.

Amongst some tribes, a son can marry his step-mother. This custom came into existence probably to avoid the family going through the ordeal of lengthy procedure of inheritance. Also, if the step-mother gets married to someone outside the family, there is the fear of children not getting good treatment at the hands of the step-father. This also saves the house from the trouble of fixing a bride price.

But on account of the activities of the Christian missionaries over fifty per cent Nagas are now Christians. The preachers have been relentlessly advocating that for a Christian Naga it is not good to have more than one wife at a time. Therefore the converted Nagas do not observe the above practice to any great length. They suspend all work on Sundays and arm-in-arm with their wives visit the village church to attend sermons from their local pastors.

Woman has always been considered to be a great asset. They walk in step with the men and socially they are much above the secondary position which may be the case among many cultures. All women have social rights equal to those of men and they take a significant part in the tribal life which is full of rituals and ceremonies.

Chapter 13

DISCIPLINE AND DEMOCRACY

THE DEMOCRATIC institutions of the Nagas are worth our enquiry. On scrutiny they seem to be close to those that obtained in Greek City States and they are the very models of the Spartan discipline. Their headmen were both religious and temporal and their secular chiefs, priests and the entourage of village elders give the impression that their organization was politically democratic; socially liberal; economically considerate; religiously somewhat secular; legally effective and militarily alert and prepared against any enemy adventure. Their complicated organization, as will be seen later on, did not in any way contribute towards the establishment of a bureaucratic society though there were privileged families or persons. At the same time the heads of various organizations had no inclination towards a dictatorial or despotic treatment of the subjects. The chiefs were not dictators; nor were the village councils mere fake agencies trying to be the mouthpiece of the former.

It is likely that in the initial stages when these tribes started their independent existence they were ruled by powerful chiefs whose orders were the last words for the tribesmen. Gradually democratic institutions started gathering momentum and perhaps after a prolonged conflict, the despots gave in. Free and cordial discussions form the very backbone of their organization and every representative maintains the right of free expression even when it runs contrary to the general opinion. No decisions are thrust on a tribe or village by those in authority, no extortions are made and the aggrieved are given a patient hearing. Before taking up any task involving the *khel* or village as a whole, all the representative members and sometimes the entire population are consulted and their views taken seriously. For operations like jungle clearing or village defence schemes, the approval of the whole group is essential. If a conference hall is to be constructed, everyone renders help and the

collective task is treated as personal by everyone. This example of self-help and community spirit is rarely to be witnessed anywhere else. Voluntary labour without any force or outside pressure is a matter of pride for the Nagas. Their democratic village organization, their respect for the individual, their enthusiasm to work collectively for the good of the community as a whole, their tolerant behaviour towards those who disagree, and their spirit of adventure, all combine to inspire in them feelings of oneness, solidarity, and unity.

In spite of the fact that nature had forced the Nagas to live a life very different from ours, we have to learn a lot from them. Many who never visited their land called them barbarians and nomadic criminals but if you stay with them for a while, you will be convinced that they are brave and cultured warriors settled in a land not very hospitable to them. They have full control over themselves and never indulge in loose passions that make life easy or comfortable. They have to make efforts to reap every bit of grain and it is truly said that to live respectably is not to avoid rigours. Their approach towards life is inspiring and their strict adherence to rules and social customs, though all unwritten, make you feel that you are in a land where everything is done without any orders or instructions but by the pursuance of a code of honour. Their sense of self-discipline guides them on the correct lines. Their understanding for each other, spirit of sacrifice for the village and tribe, their love and respect for customs and tradition, all combine to make their life rich and real.

In their land I seldom heard the word 'thief'. The few valuables that a Naga possessed are kept open in the house since they do not use locks. All the valuables such as beads, ivory ornaments, headdresses, ringlets, etc., are kept on the bamboo shelf in the house unlocked. Actually it is the up-bringing and the training under very strict control which mould the young growing Naga children into disciplined and strong-willed men and women.

Soon after the birth of a child the mother starts taking care of the new baby. The child starts crawling on his hands and knees and the responsibility starts shifting from the mother to elder brothers or sisters. You could see a five-year-old girl

carrying her infant brother slung at her back and taking him along wherever she goes. I saw many such kids who carried the youngsters in addition to the load of water in bamboo tubes and as if all this was not enough, climbed the steep slopes with all the load. It is here right from the beginning that the Naga child was introduced to the severe hardship of life and rigid discipline. Thus a child grows up with very few demands and requirements. He learns to live with the children of his own age group at an early age. There are not many toys for him to play with except the rugged ground. There are no baby sitters to lull the child to sleep except the loving bosoms of the mother who while keeping the child in her lap has to work on the loom as well. Life for the young is grim and serious because they come in contact with the realities of life at too early an age. I seldom saw a young child crying and even if he cried, the mother would seldom leave her work and start fondling the baby. Thus the child starts familiarizing himself with the rugged life at a very early age. He starts using the *dao*; he learns to make and repair house walls; he learns the art of cutting timber; he watches the elders making their headdress, cleaning and repairing weapons and preparing traps for the animals. With this background, it is easy to train the Naga youth in the art of jungle survival and tribal warfare.

But how a Naga boy grows up to be a man and how he is milled to become a useful and disciplined member of the community can only be understood by examining their almost universally existing institutions of community dormitories.

The boys' dormitory is the institution around which the social, political, religious, legal and military life of the many tribes revolves. This focal point, normally located centrally in a very large hut overlooking the approaches to the village, is the very nerve-centre of the community. It controls the growth of a boy to manhood and regulates, the daily life of the community. The dormitory contains large membraneless drums or xylophones with boldly carved figures of *mithuns* and other animals. Hand hammers are used to beat them to produce different notes in case of an alarm or a ceremonial function.

All the boys after they had attained the age of puberty are obliged to sleep in the *morung* at night. During the day,

they can help their parents in any job that they may be asked to do. Normally they help parents in the household work and cultivation. Young boys of a particular age group enter the *morung* at regular intervals and are kept under the control of a commander called *chuzen* who is solely responsible for their training. He is assisted by a council of elders. The commander is normally a person with great qualities so that he can impose the severest of punishments on the boys. Here the young boys are made to work hard for the *morung* and other senior members. On entry the boy is ragged and made to do all the dirty and menial work. He is made to go into the jungle to collect firewood, food, timber pieces and bamboo required for the defence of the village. He is asked to collect water for the members of the senior groups at odd hours of the day. Any hesitation or exhibition of fear on his part can land him into serious trouble as a tougher task can be assigned to him. This goes on till the boy has learnt to deal with difficult situations without any fear. A boy is not considered fit for the community till he has qualified himself in such tests as demanded guts and fanatic spirit to risk life. The young Naga is taught the use of *dao*, bow and arrows, the all-important spear and many methods of raiding and ambushing an enemy. He is taught to observe discipline and show spontaneous obedience because unless these two things are achieved, the survival of the community is at stake. Every young grown up man is supposed to be a master in the use of weapons, so that at any time and under any conditions he can be called upon to face the enemy's onslaught.

In this institution, no matter from which family a boy came, no favouritism or discrimination is permitted. Everyone gets the same treatment and any feeling of superiority that exists in a boy for belonging to a family of high status is soon wiped out from his mind. Differentiation on the basis of wealth and family is frowned upon and formation of factions and groups discouraged. The primary aim of all such organization is to form a classless society having unity and brotherhood. These elements are essential for a community whose main task in life is to remain ever prepared for war.

A Naga boy has to serve for a fixed period of about

three years before he can be accepted as a useful grown up member of the society. He can leave the institution after having gone through the minimum period of training. Such a request would set the village council humming with activity. On consultations with the commander's advisory council the boy can be declared a member of a particular age group called *zunga*. Then he can leave the *morung*, get married and set his own house. He is a full-fledged member and can take part in the civic set-up of his village or *khel*.

It will be interesting to note how these very boys when grown up become members of the elders' council, called *tatar* which is the supreme law making and governing body of the village. Their elections are a highly organized affair bound by strict rules and conventions. The prospective candidates have to fulfil many conditions. The first consideration is the age which again can vary from village to village; one must be above thirty years to become the member of the council. Then all the members have to be from the same generation. The entire life cycle of the Aos is divided into a number of stages, each being of about twenty-five to thirty years. Every stage is further divided into a number of age groups and members of one generation only can form the council. In each particular group, seats are divided amongst the various family groups or clans according to the tradition which takes cognizance of the status of a particular clan. There is little scope for conflict over such constitutional issues but there had been cases when serious thought had to be given to the various protests, allegations and accusations. The entire village gathers to elect the new council in accordance with the customary law. Every family in the village has to pay the *tatar* in the form of goods or services and all the members above a certain age, generally thirty years, of those families only who pay such levies are granted the right to vote. No member, unless granted the right of citizenship, can take part in the social and political life of the village. Anyone who settles down in a village cannot automatically become a citizen unless the *tatar* gives such formal approval. Women were debarred from such voting rights and generally excluded from the political life. They have their own field of activity. In case a seat falls vacant later on due to the

death or removal of a member because of his unsound mental state, or physical disability or due to his being involved in a criminal case a replacement from the same family group is found. As in the earlier case, the candidate fulfilling the required conditions is elected by the members of the same family group.

Depending on the customs and local practices, the office of the head councillor and his second-in-command can be reserved for a particular clan. But at the same time to balance and subdue the despotic tendencies of the head councillor which are likely to crop up owing to his unchallengeable position, the third and the fourth members in the council are generally made responsible for transacting important business of the village. No *tatar* can be dissolved or abrogated during the period of office which is up to thirty years.

The outgoing members are not permitted to contest the elections again. The new generation takes over complete administration and the outgoing councillors, though respected for their age, experience, and wisdom are never allowed to interfere with the work of the new generation.

The changeover of the administration from one age group to the next is not always smooth as those enjoying authority would show reluctance to reconcile with the claim of the younger generation that their days are over. There had often been tussles with the incoming generation, and sometimes they even tried to grab power which they thought was their right and privilege.

Thus the village council—the highest law making body of the village whose activities are concentrated round the *morung*—is the caretaker of the entire community. It is vested with legislative, executive, and judicial powers. Unless the matter is of great significance when the entire village is consulted, the council by itself can amend, change, take decisions or give up any customary legal or social practice. At the same time it is the highest financial authority which can collect funds, goods or services and then disburse these for the welfare of the community.

The *morung* plays a vital role in preparing the younger generation for posts is the council. The *morung* is the club, the public school, the military training centre, the hostel for boys and a meeting place of the village elders. It is as well

the centre for the social, religious and political activities. In short, it is the fulcrum of the village democracies.

The village council has many other duties to perform. It can be called to session as a court, whenever a civil or criminal case came up. Its most important meeting is held before the winter when the details regarding the cultivation are worked out. Whenever there is an inter-*khel* dispute implicating one individual or the entire community, the council can be summoned to meet. The council is generally authorized to enter into any agreements or pacts with other villages. It also has the sanction to grant citizenship rights, collect taxes, and fix dates for feasts and other communal ceremonies.

It is essential to point out that the above system of village republics does not exist everywhere. The Konyaks—the largest tribe in Nagaland—are being ruled by the *aungs*—the powerful religious and secular chiefs. Whatever they say is the law for the people and their decisions cannot be questioned by the bravest of men. The Angamis, as I found, had a democratic set up even purer than that of the Aos. The history of the development of the tribal institutions supports the hypothesis that initially the tribes were governed by the dictatorial monarchs and the powerful chiefs who conducted the business of the community and all the power was concentrated in their hand. It is likely that at some stage the communities revolted against this type of dictatorship and evolved a system which appears to be very close to the modern concept of democracy. The Angamis conceived these ideas out of dire necessity and compulsion by their environments and political forces. Or was it the genius in their rational thinking at the peak of their development? Along with these liberally democratic set of people can be found the Semas ruled by chiefs who just inherited this status.

The most widespread thing that I noticed during my stay was the force of transformation which has started entering gradually into the political and social life of the tribesmen. The Nagas had contacts with the outside people for centuries but the relationship was very restricted and the limited traffic never attained such magnitude as to seriously threaten their socio-political set-up. But by then a large number of Nagas were

crossing the limits of their lands for education or jobs outside their State and many were joining the Army, Police and other civil services. At the same time, the administration having been thoroughly established, many educated people from outside had settled side by side with the Nagas. The organization of various national functions, tours of very important personalities, outside visits of Naga delegations, opening of schools, hospitals, dispensaries, community development centres, promotion and sale of their artistic handicrafts by the authorities, and the spread of Christianity during the last few decades have disturbed the social equilibrium, inadvertently resulting in the creation of new classes and institutions. The power seems to be changing hands from the older and the experienced lot to the younger educated groups.

The inter-village feuds and wars, which form an essential part of the Naga life, have now become stories of the past. Protection against raids and defence of the village used to be things of primary importance. Without this the community's life could be reduced to only a few sunny days. This demanded rigid military training and discipline. After the establishment of the administration, this insecurity which lurks in every mind starts disappearing. The Nagas themselves immensely welcomed this change and even sometimes requested the authorities to take such steps as would ensure their safety and eliminate the fear of a sudden attack. Of course it gave them peace but at the same time it disturbed the public school organization of the boys', dormitory and their militant aspirations. The rigid discipline started ebbing down and the village chiefs, who were the leaders of the community organized on war footing, started losing their hold over the younger warriors.

Another force influencing the change was the changing set up of the administration. Since the courts started extending their legal jurisdiction into the tribal areas, the village councils automatically had to step down. When a tribesman realized that the *tatar* was not the final authority that could render justice, and that he could redress his grievances in the higher courts, the village council receded into the background. But it is creditable that our Government all over the north-eastern tribal region is trying to encourage the village councils and

is making serious effort to revitalize the legal authority of the council, so that justice can be dispensed according to the customary law of the tribesmen. Introduction of our own legal system can result in a score of other complications.

The tribesmen would not be able to understand the complicated clauses of the modern law. Even the highly educated men need experts to interpret it correctly. The modern law is too tricky for the tribesmen. Then there is the question of necessity. What will a community without adequate resources, affluence and educated men do with the modern law? It will be just out of context. The aim of any law is to disburse justice, but a law code which does not bear any relation to the way of life of the people will hardly perform this function. The modern law, if imposed, would thus become another force distorting the personality of the innocent tribesmen. In a community where chopping off of a human head is considered to be a birth right, the courts and lawyers practising modern law would become another pain in the neck of the tribesmen besides ridding them of their small pockets.

Education is another factor, the effective pursuance of which will ask for certain adjustments in the Naga set-up of life. The younger educated generation after having seen the different world and the scientific development all over India would definitely demand greater share in the administration of their villages, thus affecting the position of the councillors and the chiefs. I am certain that with little modifications, even if all the tribesmen get highly educated, the village councils can still be an effective instrument administering the village democracies and controlling the social and legal institutions which are by themselves self-contained and effective within the perimeter of the village.

Educated masses normally tend to accept the Western style of clothes. There is no harm in accepting new ideas and changes but there is the fear that these innovations will affect the production of their own indigenously manufactured goods which are in true harmony with the Naga culture. Their singularly beautiful *mekhelas* and *chaddars* of uniform patterns and colours worn universally by all the members of a particular tribe give them the feeling of oneness, of a unified people their strict rules

of conduct and rigid discipline make them a thoroughly organized body; their compulsory military training induce amongst them a disciplined attitude and their institution of the council of elders and the citizenship rights, all these introduce in their villages miniature democracies where everyone owes his incorruptible devotion to his village.

The redeeming feature of all these unavoidable changes is the fact that the Nagas are still in possession of their basic qualities and with the present Government's policy they will cling on to all that is good in their culture. Looking at the situation from a wider perspective, we can say that it does not matter at all if a Naga boy starts putting on a trousers with socks and shoes and a well tailored shirt instead of roaming about naked in that cold land. What matters is the spirit, that Naga spirit, which has been the corner-stone of their life and responsible for their survival through the unlimited gruesome conditions imposed both by nature and man. The continuance of their enviable spirit will supplement and enrich the ideas of the largest democracy of the world of which they are an integral and substantial part.

Chapter 14

THE FIGHT FOR SKULLS

IT WAS the month of May. Under the fast moving shadows of the dark grey clouds, the national flag fluttered round the mast, outside the Assistant Political Officer's office, fifty miles from the nearest town of Assam. The endless hill peaks, not very far away from the Burmese border, looked painted in a dark blue pigment. As the rain bearing misty clouds moved, the colour of the earth changed frequently from light grey to dark green; occasionally it looked like a vast blue sea.

Inside the long *basha* made out of thatch and bamboo sat T. Haralu—an Angami Naga, a man of medium height and fair complexion slightly tanned. A stern but friendly expression with well trimmed black moustache under a prominent nose was quite significant on his squarish face. On his table he had a big Gurkha hat with two feathers of black partridge sticking out of the left side. Looking under the desk you could see him wearing ammunition boots and olive green slacks. With his ordinary white poplin shirt tucked in, he had the look of a man whose authority is directly proportional to his simplicity. He was the man responsible for helping the tribesmen in maintaining peace in the sector. Solving their problems, settling their disputes, checking the crime and coordinating development work were a few of his numerous duties and these involved extensive tours of many places for many miles and on foot in the Tuensang District.

In the year 1951, as at other places like Noklak and Kiphire, to give protection to the villages in India from raids across the Burmese border, an administrative authority was established at Mon. It was believed that in May 1951 as a result of raids by the Burmese Nagas, the villagers of Noklak were deprived of about ninety heads which had been taken away as trophies after the men had been slain. Also many other villages along the border lived under constant fear of attack.

Often during the raids many men and women lost their heads. Nagas from across the border went to the extent of collecting taxes from the neighbouring Nagas of Tuensang. With the establishment of outposts in these border villages, raids from across the border were brought to a halt. But this was not the end of the inter-village or inter-tribal feuds inside our own territory. Though this primitive and cruel pastime threatening the peace of the entire region is on the decline, yet there were a lot of Nagas of both sexes and of all ages who during the many raids had been kidnapped from their peaceful abode and sold across the border as human merchandise for slavery. Their life is still unhappy.

It would be quite correct to say that long standing feuds, raids and head-hunting expeditions were quite the order of the day till the end of the nineteenth century. The Angamis, Aos, Semas, Lothas, Phoms, Sangtams, Changs, Konyaks and quite a few other tribes had been past-masters in this art. Tribes of Tuensang, particularly those who were just near the Burmese border and were the last to be brought under administration, did not feel compelled to give up this activity and continued, though in a meagre way, the hoarding of human skulls. The last case was reported in the year 1958.

During one of my visits to the Assistant Political Officer at Mon, Mr. T. Haralu I saw a number of Nagas squatting in one of the corridors. waiting for him. From their peculiar dress which was precious little I could conjecture that they were not ordinary Konyaks. Some of them wore those wide silver belts which was the privilege of the men belonging to the royal families only. The Konyaks did not practice the liberal democracy that guided the lives of the Aos or the Angamis. Amongst the Konyaks the authority rested with the *aungs* who were religious as well as secular heads of a group of villages. An *aung* who belonged to a royal family commanded great respect from his subjects. Even the bravest amongst the villagers could not by-pass without showing reverence to him. His dress was conspicuous and rich and only he and none else could wear such clothes.

Well, one of them was a little known to me. I had met him about a week back when he cut across our bridge-site while proceeding to Sibsagar town to sell some of his local produce

of roots. Later on, the next day while coming back from Jorhat, I had given him a lift in my vehicle. On seeing me he gave a friendly smile. I went up to him to enquire if he would like to go back to Sibsagar in my vehicle. He nodded his head and said 'no' since he had come to Mon along with a party to settle an old dispute. He stated that the forefathers of two *aungs* had been their bitter enemies in the bygone days. The population of both parties lived under constant fear of surprise attacks and thus had always to be prepared militarily for their defence. Now to patch up the issue one of them had invited his adversary to a lavish pork meat and rice-beer party. It was just a move for reconciliation and the other chief had gladly agreed to compromise. But on the actual day of the meet, the invited chief failed to show up. The host accused the invitee of deliberately absenting himself with the aim of humiliating him and thus affecting his prestige amongst his own people with the ulterior motive of giving an impression to the tribesmen that the host was attempting to appease him.

This I heard from a person who was not directly concerned with the issue. Where lay the truth? I could not guess. But about one thing I was extremely certain. If this episode had occurred, say, fifty years earlier, there would have been definitely a raid organized by the plaintiff as a compensation for the deliberate insult. This raid would have of course been returned by another one by the antagonists. This would have produced enough spark to set the tribes on fire and there would have been no end to the attacks and counter-attacks, and these would have continued probably for centuries.

But the tribesmen have now started enjoying the fruit of peaceful living. And the constant propaganda against such wanton acts of violence and the presence of the administration with executive powers keep the tempers of the belicose Nagas low. Today, only memories of the past are there to remind them of the story of the past heroic acts.

The Nagas wearing bear skin caps decorated with boar tusks and plumes of feathers, with bows and spears in ready position scan the dense jungles in search of wild animals for food. The primitive sense of achievement demands of them an expression of their dare-devil spirit. In the past ruptur-

ing the belly of an enemy with a pointed spear or poisoned arrow and then making off with the head, hands or other limbs, as the community's custom demanded, was not a very uncommon affair.

The road from Mon to Sibsagar is often frequented by the Konyaks. Some of them even in scorching summer heat never take off their heavy black topcoats that seemed to have become very popular there. Some of them clothe themselves in a very incongruous way. If you surveyed a Konyak starting from top, you saw the well-cut hair pinned at the back with a spindle, the ears decorated with mushroom type of ringlets of goat hair, face completely spotted with tattoo marks, neck cinctured by beads and below this came the abrupt navy blue waistcoat, and if you ventured to stare below the belt where the waistcoat ended, you saw nothing save his natural skin. There are many other instances where the Konyaks betray their innocence and simple unsophisticated approach to life. No doubt they looked very smart and natural with their protective caps decorated with red, black and other colourful feathers. The feathers of a hornbill, the use of which some years back was restricted only to the warriors who had taken heads or those Nagas who had sacrificed certain animals, are tied with the goat hair. A decorated flap of foolscap size hanging from the cane or silver belt in front from the waist level to just above the knees is their notion of adequate dress though not from our standard. In addition to a few other decorations many Konyaks wear replicas of skull made out of wood, copper or bamboo. Invariably, they hung them round their necks. The number of the skulls can be any but the maximum which I saw was six. Some had such replicas dangling from their baskets, attached to the tobacco pipes or fixed in front of their hats. In a few cases they hung them outside the front walls of their huts. These were further complemented by the skulls in some cases of elephants, of *mithuns*, or of wild boars, horns of animals and tusks of wild boars, and so on.

Round some necks I saw a few skulls that were not mere replicas but real in structure as well as in shape. Though much smaller in size these resembled human skulls. They could have been dropped off the shoulders of children. At the same time

they could be those of once living human beings shrunk to size by such indigenous methods as are known to some other communities of the world. But the family of monkeys could as well lay claim on them. On enquiry regarding the first supposition I discovered that though the hunting of heads of grown up men and women was quite common, the children were kidnapped if the situation permitted. Then these young ones separated from family could be sold as slaves to the richer members of the community. Regarding my second view, after having gone through a number of villages and spoken to many Nagas, I was made to believe that the art of shrinking skulls was not known to the Nagas and that they were never tried it. Therefore the contribution by the members of the monkey's family appeared to me to be quite a possibility or it was more likely that the miniature skulls were those of human children.

The motivation behind a head-hunting raid is quite simple and there are many tribesmen who can still give you disjointed explanations centering round the belief amongst the tribesmen in that the soul exists in the head just under the scalp. In saying this I am only considering a general point of view because minor variations of the same belief exist from tribe to tribe and village to village. It is believed that all the strength and force of a person is concentrated in the head and that this is transferable. This soul-force guides the functions of the human body. Further, variation in the sum-total of the entire community's soul-force has its impact on the prosperity of the race. If a calamity, an epidemic or a mighty fire broke out or the crops failed, the cause is to be attributed to a decrease in soul-force. The excessive mortality in population or cattle or positive evidence of decreasing fertility can justify the demand for a head-hunting raid. To compensate for the loss of the force as a result of a raid, counter-raids must be launched to bring back home at least an equal number of heads. Since the loss of heads affects the entire community, it is not the business of the members of the family of the deceased alone to take revenge but of the entire community.

While in Tuensang town, a Phom chief told me that in the older days, centuries back, head-hunting was associated with ceremonial cannibalism. To increase one's own fertility, to

get a large number of healthy children, enemy's flesh and blood—supposed to have been transformed into energy—were tasted. As there has been no recorded case of cannibalism, we would be justified in taking this statement with a pinch of salt.

Considering the viewpoint of the Karens of Burma and other neighbouring tribes whose war drums roared more often than those of the Nagas, one is inclined to believe that some sort of cannibalism or human sacrifice could have existed amongst the Nagas as well. The Karens tended towards the more physical aspects of the belief and felt that the human head contained a volatile fluid which had a great fertilizing power when the fields are sprinkled with it. This fountain of life-force is supposed to make the soil rich and the increased yield makes the animals plump. Both the improved produce of the soil and the fat animals further increase the vitality of the man and in this way make him fertile.

Some other tribes of Africa, Indonesia, and South America have been still practising this crude art. In the remote corners of Waziristan, part of the North West Frontier Province of undivided India, it had been quite common to take off a limb—a nose, an ear, or the upper lip or head. Some tribes went to the extent of using the skulls as bowls for food. In another case it is believed that the human flesh was used as a fertilizer in the fields.

Be that as it might, a head-hunting campaign needed provocation to give the necessary spark for an immediate fire. Giving shelter to an absconder, trapping animals in areas not belonging to one's community, cutting grass or bamboos from territory not one's own, abducting a woman or giving shelter to an unfaithful wife from an alien community, making a promise and then withdrawing help at the hour of need were some of the causes of a head-hunting expedition. To avenge the killing of a relative could be another motivation. Also amongst certain tribes, a new drum could not be installed till it was blessed with the head of an enemy and sowing could not be started without enriching the soil with a head. On many occasions when heads could not be procured, replicas were employed just to keep the ceremony going. These days a *mithun's* tail is clipped as a substitute.

The preparations for the raid required of the Nagas to collect information regarding the enemy's defence, dispositions, obstacles, and so on. Intensive military training being the most important aspect of their routine, there was very little flapping about and things were taken very coolly and a lot of restraint and self-control was brought into play. The entire operation was put under the command of a warrior whose bravery and valour had already been put to test. Sometimes a number of villages pooled their manpower and forces against a common enemy and all these men acted under one leader who was responsible for the operation.

Before the onset of the raid, ceremonies were performed in which animals were sacrificed according to the local custom. Tests like killing a fowl or breaking of an egg or some such rituals were carried out to find out if the omens were good. If the results gave negative indications, the raid was put off for a better day. In this way with the blessings of the religious deity the Naga youth set off to tread on the treacherous war path.

The execution of the raid was the most exciting affair. Raiding parties had sometimes travelled a hundred miles to avenge the enemy. An attack at dawn is generally preferred though raids at other times were not uncommon. A village could be surrounded from all sides or attacked from two directions depending upon the ground conditions. When the aim was to avenge an enemy, their entire village could be set on fire. Many were caught unaware before the flames leaped out, those who tried to escape were put to death by spears or hacked by the *dao*. Arrows especially with poisoned points were very popular and a warrior who used such arrows was not expected to miss the target. Sometimes the granaries were spared. It is reported that the prisoners of war were seldom taken and it was a matter of great shame to anyone to fall alive into the hands of the enemy. The prisoners on some occasions were sold to the richer strata of the community and there had been cases when the slaves were murdered in cold blood to quench the thirst of the skull-hungry masters who while sitting in their huts wanted to swell their treasure of skulls with the aid of their wealth. The slaves could be sold and resold time and again. The slaves generally reconciled with their position and made no frantic

attempt to escape.

During the raid the naked Nagas with their wild cries in the vast dense jungle suddenly broke the silence of the mysteriously quiet hill tops and with the noise of their feet like scores of galloping horses on dry leaves showered spears, arrows and of late the musket shots on wildly running families in panic. The old and the infirm were swallowed by the fire before they could step out of the doors. The young warriors while resisting, either fell fighting or killed a few of the enemy. The picture was that of chaos—dogs barking, pigs and hens running into the jungle many headless men and women, lying scattered, burnt houses, and deserted villages.

With their booty—the heads with blood trickling down from the slashed portions—the attackers returned home triumphantly hoping to earn a name and win the affections of the most beautiful girls of the village. The women who among certain tribes were supposed to remain chaste till their men had returned from the head-hunting expedition, anxiously awaited their husbands and boldly admired their actions. It was a matter of pride for any young maid to be the wife of one who had gained maximum of human heads.

The heads of women and children were generally not taken. It would be worthwhile giving an explanation for this because this gesture was not a concession based on humanitarian grounds or acts of generosity. Rather, it was the other way round. The head of a woman, particularly that of a young girl, was a highly prized possession because by obtaining it the fertility of the enemy was straightway reduced as the community lost one prospective mother. At the same time some ornaments could as well be snapped away from the corpse. Some tribesmen felt that the hair of a woman brought additional fertility to the slayer's family and the Angamis could use the long hair for decoration purposes. It was not an easy task to get the head of a young maiden. The old men were generally given the tasks on the outskirts of the village. Then came the young men. The next block towards the village was reserved for the old women. Right in the centre, protected from all sides, came the children and the young girls. Therefore, getting the head of a young girl was an act of great bravery as one had to fight through

many waves of defences and other specially arranged guards and posts before one could reach the stronghold of young maidens. Hunting of the heads of children who had cut their teeth was equally significant. To hunt the infirm or the mentally deficient was forbidden.

Various other traditions and ceremonies were associated with head-hunting. Though these days among the Konyaks tattooing is seldom practised and many youngsters can be seen without any tattoo marks at all, during the head-hunting days only the one who had actually killed the enemy had the right to get his neck tattooed. The skulls could be hung or buried depending upon the local customs. Along with these skulls could be displayed the skulls of other animals. In one of the Konyak villages I saw a bamboo wall completely filled with *mithun* horns and skulls of various other animals. Just near the entrance lay an elephant skull and other bones, very prominently displayed. The villagers had killed that elephant, I was told, some years back.

There is always a fear lurking in the minds of the villagers: they are scared of the ghosts of the persons slain. Therefore among certain tribes, to restrict the activities of the ghosts, legs and hands of the enemy killed were chopped off to immobilize their ghosts. Spikes were pierced through the eyesockets to blind the ghosts. Among certain communities eggs and rice-beer were showered on the skulls. This was done perhaps to induce the ghosts to call their other relations, so that more could as well be slain.

Another belief prevalent is that the person slain would go to serve the slayer in the world of the dead, after the latter's death. Therefore everyone endeavoured to kill an enemy and thus secure his future with comfort and splendour by having a slave ghost at his beck and call.

None the less, the Nagas have their own code of behaviour and ethics. Amongst their own clan head-hunting was never practised. Also, the village as a whole tried to remain free from such conflict. No doubt deadly frays take place within the village and in that process sometimes a few lose their lives, but then this is quite normal. Fights do take place, but amongst themselves these brawls never change into head-hunting crusades. They always

consider loyalty to village as the most essential qualification for any citizen and a Naga always tries to check or limit hostilities in his own *khel* or village.

From what has been said it would appear that the main concern of the Nagas was to slay and avoid getting slain. Well, it is not very wrong. The entire life of an individual, his family and his village revolved around this. It is not just a matter of pleasing themselves with physical achievements, it combines the spiritual satisfaction with the abstract supposition of fertility and of a happy future in the world of the dead. This practice, though harmful for the peace of the land and though barbaric, fulfils the basic human aspiration of standing superior to others. In an underdeveloped land there are very few other means of attaining the status of an overlord. Every community or nation tries to fulfil this inherent desire of moving a step further than the surrounding neighbours, militarily, politically, economically, culturally and even in the field of religion. But in the case of the Nagas these forces are very weak or not properly developed and a substitute had to be found. Also due to gaps in the above aspects of life, energies of the people had to be directed to some other sphere. The shape of this new sphere of activity depends on the background of the community, their heritage and local conditions of climate and geography plus the nature and the stage of development of the surrounding communities.

It appears that head-hunting and other activities connected with it had been quite widespread in many corners of the world. It cannot be established beyond doubt that such institutions developed independently of each other since among certain communities, there are striking similarities in their philosophy for such practices, customs, dress and social institutions.

It will surprise many of us to learn the importance that this institution of head-hunting occupies in the fabric of Naga life. As already stated, military adventure was the focal point around which the Naga life revolved in the past. The villagers kept themselves in a state of perpetual preparedness for any military engagement. Also their social institutions, community life and other religious ceremonies did not remain uninfluenced by the honour and the privileged position which a head-hunter earned.

It will not be wrong to say that head-hunting was a great source of inspiration to the Naga artists and craftsmen. The head manifested that essential aspect of life without which their pride of achievement could not be fully satisfied. A successful head-hunter walked in the midst of the admiring eyes; he stood the best prospects of matrimony. Among certain communities he was the only one who could perform or take part in certain ceremonies and arts; he wore a distinctive dress and only he deserved a decent burial after his death. Human head, painted, drawn, or carved, was the only item that could be seen any where and everywhere in Nagaland. Amongst the Konyaks I saw beautiful carved human figures on a spindle tied at the back of the head. I also saw very artistically carved figures of human heads round many Konyak necks, hanging from bags and baskets and spiked against the walls. Two beer mugs which were presented to me in the Tuensang town and which still decorate my room had similar forms on them etched in black.

The very art which was a source of inspiration for many has now gradually come to a dead end. The end of head-hunting has brought many blessings to the people, the greatest one being peace, but at the same time the arts connected with this practice have started withering away.

Chapter 16

WARRIORS ON WARPATH

LET US go backwards by about ninety years and peep discreetly through the curtain of impregnable bamboo into the villages on the hill tops in Nagaland. The day was 13th October, 1879. Mr. Damant the then Deputy Commissioner of Naga Hills District with an escort party of eighty-seven men was just on the outskirts of village Khonoma when he was fired upon and betaken by mortality. Only fifty men lived to bring the ghastly news to Kohima—the head quarters of the district.

The inadequately defended post at Kohima consisted of two incomplete stockades which were formed by weak and dilapidated palisading without any earthwork. Almost on all sides there was a lush vegetation and undulating ground to provide sufficient camouflage and unrestricted covered approach for the attacker. Another inherent drawback of the post was the innumerable thatched buildings which could not have escaped the burning missiles of the attackers. In addition to the post being badly situated, poorly fortified and meagrely stocked as the report states, a number of children, women, and non-combatants further reduced the efficiency of an advanced military post by their hibernation.

The garrison being only 158 strong, it was decided by Captain Reid to defend only the eastern stockade and therefore after shifting all stores and ammunition to this stockade, the western stockade was almost destroyed. Within the short time available all possible improvements were carried out.

It was on 16th October that the first advancing parties of Naga warriors were seen. The long aqueduct had been cut off, and water could only be collected from the springs under cover of fire. Though the soldiers had rations for a month, the civilian complement possessed only a few maunds of rice.

On 19th October, under the able guidance of Mr. Hinde a

65-man strong reinforcement arrived at Kohima after forced marching through the hostile country for about three days.

Anyway, the meagrely reinforced post living on quarter rations and dirty water made itself ready to put up resistance against an estimated 6,000 besieging Nagas, out of whom at least 500 had firearms. Along with well directed fire came a series of burning rags with missiles and constant vigil had to be kept to protect the thatch roofs from catching fire. The Angamis applied the tactics of rolling logs and boulders and moving under their cover and firing whenever a head popped up from within the stockade.

In spite of constant firing and in spite of the warriors advancing the garrison kept on repairing the earthworks and throwing barricades wherever needed till the morning of 24th October when the Nagas were as near the stockade as 40 yards and the effective working strength of the garrison had been reduced to only about 50 men.

Soon the news regarding the arrival of reinforcement started spreading and on 26th October after covering about 100 miles of inhospitable country in only eight days a contingent of 2,000 soldiers from Manipur arrived, scaring the bewildered warriors to run away into their villages. This was the end of the siege but the offenders had yet to be dealt with.

Brigadier-General Nation was to command the expedition which in addition to the 2,000 rifles under Lt.-Col. Johnstone was supplemented by 1,135 all ranks and 200 military police.

A detachment sent to Sachima found the village deserted but no sooner the entry was made than the Nagas swarmed from all around and it was only the reinforcement's arrival that extracted the detachment from the impending onslaught.

Sephima—another village—was captured in the meantime. The main body then started preparation for the attack on Khonoma which was the stronghold of the Angamis. This village located on the crest of a spur jutted out from the general ground level. The steep slope and the thick vegetation deprived any attacker of the flank approach.

It is interesting to consider this case. The defence consisted of a series of terrace fields which gradually diminishing in extent went up to the top. The stockades around these fields were

bullet-proof and loopholed and the parapits below them had been strengthened with boulders, with the result that each terrace by itself was a defensive position and its occupation after severe fighting resulted in the control of a limited area only. Around the stockade, jungles had been cleared and the area infested with *punjis* and entanglements. The fighting shifted from the lower fields to the correspondingly higher ones with the attackers at the same time getting some advantage from the parapits around the scarps.

The Nagas in this particular case had destroyed about three-fourth of the houses to secure advantageous entrenchments. Nevertheless the brave Gurkhas succeeded after about twenty-four hours of nerve-racking engagements in making the Naga defenders retreat towards Japvo mountain after having lost about hundred bodies in the day-long combat.

This is a brief narration of only a part of the expedition. Such resistance and punitive expeditions were routine happenings in this corner of India a little later than a century ago. But the resistance put up against the British was not the only feature which contributed to the bloodshed in this region. The way the resistance was put up is in itself a measure of the military preparedness of the local Nagas. The factors that guided the selection of a village site, their machinery of war with their flawless organization, weapons of war in defence and attack and the cunning tactics as well as complete knowledge of the local terrain and climate revealed further the rich treasure of military knowledge that the Nagas possessed. The location of villages on the hill tops gave the Nagas added advantage over their adversaries.

The losers in the plains often took shelter in the hills either to get away from the din of battle or to have a breathing space to reorganize for a counter-attack. But the counter-attack not being feasible or successful, it appears, they reconciled to stay to make the hills as their homes.

The weather in the lower tracts being always conducive to the generation of mosquitoes, leeches and many other insects, the tribesmen perhaps felt the tops of hills to be more hospitable. Probably the regular floods might have compelled them to stay at higher elevations.

It could also be that due to constant hunting through ages, gradual annihilation of wild animals took place in the plains and the higher tracts with unchecked animal growth became attractive for a people who loved sports, hunting and taking part in other adventurous activities. Also due to the heavy rainfall in the hilly regions a thick growth of jungle wood for warming and cooking purposes and for housebuilding activities could be procured easily from the hills.

There being very few navigation aids and the means of communication being poor, it is quite a job for any belligerent community to track its way to the enemy positions. At the same time the one assaulting the hills is at an inherent disadvantage in climbing the hills and then getting exhausted before the final assault, while the defender is fresh to face the staggering enemy.

In addition to the above advantages, the hill top villages give the defenders a good view of the entire area around. Thus observation posts can be set up and early information and fire can be brought to play effectively. In certain cases this natural defence was supplemented by a stockade all around which could be of tree stumps, boulders and mud. There can be series of such parapits.

Punjis is another item used to impede the progress of the enemy. It consists of a number of small bamboo spikes sticking out of the ground's surface by about half foot to three feet. With great ease these can be embedded into the ground. This anti-personnel obstacle has a sharpened end and on many occasions the tip is hardened and poisoned. These spikes are laid all around the post or at the likely enemy approaches depending upon the local tactical situation. As the tips are both hard and sharp, the spikes are camouflaged in grass or the green shrubs which generally grow all around the Naga hutments.

This is not enough because survival of the fittest is the principle around which life revolves and any village or community that does not accept this conception reduces her span of existence. There is nothing odd about it; probably this was the thought current and nothing beyond these limits could be felt or touched. Even in our own history it was very late that the earliest prophet of peace like Gautama Buddha opened the

curtain to 'life without pain'—a way of life which was to respect each living being.

But the Nagas were quite different both in time and in respect of ideas. Protection of the body and of the village was their main concern. Many tribes in NEFA and Nagaland built chutes, with the help of which huge boulders could be hurled upon the approaching enemy or by pulling one string a number of poisoned arrows could be forcefully let out. Certain communities dug deep long ditches which could be covered with false platform to deceive the enemy. Inside the ditches or other natural depressions could be found a bed of *punjis*.

At certain places the huts had no vertical walls because of the fear that a spear could easily penetrate from outside. Instead sloping roof came down almost up to the ground level in a concave shape as this gave a little additional narrow space inside, which could be left unused for safety.

Taller than their own bodies is the spear which was often used by the Nagas in combat. It can be used either for throwing or for thrusting. Made of wood, the spear has an iron point at the end of a sharp little blade. Varying in design, the spear can be painted at either end. Some of the spears that I noticed in Tuensang District were the most colourful instruments of war. Leaving the points and a six-inch portion for holding the spear, the entire length of the spears was muffled up in some animal's hair in bands of different colours. With the hair many spears of different patterns are made. It is an exquisite piece of art; the colour combination always conveys a very high degree of aesthetic sense. Thus even through the instruments of war the Nagas give expression to their artistic urges.

There were some chiefs who would not move out without carrying with them a spear of the above description. It added to their social status and was considered to be an essential part of the dress which otherwise was almost non-existent.

The other weapon for use at long distance is the bow and arrow. Made out of bamboo, it has many varieties, but generally the components are the same. A hardened bamboo and string are used for the bow. The arrows are very effective with pointed or iron heads. Occasionally, the arrows are

accurately balanced by fixing a few leaves or feathers in the slits at the rear ends.

These arrows are made still more dangerous by applying some local poison at the point heads. This poison is so lethal as to kill a person within forty-five minutes after the arrow punctured his body. In some cases it took many hours for the case to prove fatal. At the same time life could be saved if the arrow is pulled out quickly and the ruptured portion of the body thoroughly cleaned with water.

Nagas very often used these poisoned arrows against their enemy. Killing animals with this weapon was quite normal. In addition to the .303" and .22" rifles and double barrel guns which are very much valued and held in great esteem, the locally manufactured muzzle loaders are quite popular in certain areas. In Tuensang District I witnessed a Konyak killing an eagle with this weapon. But these are the weapons possessed by only a few of the warriors. Swords are also used but not very commonly. A replacement for sword was found in the *dao*. Amongst the Aos and all other tribes the *dao* of various shapes and sizes is found. The length can be anything from one and a half to three feet and the width of the blade can be even more than six inches. Generally the *dao* has a wider edge towards the head. The other end narrows down fitting into a bamboo or some other wooden handle which can have a cane woven casing. At the end of the handle can be tied goat's or some other animal's hair dyed in bright colour.

Without a *dao* not only warfare but also the maintenance of the household and essential services would have been a cumbersome business. It is said that a Naga starts getting familiar with a *dao* from his childhood. He starts using it for cutting small trees, bamboo stumps, cane sticks or for peeling off the green bark of the logs. By the time he grows up to manhood, he becomes proficient enough to chop off the head of a *mithun* with one stroke of a *dao*. The same weapon with great fondness was used for slaying the enemy on a head-hunting mission.

Some tribes like the Aos sling *dao* at the back through a wooden neck but many use a casing of leather which can be slung across the shoulder. In addition to the above some of the

Nagas have small knives fitted to wooden handles with many carvings all over the body. Probably this is a recent acquirement.

The defensive weapons of the Nagas are, in the main, the shield and helmet. The shields are generally made of bamboo or cane with a horizontal handle in the centre of the inner side for holding purposes. These can be straight, concave or bent along the centre axis like a sloping roof. A few of the shields are covered with hide for greater protection. The helmets are generally made out of cane peelings and sometimes reinforced with bamboo or cane strips. Coloured tufts of hair of various animals, tusks of boar, beaks of birds, horns and feathers of birds add to the awe-inspiring appearance of these conical head dresses.

Even with these primitive and outdated weapons in his armoury, the Naga warrior proved himself an outstanding soldier to whom tactics were dictated by his instinct and the inherited knowledge of the terrain. The Naga warriors are tough and hard and can march any distance in these rugged hills. Their implicit discipline coupled with obedience and intelligence brought them to the forefront of soldiery. They are quick in appreciation and have full understanding of the country. They fight hard not to surrender and are stubborn and determined not to disclose anything when interrogated by the captors.

Nagas are not nomadic warriors who fight with bows and arrows. Nor do they consist of a group of savage people who act independently and attack and loot at their own will. They have a brilliant machinery of war which can be effectively put into operation within no time. Of course, they have their own limitations.

The Nagas utilize their knowledge of the terrain and the geography of the land to the fullest extent. The things that would prove obstacles for any outsider are fully taken advantage of. The country with steep hills, rivers, valleys and dense jungle growth greatly reduces the mobility and makes the communications, particularly during the widespread and prolonged monsoon, a dreadful affair. During their inter-tribal raids they moved on foot in small strength, and if the distances were long, with very little loads. They fully know the topography of

the region and have an inborn sense of direction. At the same time the thick growth and the extremely undulating ground give them a great advantage of natural camouflage, concealed movement and covered approach and exit. They did not believe in the lengthy and cumbersome process of supplies. They know from where to ford a particular river and from which place to procure their food.

Their method of conducting raids or attacks on enemy hamlets is always in conformity with the prevailing local conditions. It is a sort of a guerrilla warfare in which the warriors manoeuvre like a cat, enter the forbidden territory like a poacher, come out from behind the bush like a panther, pounce on the enemy with the paws of a tiger and after hurriedly going through the raid melt into the thin air. They conducted their operation with such swiftness and accuracy that there is no time left for the defender to recover or reorganize. The defenders would not know the direction in which the warriors withdrew. Even if they knew, they found obstacles in the way and thus to keep contact with them would be a wild goose chase.

While moving about, they organized themselves in a very systematic way and never would the warriors be seen beating about in a disorderly or indisciplined manner. In front they would have scouts who would pass the information obtained. Then came the solid mass of fighting warriors in their war-paint, literally; followed by the helpers who carried the essential equipment, ammunition, stores and rations.

The warriors generally refrained from fighting a pitched battle and normally acted in small numbers because of the limits imposed by their administration and organization, difficult terrain, long distances and lack of modern facilities. Their poor financial condition and meagre firearms further limited their activities.

It will not be wrong to say that every village at one time had its own military organization with old weapons and equipment. During the Second World War some of the Nagas round about the region of Kohima saw some large scale fighting and many of them took active part in the various defence organizations. They acted as guides for the Allies and some took part in

the actual fighting. They were startled by the large scale use of air power, artillery equipment and engineering effort. The way the Japanese fought left a deep impression on their minds. They learnt a good deal of the modern methods of warfare and thus supplemented their already existing brilliant military organization.

No doubt the young Nagas are brought up in an atmosphere of Spartan discipline. But they are not trained for any major war or long drawn battle. The training is restricted to those indispensable essentials which a warrior fighting on that terrain must possess. First and foremost thing is to make a Naga shed the fear of the uncertainty of topography, natural calamities, mishaps and darkness. The unknown element of nature is not, however, considered free of the supernatural and is given due reverence in all shapes and forms.

After this the young Nagas are set on the hard task of toughening up. They are given individual and group tasks involving great endurance and leadership. Along with this continued the training in the art of warfare which is passed on from one generation to the next. Village defence, the use of weapons, ambush and raids were the sheet anchors on which the Nagas survived, of course, not without the backing of rigid discipline, spontaneous obedience, limitless endurance and faith in the goodness of the cause of head-hunting which was supposed to have religious and moral sanctions.

Mobility is their greatest asset. Through their hard enduring life the Nagas learn to befriend the multifarious and ugly postures of nature and treat these as a part of life. For a Naga to move on a narrow track up a steep hill leading to a precipice with hardly any flat portion and then coming down into a deep gorge infested with mosquitoes, leeches, snakes and other poisonous insects is as simple and casual as for us to have a round of the gaily decorated corridors of Connaught Place in New Delhi. Their requirements of clothing, food and equipment being very meagre, their weapons of war being very light, and there being no transport facilities, there are rarely any hitches or bottlenecks which in any appreciable way could affect their movement. In general the Nagas are tough and hardy and have no sophisticated demand when on march or at war. As there were hardly any long wars, the problem of the

supplies of rations and other essential equipment rarely assumed any significance.

Naga warriors have been quite notorious for suddenly appearing at a place or suddenly attacking at a time when they were least expected. Surprise and deception have been a part of their tactics. To deceive their enemy the Naga warrior suddenly pounced from behind a tree, from a bend or from some other nook in order to overpower the enemy. Deception and surprise have won them many heads. In the small hours of a cold morning suddenly breaking the mysterious silence of the lands the warlords would emerge to leap on the enemy with the craftiness and strength of a man-eater. Their presence could only be known to the villagers after a few of them had been hacked and half of the village huts gutted with fire.

It must be stated, as should be evident from the above narration, that with all the poor resources, the Naga warlord exhibited a tremendous amount of command and leadership in launching sometimes thousands of warriors into a battle. To control the various bodies of men, the Nagas very frequently employed their indigenous means of communications. The services of a runner are employed most extensively. Having been brought up by the stern hands of nature, any Naga of sound health can be sent for delivering a message. A Naga warrior can easily cover a distance of thirty miles, deliver a message and be back the same day.

The location of the Naga villages is also an advantage to a warrior. From the top of the hills the process of heliography is brought into play and brief pieces of information are passed. Sometimes lights are also displayed and information passed on the basis of some prearranged signals. Raising of smokes can also convey some information to one of the allied villages regarding the approaching enemy. Beating of drums which can be heard from a great distance is also often meaningful.

Over and above these means, at close range the Nagas would make use of the bird calls. Those who have heard them will agree that the exact imitation by the Nagas of the calls of the birds can put even the birds to shame. It is only another Naga who can decode such a natural note. At the same time they have to some extent developed other means of communi-

cation; they would engrave certain markings on the trunk of a tree; make a combination of a few branches of trees and leaves, scratch the ground in a particular manner, fix a few twigs in the fence, or employ other like means. Thus with all these invaluable and effective aids which cost nothing, the Nagas maintained a reasonable hold over areas which lay under their tribal jurisdiction.

All these minor tactics further assisted the Nagas in conducting their masterpiece ambushes. In case of protracted warfare an ambush was a very effective instrument. Before laying an ambush, the Nagas always ensured the tactical soundness of the plan. The areas selected generally reflect the wisdom of the planners. They sometimes rehearsed their ambush plans and very much cared for the escape routes and quick execution of the job. The ambush party was a very well-organized body. It normally consisted of about four to six batches, depending upon the nature of the ground and the enemy strength. The weapons generally used in such operations are small arms, *daos*, bows and arrows.

An attack is an occasional burst of anger or a means of avenging an enemy who might be in the next village or a hundred miles away as the crow flies. However, a Naga attack is always co-ordinated and properly planned. Generally speaking the Nagas believe in all round attacks—attacking from all four sides. Sometimes attacks were silent but on other occasions these were noisy. They would normally cut off the water supply and almost throw a siege round the defenders. At places they would make noisy attack from one side just to deceive the defender as the real onslaught came from the three other directions.

While in defence the Nagas never thought it wise to behave like a fanatic and fight till the last. When attacked they always tried to throw the enemy back by determined resistance but if they discovered that the enemy was too powerful and the final defeat was inevitable, they started thinning out, leaving a few men to hold the enemy at bay, inflict maximum possible casualties, deploy the enemy and thus delay them till the main body escaped to safety. These few men firing from different places gave the attacker wrong ideas about the defenders' strength. Overestimation of the defenders' strength could result in loss of

time due to the deployment while underestimation could prove very expensive in terms of casualties. Thus these few men proved very effective in pinning down the attacker. Exits were generally prepared and before the attacker captured the objective, there would be hardly any defender left. Thus, without actually defending a position they gave the impression of defence and by deploying the attacker, they found time to relieve themselves from the impending onslaught.

Chapter 16

IDEAS AND BELIEFS

THE ONCE unshakable faith of the Nagas in their customary way of life and approach to religion—the horizon that recedes as we approach it—seemed to be fast giving place to new ideas.

The tribesmen did not seem to have developed any mysterious relationship with any plant, animal or any other natural object. In other words their religion was non-totemistic, unlike some of the Red Indian tribes which during the course of their long history acquired extremely intimate spiritual and mystic attachment with some plants or animals. Nagas have no idols and do not believe in image worship. The Aos attach some importance to certain stones but they do it without the idea of worshipping them. The stones are supposed to be the abodes of certain spirits and it is to appease the spirits and to offer sacrifices to the spirits to be kind to them that the stones are worshipped. The Naga religion and way of life is linked more with heavenly bodies like the Sun and the Moon rather than the gods and goddesses that are merely figments of the imagination. The earth and the sky have greater significance for them.

Fear of supernatural powers keeps the Aos duty-bound to their village and neighbours. The deities, it was felt, keep an eye on them and, therefore, come to know the moment a man commits a crime: kills a person, steals or deprives some one of the rightful property. Therefore the Aos are afraid of doing something which is contrary to the customary belief or local practice. There are deities which control the earth, heaven and the land of the dead souls. The supernatural force managing the earth is held in greatest respect. And since this god can send any epidemic, storm, lightning, wind, etc., the whole village worships the deity periodically. Offerings in the form of cattle, pigs, fowls, eggs, and beer are offered during the worship.

The religion of the tribesmen is neither a deep rooted philosophy nor does it demand any spiritual or mystic participation by the followers. Human needs, biological functions, the fear of the unknown and darkness and many other feelings of want and desires to a very great extent determine their religion which is not independent of magic, sorcery and ghosts. The Nagas do not think of religion, magic, sorcery and ghosts separately, one independent of the other. For the Aos the sun is the deity which can straightway affect the health of their cattle and crops. Therefore the Aos go all out to appease this force of nature by various ritualistic ceremonies involving great offerings of *mithuns*, pigs, fowls, and eggs. They often hold prayers requesting the sun to be kind to them. Many other tribes hold the sun in high esteem. The Angamis believe the moon and the sun to be husband and wife. Their interpretation is very simple. The moon, they feel, is like a man who is not scared of moving about in the darkness while the sun remains hidden at night.

Generally all tribes give a special status to the sun and the moon and it is only the interpretation that varies. Science being remote from the tribal life, the forces of nature are the only benefactors. The sun, moon, earth, wind and water control their life. Secondly, lots of stories regarding the origin, break up and association of the tribes with other heavenly bodies came into being just in the form of explanation for the existence and effects of these heavenly bodies. Actually these explanations greatly vary from place to place and sometimes even from village to village.

There are various epics pertaining to their religion. If one can win the confidence of the tribesmen, very interesting information can be gathered from the village elders. They can tell you when and how their tribe or clan came into being. They would also tell you as to why a particular area was occupied by a tribe and how a village came up at its original place.

Man was too lonely and meek to start on his own against the mighty and ruthless forces of nature. Earthquakes, storms, torrential rains, floods, fire, epidemic and landslides are a few things that can sweep in their wake hundreds of human beings in no time. The Nagas have no means to protect them-

selves against these natural calamities. They can only reconcile with these inhospitable conditions by appeasing them. Explanations are found for phenomena like lightning, snake bite, fall from tree, etc. The unknown comes to be known though only irrationally and the credulous Naga starts attributing reasons to such mad acts of nature which for all practical purposes are beyond the realm of human reasoning.

Nagas believe in spirits who are supposed to be extremely hostile to the human beings. Spirits can reside anywhere and in any shape and whenever an opportunity arises they pounce upon the human beings to destroy them. They can take the shape of a tiger or snake and kill the tribesmen, they can come down in the form of lightning or as floods, they can spread fire or epidemic, they can send curses, thus affecting the fertility of both women and land. Thus the people have to appease them. As mortal beings the Nagas are too weak to fight them alone. Before sowing seeds one has to sacrifice a pig or a fowl to please the supernatural spirits with a view to getting a good fortune in crops. Various other animals are sacrificed, the type, age, colour of the animal selected depend on the nature of sacrifice and the customs followed in that particular tribe. All the spirits are not hostile. Some are beneficent.

Besides these spirits which are more or less heavenly in their origin there is another category, namely the spirits or ghosts of those human beings who die an unnatural death or those who after death are not treated as per the rites of that tribe. It is believed that by not performing the traditional ceremonies on the dead body of a person, the spirit that left it for its new home does not rest in peace and it remains disturbed and annoyed with the relatives for their indifference and negligence. This spirit can literally play up hell with the members of the family. Such spirits roam about to take revenge from the wrong doers by cursing their crops, bringing sickness, setting fire and even resorting to killing. To avoid unnatural death, fire, accidents, epidemics among the crops and cattle, the spirits have to be appeased. An unnatural death is a curse to the family whereas natural death is accepted without any reservations or ill feelings. When a man's days are completed, he has to leave for the world of the dead. The dead body must be paid reverence

and given all assistance so that the dead may enjoy the same status in the land of the dead which he enjoyed before death.

Amongst the Aos, in case of an unnatural death, the observance of the customs can throw the family of the dead in real frenzy. Since the death has been caused by the curse and by an act of a hostile spirit, the family is made to leave the home and asked to stay in the jungle for a certain period. To further the act of purification, the house can be destroyed and all other property left aside. The granary is also destroyed and the relatives of the bereaved family are expected to go to the jungle and give food but without talking to the outcasts. And when the due period of penance is over, the family comes back to the village and starts staying in a new house. This procedure, till lately, is being strictly followed for any death caused by lightning, snakebite, attack by an animal, drowning, burning, landslide, fall from a tree or a cliff and child birth. But through the passage of time this concept has lost significance to a very great extent.

The tribes all over the Nagaland hold varying and confusing views regarding life after death. The belief that the human body houses the spirit and after death the spirit migrates to the land of the dead, is prevalent in the greater part of the area. The soul travels through certain routes which varies from tribe to tribe.

I had great difficulty with some Konyaks in taking their photographs. They generally felt shy and hesitant and some of them even ran away before I could click the camera. Later on I learnt about the general belief that the shadow or sketch when in possession of another person could deprive the individual of a part of the life-force. If some one made an attack on the shadow of an individual it was a hostile act as the former could be deprived of his fertility and strength. The term *naksha*, meaning pictures in Hindustani, seemed to be quite well known to some of the Konyak elders. Later on when I got familiar with them they posed very freely for the photographs. This conception of the sketch representing the soul was petering out.

Many tribes like Aos and particularly the Konyaks disposed of the dead bodies by exposing them, a custom which is still prevalent among the Konyaks and Phoms. The rich families

even light fires under dead bodies which are laid on a raised platform to smoke the body. Other common people can just erect a platform and keep the body on it covered by a mat. Along with the corpse can be kept such items of utility like dead person's personal kit, *dao*, ornaments and bead necklaces. Some animals depending on the status of the heirs are also sacrificed. A cock and a dog can also be ritualized by their killing. The dead man's belongings are kept there for the simple reason that the members of the family desire that in the world of the dead the spirit should continue to live an equally good and comfortable life. Even food laid near the corpse is supposed to feed the spirit. The *dao* is kept to protect the dead body, the ornaments are kept for decoration, while the cock symbolizes food and the dog precaution against any danger. Many other tribes like the Semas and Angamis bury their dead with similar ceremonies and thoughts motivating such rituals.

Geena is often observed after every religious ceremony. It imposes upon an individual a number of restrictions. Thus a person observing *geena* is not supposed to stir out of the house or village for a number of days. He is not supposed to talk to strangers. After religious ceremonies, the person is likely to be attacked by evil spirits and so he must keep chaste and to do this he has to refrain from eating meat and abstain from sexual intercourse with his wife. *Geena* is also observed in case some unusual incident like fire, or earthquake took place or when someone dies under unnatural circumstances. As a result of this the entire village would not go out or work for a number of days.

In case a person falls sick, many taboos are observed. Sickness is the doing of a spirit and the only way to relieve a person of suffering is to appease the spirit concerned by making appropriate sacrifices. It is believed by the Nagas that there are certain people amongst them who are capable of contacting the spirits. Such diviners, right from their childhood, exhibit such aptitude and interests. These children are given a special status and are kept as understudies to the old masters of this art. Gradually they get trained and when they grow up, they are capable of falling in a trance. Many other items that can be construed as instruments of magic are used to contact the spirits.

This ceremony which is probably one of the most ritualistic

affairs of Naga life gets into full swing when incantations are chanted. A lot of other sentences of magical significance are also uttered. The tribesmen feel that there exist certain spirits which are sympathetic to these religio-magical authorities. And on being invoked by them, these spirits pass into their bodies and there they stay temporarily till the trance last.

Such men when possessed by their pet spirit no more behave like men, but like the spirit itself. When in trance, they lose their own personality and act under the command of the spirit. This spirit is supposed to contact those spirits which are causing distress or sickness. A bargain is struck and the sufferer has to perform sacrifices as per agreement.

When the outside spirit has left the body and the performer has come back to his senses, information regarding the contact with the pet spirit and the conditions of agreement with the oppressing spirit are passed on to the oppressed. The victim after performing the suggested ceremonies is expected to heal or get rid of the curses. The institution of medicine man is another means by which the Nagas could be healed of the sickness by religio-medical treatment.

Soothsayers are the men who have within them some divine powers to retrieve a man from the claws of an annoyed spirit. All these functions involving psychological conditions of a man are special jobs and thus they can be performed only by a few. Tribesmen have immense faith in these men and always request for their services when in difficulty. These men with super-human qualities are thus the philosophers and the doctors. They are the mediators between spirits and ghosts and the powerless human beings. And they control the supernatural by appeasement and appeal.

All those phenomena that occur either due to nature's creations or due to man's own efforts are attributed to the powers of the supernatural as no explanations based on scientific principles are sought. The brave and hardy Naga is a firm believer in superstitions. A dream can be a serious affair. There are some that are taken to be the forerunners of good luck. Many dreams convey that some bad luck is about to befall. There are certain dreams that are still more serious and one that conveys an impending enemy attack has to be announced

to the entire village. A dream would thus bring the whole village on guard and the villagers would start hectic preparations. It is not surprising that in some of the cases, the tribal dreams had proved true but there is no doubt that a majority of them proved otherwise. Probably the effects of the dreams are more psychological than magical. It is said that when the body is asleep the spirit leaves the body and establishes contact with other spirits. Thus they know of the events to come in advance.

The village priest presides over all the village functions and conducts all the ceremonies. He gets quite a bit of the share of the sacrificial animals. The villagers work for him in his fields voluntarily and show him great respect.

In this way the village priest and the soothsayer, along with several other functionaries, guide the tribesmen along the established code of conduct. By appealing to and appeasing the supernatural, by interpreting the dreams, and by helping the people to sustain their faith in religio-magical thought-system, they regulate the life of the great Naga community.

Chapter 17

FROM DARKNESS TO LIGHT

THE SUN crawled up from behind the hill on a cold morning and its golden light pierced through the damp breeze. The green landscape appeared to be gathering life. The mist started rising from the deep valleys. It grew like a mushroom, ever expanding upwards and the changing white appearance got thinner and thinner till you could see the hill ranges in the background. Often the white screen split up showing gaps of blue sky and the grey hills meeting mystically at the horizon. The land all around was picturesque, overflowing with mirth and luxuriant beauty. The river flew at the foot of steep hill, effortlessly and calmly. The water was so clean that you could even count the fish.

The river flowed noiselessly. Weeds struck out of the water at many places. A little bird swooped down and landed on a prop holding a twig in its delicate beak, without dropping the twig, fluttered its blue tail with yellow stripes, and again flew off across the water, perhaps in search of its mate.

Butterflies, oh ! they are found in all the colours of the rainbow. They varied in size from a moth to a sparrow. It looked like a whirlwind of tiny coloured birds. The dark clouds which seemed far away came right in front of you. The sun could be seen no more; it was shrouded in the clouds. You stood with fog all around. For a moment you thought you were in a fairyland.

But then you suddenly saw the dilapidated village in front of you, a village which looked like a skin peeled off. There was not a house which stood the way it was built. Most of them had been burnt and only a few half smouldered logs were left to tell you the story of misery and bloodshed, poverty and ruin, wreck and destruction, disease and death.

The *morung* had been razed to the ground. On the ridge only a pole stood with its top half burnt. The bamboos and mats that had once formed the walls of the houses lay in mud and

dust half eaten by the pests.

The village which once used to hum with the community life is no more and the area round the *morung* where the warriors would dance for hours is deserted. The housetops that once gave the idea of habitation lies flat on the ground. The young men who were prepared to fight against the enemy at any time at the slightest provocation are to be seen nowhere.

The rice pounder was half buried in the open ground. A few old women in tatters sat outside in the sun with about a dozen and a half children playing in the vicinity.

Outside a semi-collapsed hut, a middle aged woman with her hair opened like a coconut fibre brush lay on a cotton shawl spread on the cold earth. The shawl which was small in size even for a child to lie down accommodated the mother, her three children and a full-grown pig. This was all the earthly possession that the woman had.

A few of the young men joined the hostile Nagas and many out of their fear ran into the jungle. The rebels brought destruction for their own people in many ways. The undesirable activities of the rebels blocked the way to progress. A great mass of men and material had to be inducted into the hills to retrieve the Nagas from the apathy caused by the rebel destruction. Only after the normalization of conditions, could the Nagas be in a frame of mind to review their social, economic and political structure rationally. At the same time they have to be encouraged to continue their own invaluable arts and practices. Drastic changes could not be effected overnight. It requires a steady and sustained effort for an all round development.

But for all this we require roads, the basic requirement for any reorganization and development. Even a cartload would take months to reach its destination and that too in a piecemeal fashion. We require huge wagons that can carry food, consumer goods, equipment, machinery and materials.

Absence of means of communication and lack of transportation facilities is the biggest difficulty. No roads worth the name exist and when the Army came in only footpaths and a few washed out jeep tracks built by the Allies during the Second World War round about Kohima, were to be found. There were many rivers skirting round the hills, and small *nullahs* were

numerous. On account of the rains, the water carrying agencies would swell up and wash away the existing temporary bridges and culverts. During the monsoon of 1957 some of our men were engaged in constructing a small temporary timber bridge. This involved the construction of three small spans for which two robust piers were required. After about a few days of hard work, the men prepared the bankseats and by about a week's time the piers were also ready. Next day work was to start on the superstructure and then the bridge could be used. But when the men went to the bridge site in the small hours of the morning the next day to resume the work, they found to their surprise and dismay no trace of the two piers or the bankseats. The water had risen so high magically that it had become difficult to establish the location of the bridgesite. It had rained heavily during the night and the water level by morning had gone up by about eleven feet washing away whatever existed of the bridge. One could not believe that this thing could have ever happened. Soon after the water subsided, the men again started constructing the bridge right from the scratch but at a much higher level. On certain occasions, a patch of road would just disappear after a heavy rainfall and subsequent landslides and new alignments had to be made. A foreign highway engineer who came to India during the Second World War on being questioned on his return to his country very candidly replied that road building in the Himalayas had started about sixty million years too early. The Himalayas are probably one of the youngest mountain systems and the settlement and consolidation to a reasonable degree has yet not taken place. But in spite of the above, a network of roads was taking shape. During the monsoons the roads became slushy and the vehicles go wheel deep into the mud. The already existing tracks which run round the hills are very narrow and had sharp turnings. They are hardly fit for even the smallest vehicle. Even with the minutest care on the part of the driver the jeep with all its occupants can be found in the *khud* which mercilessly run hundreds of yards deep and this makes the recovery of the vehicle impracticable, if not impossible. The men, in case they survived, had little to look forward to.

The Army Engineers who had earned a name in the jungles of Burma during the Second World War were faced with almost

similar problems. Of course, we had nothing to do with things like mines, booby-traps, or demolition work because here we were not dealing with an enemy. It was with the missionary spirit that the entire Army worked. Against many odds they took up jobs that appeared to be impossible. Generally it involved a colossal amount of hill cutting, levelling, and draining of subsoil and rain water, conversion of marshy patches into roads, construction of culverts, rock blasting, heavy bridging and, many other minor jobs that go into the construction of a road.

No earth moving plant could be pressed in, in the initial stages as the roads were not wide enough and the bridges not quite strong to take heavy loads. The Engineers assisted by Pioneers organized large scale civilian labour consisting of unskilled Naga population. The intelligent Sapper, the hard working Pioneer and the spirited Naga with his ingenious methods, joined hands with picks and shovels, with axes and crowbars, with *daos* and other digging tools and ripped open the virgin hills of north-east. The roads connecting all the administratively important places were given priority over others. Then came the task of constructing jeep tracks. After having achieved this the Sappers set out on the task of improving roads and bridges. Many miles of roads had been developed and the construction of permanent bridges across many rivers indirectly gave an impetus to the newly launched development schemes.

The activities of Engineers were not restricted to the boundaries of Nagaland only. Their work in NEFA on Kimin-Ziro and Foothills-Bombdila roads was another example of their versatile profession. With the improved roads, small-sized bulldozer tractors managed to climb the uncharted hills of Nagaland. Dropping zones (DZ) at many places were levelled up and you could see large flat grounds on top of steep hills. At one of the places the DZ was large enough to accommodate eight football teams at a time. No sooner did the aircraft disappear after dropping the supplies than the Naga boys started rushing to the ground. I was not surprised to see them turning out to be extremely good players in such a short period.

Very often many tons of foodgrains, salt, medical supplies and other necessities of life had to be air-dropped. On account of the disturbed conditions in the area the Nagas could not

effectively cultivate their lands and the Government could not let them die of starvation. It is really commendable on the part of the Government to have mobilized all the available agencies and funds to fight the near-famine conditions. To reestablish the life of the Nagas which had been paralysed by the action of the rebels and to create once again conditions for the Nagas to continue their normal community life which to a great extent had been disrupted, the need was acutely felt for better roads and means of transportation.

To begin with, we had started widening the roads for the larger vehicles which could not move about without resorting to reverse gear at certain places. Near one village a stretch of road had just been widened but its suitability had yet to be seen by actually driving through the three-ton trucks.

One early morning I was informed on the radio that a number of three-ton trucks would be sent on that road from Mokokchung for the first time in the history of Nagaland. It was about 2.30 p.m. I was just inspecting a culvert that our men had built when I heard a roaring noise. 'What could it be?' I asked. Then it suddenly struck me that it must be the trucks and from the side of the hill emerged four huge trucks. The truck in front looked like a bride whose veil had just been set aside. Well, it was an exciting day for us. All the Nagas came out of their huts to welcome 'the elephant vehicles'. Our men gathered round the trucks, pulled the drivers out and raised them shoulder high to compliment them for their good driving and the drivers in turn congratulated our men for their hard work on the road.

On another day, early in the morning at about 5 a.m., a little Naga boy came running to our camp to inform us about a landslide which had taken place just a few miles away. It had been raining for the last few days and such cruelties of nature were quite expected. At about 7 a.m. a few very important personalities were to pass through that road. Well, there was no need for orders, everyone came to know what had happened and was fully aware of the action to be taken. The *Jamadar sahib*, as if it was his personal affair, marched off immediately with about twenty men carrying picks and shovels. The *Havildar* got busy in organizing more working parties and the bulldozer

operator, Hukam Chand, who had become an expert by then, was in his seat and the machine rolled out of the hills like a squirrel from under a shrub. The work started soon, and just when the last shovel of earth had been thrown into the ravine and the machine after clearing a huge heap of earth had turned about, the first jeep of the VIP's convoy was sighted. Everyone was happy. It was the Naga boy who saved the face of the Sappers and as a reward for his loyal services he got a free ride on the bulldozer. This was his first ride on an automobile which was a funny experience to him though, of course, not without apprehensions.

Many a time we were faced with similar situations when sleep and rest was out of question and the work on hand engaged all our attention. In this process of working together with the Nagas, we learnt a lot of things from them and at the same time taught them equally useful things in return. For instance, every Naga by then knew how a culvert was made, what type of boreholes should be made for blasting, how much should be the minimum radius for a curve of the road for comfortable driving, what was camber, how much super-elevation was to be given for different curves and many other similar bits of information concerning the rudiments of road construction. At the same time our men learnt many useful things; they could erect a bamboo hut, or make a rope out of wild grass and make bamboo furniture. They learnt the art of jungle clearing and got used to the wild life. Far away from their homes, in the hills of north-east, they made homes and hearths for others.

Every soldier, no matter which service he came from, did his best to contribute his bit. There is nothing but praise for the men from the Supply Corps who ran the convoys carrying food and medical supplies to the remotest corner. They worked round the clock on dangerously narrow roads, kept on transporting men, equipment, ammunition, food and other essential supplies from one place to the other. One required a strong nerve to steer a vehicle on such slippery roads because there was often the fear of skidding. During the dry months the roads became very rough with clouds of dust flying whenever a vehicle moved. All this made driving very hazardous. Sometimes the landsides held the convoy for hours. On many occasions

partly damaged and shaking bridges had to be negotiated with heavily loaded vehicles.

A man who went back to Mokokchung after a period of absence of a few years could not recognize that it was the same old traditional village of the Aos. All round he could find a network of roads, some of them capable of taking heavy traffic. This development was long overdue. Though the roads had not been metalled, yet they were good enough for speedy transportation of supplies. Construction of roads right from a scratch involves a great sum of money, more so on the green mountainous terrain of Nagaland. A mile of metalled road could cost a million of rupees. We can well imagine the difficulties which any builders would have to overcome during the development of communications. With the Army Engineers in the field; substantial economy had been effected and the most outstanding feature of their work had been the speed with which the projects were constructed.

The slim man from the south proved as tough as the stout Punjabi, and the talented Bengali was not the less courageous than the warrior Marhatta. That was a place where you could find and feel the morale of not only the Army but of the nation as a whole. Men of different colours, varying physiques and from all corners of India were to be found there co-operating with mutual understanding and the spirit of give and take. One characteristic feature stood out—the spirit of the nation and not that of a few individuals, or that of a few communities or religious sects. It exhibited a unanimous determination where all were making a joint effort and everyone contributing his best.

And it is this spirit which helped the Nagas to continue their century-old struggle against the relentlessly destructive forces of nature. The brave Nagas once again clenched their iron fist not to make a show of force but to express their determination to march ahead along with the others in India to enrich their life with the fruit of the scientific discoveries without substantially disturbing their customary way of life.

To avoid this cultural group from remaining secluded or locked up behind a jungle curtain and to further protect this community from getting washed away by the aggressive forces of the alien cultures, Government of India under the inspiration of

Mr. Nehru—the great benefactor of the tribesmen—have evolved a liberal policy. Dr. Verrier Elwin who spent the best years of his life with the Indian tribesmen was the man whose experience, spirit, vision and moral force provided the basis for the generous treatment which the tribesmen of India, particularly those in the north east, are getting from our Government and the people. Truly speaking, Dr. Verrier Elwin has been the *Alma Mater* of the Indian tribesmen.

To examine these broad principles, the basis of which are guiding our relationship with the tribesmen, nothing could be better than stating it in Dr. Verrier Elwin's own words:

“The task set by Mr. Nehru, therefore, is no easy one, for it involves several ideals that have rarely been found compatible. The first is to preserve, strengthen and develop all that is best in tribal society, culture, art and language. The second is to protect tribal economic rights. The third is to unite and integrate the tribes in a true heart unity with India as a whole so that they may play a full part in her life. And the last is to develop welfare and educational facilities so that every tribesman may have an equal opportunity with his fellow-citizens of the open country and the plains.

“This original indeed unique conception at once scientific and human, steers a middle path between the two older ways of approach and, if properly applied, should have the advantage of both and avoid their dangers. It is difficult but surely right. It is supported both by the findings of the anthropological science and the warnings of history. It is a charter of religious, social, economic and cultural rights.

“...We do not want to preserve the tribal culture in its colour and beauty to please the scientists or to attract the tourists. But we see now that the tribesmen will be of greatest service to India if they are able to bring their own peculiar treasures into the common life, not by becoming second rate copies of ourselves. Their moral virtues, their artistic gifts, their cheerfulness are things we need. They also need the comradeship, the technical knowledge, the wider world views of the plains. The great problem is how to develop the synthesis without destroying the rare and precious values of tribal life.

Nagaland has a bright future as any other part of India.

With the economic development and the untiring efforts of the Government to retain all that is virtuous in Nagaland, this heavenly blessed beautiful land is definitely turning out to be a dreamland. It would not be an exaggeration to say that the area is one of the most beautiful territories of India and one that stands out distinctly in grandeur and originality.

If you go to Mahabaleshwar in the Western Ghats soon after the monsoon or if you go to Ootacamund in the Nilgiri Hills of the south during the monsoon, you are bound to find plenty of mosquitoes or bugs but just because you find these you cannot say that these places are not fit for habitation. On the contrary there is a mad rush of people and most of these places are the most densely populated places of India. The Terai region of Uttar Pradesh, which was once considered to be most undesirable for human habitation, after having been reclaimed now stands converted into an agricultural land which extends up to miles. Jungles have been cleared for the farmers to settle down and today this region is producing the golden fruit from the rusty earth in great abundance. Man by dint of hard work and with the aid of science has successfully fought against nature's inclemencies. This is neither a miracle nor a magic that the dense monsoon jungles have perished and in their place stands the rich crops for miles all round. It is just another example of the spirited fight by man against obstacles imposed by nature. The hills of Nagaland are as beautiful as Mussoorie, as green as Mahabaleshwar, as picturesque as Kashmir, and almost as rich in natural resources as the Nilgiri Hills in the south.

In spite of all this, the region remained in the background. The fears of the Nagas, their continued separation, the poor means of communication, lack of industries in the vicinity of this region and the remotely situated official establishments had to some extent, deprived this region of the patronization it deserved.

Here the growth of jungle and crops is surprisingly rapid due to plentiful rain and rich soil. The watersprings are generally the sources of drinking water, fish is in abundance and wild life still enriches many valleys. People are honest, hard working and virtuous. They are keen to develop and arm themselves with the arts and science of the modern man so as to stand on equal footing with their other Indian brothers.

There is a definite change taking place in Nagaland under the guidance of their own liberal minded leaders. Nagas are up on their feet! With the basic facilities that a man of science requires in the present age, small self-sufficient and well-organized towns are coming up everywhere in Nagaland. With the improved means of communication, administrative offices are being established for into the interior and at the same time residential buildings in harmony with the Naga surroundings are springing up. More officials for assisting the Nagas have stepped in and a permanent bond of trust and friendship is being established by mutual learning. The villagers are now coming in contact with other Indians in more than one way. Batches of students and other citizens have been on educational tours throughout India and have got an idea of the mighty effort that the entire country is making for a better future.

The Nagas are highly skilled and talented artists, their handicrafts are becoming very popular all over the country. Articles like shawls, *mekhelas*, hats, bamboo work, and various other locally produced pieces of art are finding a ready market. Training-cum-sale centres have been established to encourage the Nagas to continue their indigenous arts and thus their traditional way of life. In this way the tribesmen are practising their old arts, improving through learning and earning through the sales of their crafts.

Poultry farms, piggeries and improved animal breeding centres are a few other things which have now been introduced by the administration. More schools have been set up and scholarships and stipends are being given to deserving students for higher education. Students are being sent outside Nagaland. The educated Nagas by themselves are an asset in spreading and furthering the case of education. To the younger lot school-books and writing materials are being easily made available and today the little boys sit in a tribal hut or outside in the open to learn their own arts and crafts and the history of their forefathers. Their ceremonial dances are being encouraged, attention is being devoted to their regional arts and above all their ceremonial functions and religious practices are being respected and organized with the whole hearted and sincere approval of the officials. At certain centres adult education for

both men and women is in vogue and to eliminate the causes of diseases, lectures and demonstrations on hygiene, sanitation and child welfare are being conducted by qualified personnel. Many hospitals incorporating the Naga customs and beliefs but aided by the modern man of medicine have started functioning. Research regarding their peculiar local diseases is on and all-out aid in improving the water resources, supplementing the diet, improving the agricultural output and cattle breeding is being rendered by specialists.

The young Naga is very energetic and enthusiastic about sports. Football in particular is proving very popular. He generally likes hard hitting games which conform to his manly attributes. His stamina, his long endurance, and his determination and instinct for details make him a very promising sportsman. He is very likely to stand out in the field of sports in the years to come.

How difficult all these jobs must be for the administrators can be well imagined from the fact that with all these changes, nothing that belongs to the Nagas in the form of property or culture is being taken away from them. They are just being aided to live their way of life with the help of the fruit of science.

Attempts are being made to pick up officials from amongst the Nagas since they will have the inherent advantage of being conversant with their own customs and therefore the villagers would feel more at home with them. At the same time it will reduce the burden of having official interpreters. This in turn will increase the efficiency and ease the cumbersome machinery of administration.

The officers and the staff in general who are directly dealing with the tribesmen on the whole are very accommodating and humble. The Nagas very much appreciate a straightforward and frank person but at the same time a lot of tact and good humour has to be employed in trying to introduce something which is new. They like to see the officials taking part in their ceremonial functions. In no way casual treatment of their problems and disputes will win their hearts. One has to know the history of the dispute before giving a decision, which might have started sixty to hundred years back when their grandfathers were at the helm of affairs.

It is a very essential and an elementary requirement for an official to be thoroughly conversant with the culture and the customary law of the Nagas. It would be rewarding to establish a school for the study of tribal culture where the officials before assuming their duties could undergo short orientation courses. We have to deal with many tribes all over India and it would prove very useful in giving the officials an idea regarding the particular set of people, their way of life, their social, religious and political institutions, their beliefs and feelings and many other customs and traditions. In this way an official will not be at a loss when confronted with situations requiring understanding of tribal problems.

One way out would be to select the entire staff from amongst the Nagas themselves. But for the entire administrative machinery we require highly experienced men which at the moment are only partly available from the present stock of the Nagas. They have yet to develop to be able to stand on their own feet and handle the complicated system of administration entirely by themselves. The required guidance and assistance from the rest of the country is being readily made available to the Nagas to elevate them educationally, economically, and politically. All this requires a tremendous amount of work and effort. The young Nagas are realizing the urgency of the situation and are coming out like brave spirited men.

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GLOSSARY

Aung	An autocratic chief amongst Konyaks.
Basha	A thatch, bamboo and timber hut.
Bulli	A section of a thin timber log.
Dao	A large chopping-knife of varying shape and size, used both as a tool and a weapon.
Geena	To prohibit work, deny contacts with others or forbid movement on account of certain rituals.
Gaon burha	A headman of a <i>khel</i> or village appointed by the administration.
Jhum, Jhumming	Fields which are used for cultivation for a few years and then exposed to nature for over a decade in a regular cycle to get the best out of the land. In this way before the cultivation is taken up, the jungle has to be cut and burnt, and this process is called <i>jhumming</i> .
Kachha	Temporary or unmetalled.
Khel	A sub-division of a village.
Khud	A ravine.
Khurda	A digging and earth moving tool.
Madhu	A variety of fermented beer brewed from rice or millets.
Mekhela	A colourful hand woven garment used by women for covering their lower half portion of the body.
Mithun	A species of Indian bison, domesticated by Nagas and used for sacrifices and barter.
Moharar	A person charged with the responsibility of looking after the maintenance and supervision of a particular length of road.

- Morung A large hall which is a bachelors sleeping house, a club and is the centre of village activities.
- Punjis A number of hardened bamboo spikes with pointed ends imbedded in the ground to obstruct the movement of enemy or entrap the animals.
- Tamul Betel nut.

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