

Nagaland: The Sixteenth State of India

Nagaland, the sixteenth state of India with a territory of 6,300 square miles, and a population of approximately 370,000 people was inaugurated by President S Radhakrishnan on December 1, 1963 at a colourful ceremony in Kohima, with Shilo Ao as the first Chief Minister. It set in motion the process of establishing smaller states in the North East .Thus Manipur, Tripura and Meghalaya achieved statehood in 1972, Arunachal and Mizoram became UTs in 1972 but by 1987, they were also given the status of states

The formation of Nagaland is also closely aligned to the question of the construction of Naga identity , the British quest for having frontiers as buffers, their ideas about retaining Nagaland as a Crown colony , the implicit support for the missionary activities , the continuing distrust amongst the highlanders and the plainsmen (as everywhere in the world) besides the easy availability of ammunition dumps left by the armies of the Allied and Axis powers at the end of the WWII.

From a chronological point of view, the story of the district becoming a state starts with the establishment of the Naga Hills district in 1866 with its headquarters, first at Samaguiting, and from 1878 at Kohima with a subdivision at Wokha and Mokokchong . By the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation of 1873, the Inner Line Permit (ILP) was introduced, thereby legally restricting the contact with the rest of the country. The GoI Act of 1935 created the Excluded and Partially Excluded Areas, and outlined the relationship of the Viceroy/GG towards these territories.

The iron curtain, created by the ILP was breached by the two World Wars. Two thousand Sema Nagas were recruited during WW1 for a Labour Corps in France , and during the WW II, the entire region

became a theatre of War . The Axis (Japanese) troops were at the steps of Kohima before they were finally routed , and Field Marshall Sir William Slim acknowledged the role of the brave Nagas in his monumental book ' Defeat into Victory' .

No wonder then, that the administrator- anthropologist JH Hutton , who had been a Deputy Commissioner in Assam, and Governor Sir Robert Reid were keen to place these frontier areas on the Burmese border as a Crown territory directly by Whitehall, but as VP Menon in the newly constituted States Ministry got wind of it , he had this stalled at the level of the Secretary of State.

Meanwhile, a delegation of Naga leadership including AZ Phizo and T Sahkire met Mahatma Gandhi in May 1947 at New Delhi who conveyed to them that although he felt that Nagas were an integral part of India, it was for them to decide the modalities of their participation in the Indian Union, and that the use of force was out of question. The Governor of Assam, Sir Akbar Hydari signed a Nine Point Agreement with the Naga leaders at Kohima in June 1947 wherein the Nagas were given full autonomy in judicial, legislative and executive matters, and guaranteed non –alienation of their lands . The ninth point read : ' The Governor of Assam , as the agent of the Government of the Indian Union , will have a special responsibility for a period of ten years to ensure due observance of this agreement : at the end of the period, the Naga Council will be asked whether they require the above agreement to be extended for a further period , or a new agreement regarding the future of the Naga people would be arrived at'. While Phizo interpreted this to mean the option of Independence after ten years, for the Gol it meant a choice between the remaining a part of Assam, or a separate status within the Union of India.

Under Part XVI of the Constitution (Articles 330 and 332) , the Naga Autonomous Hills district within Assam was given representation in the Lok Sabha and the Assam legislature , but the Nagas under Phizo's leadership did not participate in the first general elections of 1952 , and took up armed insurrection with active connivance from China and (East)Pakistan . Fed up with the perpetual violence perpetrated by Phizo and his unwillingness to negotiate with government, the moderate faction of the NNC led by T Shakhire decided to hold talks on the issue of autonomy within the Indian Union. Even after he was kidnaped and killed by the extremist faction, the momentum built up by him found expression in the Naga Peoples Convention held in August 1957 which authorized Imkongliba Ao to start the negotiations. After discussions with Prime Minister Nehru in September 1957, it was agreed that 'the Naga Hills district (of Assam) and the Tuensang frontier division (of NEFA) would be constituted into one unit, to be administered by the Governor of Assam on behalf of the President of India.

Subsequently, two more conventions were held at Mokokchong in 1958 and 1959 when Major Bob Khathing was the Deputy Commissioner, and a decision was taken to press for a state of Nagaland within the Indian Union, as well as the formation of a Naga regiment within the Indian Army and the continuation of Inner Line permit. In July 1960, Prime Minister Nehru overruled both the recommendations of the SRC and Home Minister GB Pant and agreed to the establishment an Interim body of forty two elected members 'for the regulation of Nagaland, and matters connected therewith until the creation of Nagaland as a state under the Indian Union . Unfortunately, Imkongliba Ao was also assassinated, but after the initial setback, Shilu Ao, who later became the first Chief Minister, ran the Council for the next two years.

