NAGAMESE : THE COMMON LANGUAGE IN NAGALAND

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

2. Basic Facts of Nagaland, 1974, Nagaland Today, p.3.
South and runs more or less to the left bank of great river of the region Brahmaputra.

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

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

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

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2.00 The racial group of the Nagas is one of the Mongolian groups; evidently they have mixed feature. Though some writers refer that they are found in Assam, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Tripura, Mizoram, Manipur, Arunachal, Burma, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Sikim, Nepal, Tibet, Himachal Pradesh and Kashmir of the Himalayan tracts, yet they are mainly concentrated in Nagaland with their identification term Naga.

The origin of the word Naga is obscure⁶. There are different theories regarding the origin of the word Naga. Capt. J. Butler wanted to derive the term Naga either from the Bengali word 'nangta' or the Hindustani word "naga" which means 'naked', 'crude', 'barbarous', is quite irrelevant and hateful to the whole tribe. Few other scholars explained it as a derivative of 'nog' meaning 'Snake'. The etymology of Naga or Naga may be explained by the Sanskrit word 'nago' means 'hill', and 'naga' with the Suffix -a, which means 'definiteness' or the dwellers, or 'live in' indicates the hill dwellers. But varrier Elwin⁷, Peal⁸ and Hutton⁹ have suggested another notable theory: According to them 'Naga' is a derivative from of 'nok' which means 'people' or 'man'. They identify themselves as 'nok' man. It is observed that the different tribes settled in this North Eastern region of India also identify themselves in a similar way like the Nagas. The Garos Call themselves Aöchik (hill man), Mande (the man) or Aöchik Mande; the Mizos as Mizo (Mi= man, Zo hill ); the karbis as Ar leng (Arleng = man), the singphos as singpho (=man); the Bodos as Boro (=man). The tendency is that each tribe considered the members of his own race alone to be human. This tendency is found more or less among all the tribesman of the Republic of India.

    Bareh, Dr.H.(ed) 1970.Gazetter of India, Nagaland p.19
