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Emerging Lacuna of Vision Apropos to Lasting Peace in Nagaland

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Abstract:
The Nagas' persistent struggle for political independence has been going on for more than sixty years, older than the Indian independence. The not so audible "Indo-Naga" conflict that cocooned Nagaland with instability, insecurity, chaos and turmoil, has obstructed Nagaland from moving forward towards the path of development and prosperity along with the rest of the world. In order to escape from the vortex of conflict, the Nagas have been searching for a lasting peace. The Naga populace from all age groups and from all walks of life has been suggesting what might possibly form a formidable step towards building harmonious socio-political environment in Nagaland. This research manuscript analyses the emerging gap of vision among the Naga public on the roadmap to lasting peace in Nagaland.

Keywords: Conflict, Peace, Historical Rights, Nagaland, Nagaland State, Nagas, Political Rights

1. Introduction

Conflict and peace are the terms exhaustively and painstakingly used by many that capture the attention of anyone who endeavours to smoothly progress conflicting situation to peaceful situation. They are commonly occurring in everyday business of human interaction. Despite their comprehensive usage, peace and conflict remain two of the most complex concepts that are sometimes unfathomable. Many nations of the world today are struggling to end conflict or to find peace. Conflict and peace, though they hold meanings and values that oppositely contrast and differ from each others, are like the two sides of the same coin. They are like the 'yin' and 'yang' of the Chinese dualistic cosmology wherein, one do not naturally exist without the other. Conflict and peace also constitute two of the most popularly emphasised expressions in Nagaland (the land of the Nagas). Some even commented that their stressful employments have in fact reduced the serious social, moral, political and economical values enveloped within it.

The purpose of discussing and analyzing the concept of conflict related issues as well as the various measures adopted to end conflict are done to give peace a chance. Peace is a process to engage in as well as a goal to be reached (Longvah 2014:55). It is the removal of the threat of war and absence of war; creates alternatives to violent conflict; it also means guaranteed justice, enjoyment of all basic human rights and fundamental freedoms (Pardesi 1982:4-5, Bose 1991:1, Dungen & Wittner 2003:363 & 373). Galtung (1996:8-9) emphasises that peace is the absence or reduction of violence of all kinds and it is a nonviolent and creative conflict transformation. Peace is a necessity, if we are to create a harmonious atmosphere inorder to live in peacefully.

Conflict, which is largely generated due to the pursuance of incompatible goals, is directly responsible for devaluing the idea of peace in the societal context of the Nagas. Conflict is a situation in which two or more actors pursue incompatible, yet from their individual perspective entirely just goals (Wolff 2006: 1-2). Deep inside every conflict which is ever-changing and ever-dynamic lays a contradiction, something standing in the way of something else (Galtung 1996:70-89). In fact, the disagreement and mismatch of Nagas' aspirations with that of the Indian Government are the primary factors for the eruption of a war-like situation between the Nagas and the Government of India (hereafter abbreviated to GOI). It may be noted that conflict situation in Nagaland cannot be termed as an actual war fought between the Nagas and the Indian Government, but the situation is war-like in the sense that a large-scale violence with innumerable loss of human life and property has ever been present. To restore normalcy and peace in Nagaland, a peace process was commenced in 1997 with the signing of the cease-fire agreement between the National Socialist Council of Nagalim (hereafter abbreviated to NSCN) and the GOI. Since then, the two parties have been involved in a peace negotiation held at the highest Prime Ministerial level. The two have been attempting to end the age-old Naga political conflict through peaceful process of dialogue and negotiation. However, the Naga masses are "frustrated" with the slow progress of the ongoing peace process.

The plan to sustain the political future of the Nagas, which is possible only in a peaceful and harmonious environment, constitutes the fundamental concern of the Naga peace process. The political conflict of the Nagas for self-determination and the ensuing peace process to end such conflict can be termed in generic as the struggle for peace and security of the Naga people. The masses normally hold the opinion that meaningful and honourable solution to the many decades old struggle for complete independence from the Indian Union will automatically improve the deplorable living condition of the Naga masses. The Naga masses do not dispute the historical fact that their political struggle has been going on even before the independence of India on 15 August 1947. They are also aware that theirs is "one of the world's oldest continuing armed conflicts, which is also one of the least known" (Baruah 2003: 321). The Nagas frequently assert that the root cause of their political conflict lies within the aspect that they reject

the idea that their land, which was under special dispensation during British rule, could simply pass into the Indian hands at the end of the British colonial rule (*Ibid.*). In other words, the Nagas' aspiration for self-determination - meaning they themselves will determine their own political, administrative, cultural and socio-economic affairs - is the root cause of the "Indo-Naga" conflict. Of late, although the Naga hoi polloi do not conflict to the notion that their land was forcefully integrated into the Union of India without their consent, yet many especially the younger generations have come to term that the solution to the Naga problem need not be rigidly confined within the box of "sovereignty and nothing less". The younger generations question the sagacity of their elders in sticking to the issue of "political sovereignty" which has sabotaged any round of development in Nagaland for many generations. For many youths, to address the issues and problems in Nagaland like corruption, unemployment of educated youths, lack of good governance, constant power failure, pathetic road conditions, nepotism, favoritism, factionalism, and tribalism among others is the need of the hour. They believe that the answer to the above-mentioned issues and problems lies in bringing about an amicable solution to the nearly seven decades old "Indo-Naga" political conflict. They also believe that any solution to the Naga problem must be political. However, unlike the older generations, they do not define political solution as confining solely to achieving sovereignty or complete political independence.

The Naga masses continually assert that like all other people across the globe, they also want peace, prosperity and security. Therefore, if the endeavour for complete sovereignty is not able to bring peace and stability in Nagaland after many years of violent struggle, then perhaps, their leaders must change their "priority of negotiation". In the year 2003, the protracted Naga struggle for freedom was termed by the GOI as a unique political situation in the Indian sub-continent that needed a political solution and not a military solution. On the line of this recognition, the Nagas strongly held that the negotiations between the GOI and the NSCN must give due consideration to the "unique historical and political situation" of the Nagas.

2. On the Ongoing Peace Process in Nagaland

Often, the term "peace process" is associated with peaceful conflict resolution method negating violence. Darby and Mac Ginty (2008:2) suggest that there are five essential criteria required for a successful peace process: that the protagonists are willing to negotiate in good faith; that the key actors are included in the process; that the negotiations address the central issue in dispute; that force is not used to achieve objectives; and that the negotiators are committed to a sustained process. Though there is no universally agreed definition of peace process, the element of 'conflict' is one universal feature without which there can be no peace process. Often, there is a need for peace process because somewhere somehow peace has been broken or disrupted by violent conflicts. Despite the diversities and complexities involved in defining peace process, it is agreeable that the implication of peace process has led to the ending of many types of violent conflicts across the globe. It is said that the term 'peace process' began to be widely used in the mid-1970s to describe the American led efforts to bring about a negotiated peace between Israel and its Arab neighbours (Quandt 2001:1). Since then, the term has been popularly used for attempting to resolve any type of aggressive dissension by employing peaceful non-violent means. Apparently, the use of the term 'peace process' may be of recent origin but the concept is as old as war (Darby & Mac Ginty 2008:2). Peace process, which is a "political process in which conflicts are resolved by peaceful means", aimed to transform conflict "into a peaceful nonviolent process of social and political change" (Saunders 2001:483, Subuddhi 2006:29). Of late, the implication of peace process is significantly studied all over the world because the process for realising true peace has emerged as one of the most urgent and desperate issues in the conflict ridden regions.

The primary objective of the contemporary peace process in Nagaland that begins in 1997 is to find the right way to establish a peaceful Naga society. For true peace to prevail in Nagaland, all round comprehensive addressing of the prevailing social, political, economical, and cultural vices in the Naga society are required. However, dealing all the issues at one go is near to impossible. No single method can effectively mitigate the entire prevailing complex situation in Nagaland. As a result, of late, the Nagas have come to contemplate that the conflict situation in Nagaland must be unraveled systematically, one at a time. The perpetuating political issue, which is the centripetal force of all other kinds of conflict generating factors in Nagaland, required to be carefully dealt with for a meaningful peace to prevail. All along, the GOI has adopted the method of brushing only the tip of an iceberg as a means of silencing the Naga political issue. Therefore, today many have come to assert that the GOI must play a more positive and pro-active role apropos to the Naga political issue. New Delhi must shed the attitude of playing the Naga issue to their convenient tune.

For peace process to triumph, it is important that the parties engaged in the process must not project any kind of bargaining or concession as a 'failure' or 'defeat' (Kanchan 2009). A room for free thinking unhindered by rigid conditions is essential inorder to arrive at an amicable solution. The development of a win-win situation has the potential to thaw the ice of protractedness. For most of the time, the peace process in Nagaland appears to be engaging with the stalling method or postponement process. With the initiation of peace process in Nagaland, the conflict between the Indian Army and the Naga revolutionaries has subsided considerably. However, the conflict among the various Naga revolutionary groups has resulted to the creation of environment void of real and true peace in Nagaland.

Peace is the one thing that has been unanimously and deeply reflected by the Naga populace from all walks of life. Since the employment of military means by the GOI against the Naga revolutionaries failed to end the Naga political issue, we witnessed the initiation of the peace process in 1997 between the two parties. Since then, a non-violent means was adopted by the GOI and the NSCN in order to bring an amicable solution to the protracted Naga political issue. In other words, the ongoing Naga peace process was embarked with the hope to unearth plausible means to break through the hard shell of Nagas' aspiration for "sovereignty as their birthright". The Naga political issue is usually relate to the question of sovereignty issue. Therefore, the effort to discover the right way to rectify the conflict enwrapping the "sovereignty issue" forms the primary concern of the current peace process. In fact, it is the chief cornerstone of the "Indo-Naga" political conflict.

3. Opinions on the Roadmap to Lasting Peace in Nagaland

The genesis of the brutal but often downplayed "Indo-Naga" conflict can be traced back to the year 1918 when the Naga Club was formed by few educated and concerned Nagas to bring all the Naga tribes together under one political administration. Relating to this, the Club in 1929 submitted a memorandum to the British Simon Commission expressing their view that the Nagas must not be made a part of the Indian Union even if the Britishers were to leave the Indian sub-continent. They wanted the Nagas to leave alone to decide their own political future. Towards the mid of 1940s, when it became clear that British will soon declare the independence of India, the Nagas struggle for political independence or sovereignty under the leadership of A. Z. Phizo became more pronounced. The Nagas subscribe the idea that without their consent, the Indian government cannot be made control over their land. History has shown that the Nagas vehemently opposed the inclusion of their territory under the Indian Union. Thence on, the Nagas journey towards complete independence began on the ground that they constitute a distinct nation different from the rest of India. Subsequently, militarization in Nagaland marked the beginning of India's counter politics against the Nagas' struggle for political independence or sovereignty, which was followed by rampant human rights violations of any forms, creating a peace-less and chaotic situation in the Naga Hills. Violation of human right in Nagaland is a continuing story, even though the scale of violation has gone down considerably.

The topmost priority of the Naga peace process is to achieve true and lasting peace, which they believe can be brought about by maturely addressing the root cause of the Naga political conflict. The Nagas have been voicing that peace in their land would become a reality only when their right to self-determination is wisely resolved by the GOI. One of the assertions of the Nagas in relation to their political movement is that true peace can prevail in Nagaland only when they are granted "freedom" which according to them is the "inalienable possession of everyone, great or downtrodden" (Biswas 2006:268). The Naga peace processes of the 1960s and 1970s between the GOI and the Nagas had failed to yield any concrete and lasting solution to the "Indo-Naga" political conflict. Like the past peace processes, many Nagas fear that the ongoing peace process between the NSCN and the GOI may meet the same fate. Many Nagas maintained that all the peace processes in Nagaland including the contemporary process has failed to lift the heavy burden of conflict.

Linked to the ongoing Naga political negotiations, the Naga masses from various sections have been voicing many opinions on what could possibly thaw the frozen and stalemated Naga political conflict. Out of the total 150 respondents, absolute majority of them asserted that the ongoing peace process between the NSCN and GOI has only been a temporary postponement of conflict without producing any lasting peace (See Table 1). This data was collected in 2013 during the Congress regime at New Delhi. Large section of the Nagas, both educated and uneducated, have had questioned the intention of the Congress led United Peoples' Alliance (UPA) government on the Naga peace process. Many rounds of political talks were held between the then UPA government and the NSCN during the last ten years. However, no concrete solution to the Naga political movement has yielded to end the oldest political movement in India. With the exit of the Congress regime and the coming of the Bharatiya Janata Party led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) into power at the Centre in 2014, there is a possibility of resolving the "Indo-Naga" political conflict on a time bound basis. In other words, the NDA being a strong government under the leadership of Narendra Modi has the capacity to resolve the age-old Naga political struggle.

Age Group	Option	No. of Respondent	Percentage
Below 30	Yes	38	76%
	No	4	8%
	Probably	4	8%
	Cannot Say	4	8%
31-40 Years	Yes	40	82%
	No	4	8%
	Probably	3	6%
	Cannot Say	2	4%
41-50 Years	Yes	19	83%
	No	1	4%
	Probably	3	13%
	Cannot Say	0	0%
51-60 Years	Yes	12	75%
	No	2	13%
	Probably	1	6%
	Cannot Say	1	6%
61 Above	Yes	9	75%
	No	1	9%
	Probably	1	8%
	Cannot Say	1	8%
Net Result	Yes	118	79%
	No	12	8%
	Probably	12	8%
	Cannot Say	8	5%

Table 1: Is the Ongoing Peace Process a Temporary Postponement of Conflict?

According to the findings of the study, in relation to the Naga political movement, there is a lacuna of vision among the Nagas especially between the younger generations and the older generations. We are witnessing a generational gap between the young and the old on the Naga political movement. Further, the perceptions of the younger generations of the Nagaland state may not necessarily be the same with the other parts of the Naga society like the Nagas of Manipur, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and Myanmar. Assertions like "the younger and more educated Nagas, who have had the benefit of travelling outside the state, have emerged as a vibrant, questioning and intelligent group which has long lost faith in the ideology of the underground" (Pramar 2004) hold some truths especially in the case of the younger generations Nagas of the present Nagaland state. It is worthwhile to mention here that there is a division of opinion on the Naga political movement even among the youth of the present Nagaland state. Some express that there is a "possibility of compromising" their political movement if the GOI resolved the issue of socio-economic development and security of the Naga populace. Others are of the opinion that the issue of socio-economic development and security of the Nagas will be resolved if the "Indo-Naga" conflict is amicably quelled. However, the younger generations, both educated and uneducated Nagas, of the present Manipur, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, and Myanmar seem to be more vocal in their demand for political solution. For them, the socio-economic development is not an alternative to their political movement, but it is just a part of the political solution. Contrary to some sections of the younger generations Nagas, sizeable Naga elders firmly hold that the development and security cannot replace their historical and political rights. In other words, what the Nagas need now is a political solution that inevitably encompasses development and security dimensions.

4. Conclusion

It will be a caustic remark to talk of roadmap to lasting peace in Nagaland without addressing the key obstacle, that is, factional fighting among the Naga revolutionary groups. Factionalism in Nagaland hinders the realization of right and just peace in their land. In the absence of the reconciliation among the revolutionary groups, a lasting peace in Nagaland will be difficult to realize. Reconciliation among the groups is the interest of the whole Naga populace. Thus, what is the relevance of the revolutionary group for the Nagas if they are not ready to reconcile in the interest of the people. What is the relevance of the revolutionary group in the absence of people's "mandate"? Having a "mandate" of some sections of the society does not mean that the group enjoys the mandate of the Nagas. Almost all the revolutionary groups have the same objectives in relation to their political movement. In the light of this statement, what is the relevance of a fratricidal politics among the groups in the name of "sovereignty of Nagaland" is the question that puzzles the Naga masses. T.R. Zeliang, the incumbent Chief Minister of Nagaland state rightly observes, "We must realize that Nagas are a small race and division amongst us only harms us and none else" (Divisions 2014). The issues of "ism" such as "tribe-ism, factionalism, nepotism, favouritism, and egoism" among others have resulted to the continuance of peace-less situation in Nagaland, which in fact have enshrouded the future of the Nagas with uncertainty. In essence, "reconciliation" and "understanding on some key issues" among the Naga revolutionary groups precede the establishment of lasting peace in Nagaland.

Though some gaps have developed between the young and old Naga population concerning their political issue, yet their end goals remain peace, development and solution to their political problem in order to live as "free people" in a true sense of the term. The GOI is largely responsible for the continuance of political conflict in Nagaland. One of the assertions usually made by the Nagas is that the "GOI have no political courage, nor political will. If they have the will and the courage, then it is high time to find a solution". This assertion has its own relevance, as for many years the New Delhi have neither political will nor efficient leaders to resolve the India's oldest political conflict. Another factor that is hindering to the establishment of lasting peace in Nagaland is the strategy adopted by the Indian government. Most of the political strategies to end the "Indo-Naga" political conflict are "double-standard politics" and "carrot and stick policy". Kelhouneizo Yhome (2012), one of the ex-presidents of the Naga Student's Federation (NSF) remarks, "What the Indian Government says they do not do and what they do not say, they do". This brings us to the question of "sincerity" or "insincerity" of the GOI in addressing the historical and political rights of the Nagas. V.S. Atem (2013), one of the senior leaders of the NSCN observes, "India may be too great for the Nagas but if India humbles herself and thinks that it is worth to live in peace with the Nagas than the Naga identity has to be respected and recognized. Then only there will be true peace in Nagaland". It is in the interest of the Nagas to resolve their political movement. It is also in the interest of all the peace loving Indians to resolve the India's oldest political conflict. It is worthwhile to point out here that the resolution to the decades' old "Indo-Naga" political conflict will not only bring peace in Nagaland, but it will also strengthen the "security" of India in a larger perspective. Further, this will help the GOI to resolve the issue of insurgency in a conflict-ridden region, North East India.

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