

Women and Freedom

The Role of Women Cadres of the National Socialist Council of Nagalim in the Naga Freedom Movement

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Hormila G. Zingkhai*

Introduction

"I joined just as an ordinary girl!" How did this 'ordinary girl,' turn into a brave woman who courageously supported and kept alive the more than seven decades of struggle for Naga freedom? What was it that made her choose her nation over her own life and even over the life of her near and dear ones? What was it like to give up the comfort of her home and survive in the vast wilderness? How does it feel not to be under the protection of her loved ones but to find herself suddenly being hunted down by the enemies? How did she become a warrior for her nation? Where did she get the strength to continue the struggle as well as the determination to make a positive impact overcoming all the hardships she continued to face? These are the concerns which we will seek to address, questions which will still be left undetermined when it comes to the Naga women, especially the Naga women who are actively involved in the struggle for Naga freedom.

Traditionally, in the Naga society women are seen as those who are more actively engaged with the process of peacemaking. And in cases, when faced with the ground realities of a warlike situation, often, as someone who by virtue of belonging to the vulnerable section of society become the victim. However, this

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reading of the place-position of the women is true to a certain extent. Often forgotten in the process of such projection is the fact that a woman can also be an active participant in functioning as agents of change. Such choices are made possible and realised when they in response to a political, religious or economic situation organised themselves into functional units prepared to address the situation. Thus, the present research seeks to examine what it means for the Naga women to take up arms in the liberation struggle and actively provide resistance to the forces of occupation. It is an attempt to highlight the conditions under which they serve and hence bring to focus the experiences of the struggle women faced in their role as combatants. At the same time, the present work will also look into the contributions made by the Naga women cadres to the Naga freedom movement.

To start with, the women cadres of the National Socialists Council of Nagalim like any other women are an inevitable workforce, the pillars, behind the successful functioning of their family, community, society, organisations and movements. As such, when it comes to the struggle for freedom, Naga women have made significant contributions and continue to strive unceasingly and earnestly as much as their male counterparts. They have stood for the cause in various roles and capacities as peace activists, negotiators and even combatants and in the course of all these struggles become the victims and the survivors. However, the contributions and sacrifices made by the Naga women in their various dispositions, particularly the women cadres of the Naga freedom movement are markedly missing in the narratives of the Naga history for self-determination. Such omissions, advertent or inadvertent failure to read into the history of any movement gives rise to an incomplete picture. Thus, there is a lacunae in understanding the whole picture of the Naga struggle for freedom as one of the significant contributors (the women cadres of the Naga National Workers) have been neglected.

It is in the light of such understanding that the following questions need to be examined. The question of why in the first place did these women join the freedom movement? What is their relation vis-a-vis the male members of their organisation? What

is their status and role within their organisation? What are the contributions of the women towards the freedom struggle so far? Are they satisfied with what they are doing and have achieved so far? If not, why? What are the future courses of action/s they have in mind? How would they self assess their role and contribution in joining the forces? These are questions that need to be reflected upon, an answer to which is very difficult to come about and one that will still remain unanswered yet merits a good response if one is to get a more accurate picture of the Naga movement.

Objectives

This work is an attempt to provide a more focused outlook and discussion on the role and contribution of the Naga women cadres and correspondingly sharpen the wider perceptions of them by the civil society, the state and central government, in the academic world and in the NSCN (National Socialist Council of Nagalim) organisation itself. Accordingly, the present work in general tries to identify the reasons or influences that have led the women to join the freedom struggle. But it in particular examines the objectives, status and role of the women cadres in the National Socialists Council of Nagalim and attempts to understand the contributions of the women cadres in the struggle for freedom. In the process it also involves an examination of the hopes and aspirations they have for the Naga nation.

Methodology

Based on the above objectives, the present work is built on both primary and secondary sources. Books, articles, reports and newspaper reports and write-ups on the Naga Struggle and Naga Movement will account for the secondary sources. However, the empirical data collected using questionnaires, observation and interviewing various members of the National Socialist Council of Nagalim (Isak-Muivah) or NSCN (I-M) will serve as the primary source. The rationale behind the reliance mainly on the primary sources based on the personal interviews with both the male and female cadres of NSCN (I-M) is because not many studies about the Naga Freedom Movement, especially dealing with the

combatant role of women has been conducted so far. Moreover, the available government records and reports involve highly sensitive information which are still classified and subjected to strict laws of disclosure. Moreover, when it comes to the records that are maintained by the NSCN, as said by one of the senior most members *“many of the records have been lost while shifting our base from one place to another in the jungle and during the bombings and firings by the Indian and Burmese security forces”*. Thus, the present work is based on meetings, interactions and interviews with the members from the NSCN (I-M) Ladies Unit (Women Military Wing), members from the Nationalist Socialist Women’s Organisation of Nagalim (NSWON), retired women cadres, and wives of NSCN members as well as male cadres from NSCN (I-M).

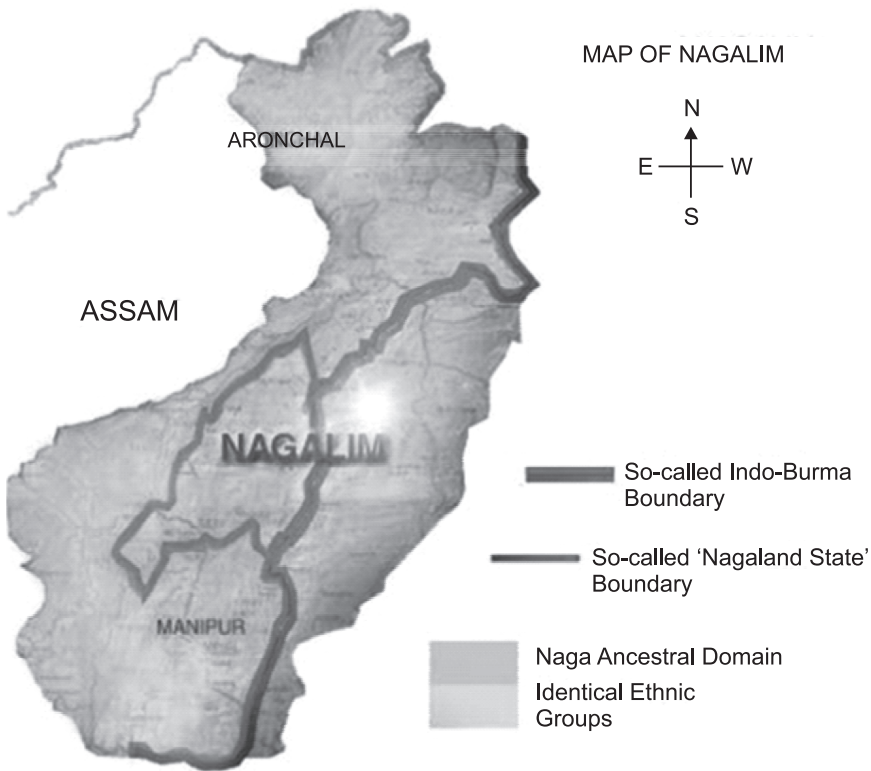
The Nagas

The Nagas are one of the ethnic communities dominantly settled in Nagaland, which is located in North-Eastern India. The state of Nagaland in India, with Kohima the state capital and twelve other districts namely, Kohima, Dimapur, Mokokchung, Wokha, Zunheboto, Tuensang, Mon, Peren, Phek, Longleng, Kiphire and Noklak, is inhabited by 1.98 million population (Census 2011). However, as stated by Lotha (2016), unofficial estimates place the figure between 3.5 and 4 million. The reason for such a variation in the estimation is due to the fact that “an official census of the entire Naga population has not been taken owing to the ongoing political conflict and the inaccessibility of many areas, particularly in Myanmar. The present state of Nagaland covers an area of 16, 527 square kilometres. However, if the whole area of Naga inhabited area or the ‘Greater Nagalim’ is considered, the Nagas inhabit an area of about 120,000 square kilometres (www.nscnonline.org). According to oral traditions, Nagas migrated from Mongolia, and then through south-western China and Myanmar into their present territory of habitation. Except for some groups who live in Assam, the Nagas inhabit a contiguous territory, though they and their land continue to remain divided between India and Myanmar (west of the Chindwin River bordering the Kachin state and Sagaing state). Within India, the Nagas and their territory have

been carved into the states of Nagaland, Manipur (the four hill districts of Ukhrul, Senapati, Tamenglong and Chandel), north-east Arunachal, and Assam (North Cachal Hills, Mikir Hills, Golaghat, Lakhimpur and Sibsagar districts).

Thus, though the Nagas are officially recorded as settled in Nagaland, their place of habitation is divided among the four states of India, namely, Nagaland, Manipur, Arunachal and Assam, and in the neighbouring country of Myanmar's upper Sangaing division. Their area of inhabitation stretches across the international borders in Myanmar, stretching from "the Himalayas (China, Bhutan and Nepal), the Indian Ocean (Bangladesh) and the wide fluvial corridors of Brahmaputra, Chindwin and the Irrawaddy rivers" (Haksar and Hongray 2019: 7). On the basis of such an explanation the Naga nationalists refer to Naga-inhabited territory in Myanmar as Eastern Nagaland; the Naga-inhabited territory in Arunachal, Assam and Nagaland as Western Nagaland and the Naga-inhabited areas within Manipur as Southern Nagaland (ibid: 9).

The Naga community of the state of Nagaland comprises tribes like Aos, Angamis, Sumis, Lotha, Kongyak, Chakhesangs, Yimchunger, Sangtams, Khiamniungam, Zeliang, Pochuri, Phom, Changs and many other sub-tribes. Each of these tribes has their own distinct language, customs, traditions, attires and political systems but "marked by commonness in their institutions, social structures, polity, descent system and oral traditions" (Haksar and Hongray 2019: 9). However, there is a debate on the exact number of tribes included within the Naga nation. "In a publication called *Naga National Rights and Movement* brought out by the Publicity and Information Department of the Naga National Council in 1993, eighty-four tribes are listed as belonging to the Naga nation of which twenty-seven are from Myanmar. The Naga Hoho, the apex body of the Nagas brought out a 'White Paper on Naga Integration' (May 2002) in which they listed a total of sixty-six tribes, some of which were spread across the international border either in India or Myanmar. However, they have in their claim added a caveat: out of the sixty-six tribes, fifty per cent are subject to confirmation" (ibid: 9).



Source: www.nscnonline.org

A Brief History of the Naga Freedom Movement

The Nagas have consistently maintained that they constitute a separate and independent nation and have been fighting for the cause of Naga identity and freedom as a sovereign nation. Many have traced the genesis of the Naga resistance movement either to the formation of the Naga Club in 1918 or the submission of memorandum to the Simon Commission in 1929 or the struggle with India since 1947. However, the Naga nationalists trace the beginning of Naga political resistance against incursion into their territory to the time when the Tai-Ahoms invaded the Naga territory in 1228 AD. Primarily the conflict between the Ahoms and Nagas was often over control of salt wells located in the land of the Nagas (ibid: 13-14). This was followed by a period of British

colonial rule, where the British sent a military expedition against the Nagas which was strongly resisted by the Nagas.

The dawning of political consciousness among the Nagas can perhaps be traced to the formation of the Naga Club in 1918 by those Nagas who went to France as a part of the Labour Corps during the First World War (1914-1918). At the time of its inception this club was rather social in character but in course of time it eventually developed a political outlook and provided the foundation for the Naga nationalist movement. Thus, in 1929 when the Simon Commission visited India to study the constitutional reform, the Naga Club submitted a memorandum to the Commission. In the memorandum, they requested that the British Government safeguard the rights and interests of the Nagas against all encroachment from other people more advanced than they by securing the Naga area from the Reform Scheme and placing it directly under its own protection. Among other requests, the memorandum also clearly stated the intent of the Nagas to be left alone when the British left India: "We Nagas should not be thrust to the mercy of the people who could never have conquered us themselves and to whom we were never subjected; but leave us alone to determine for ourselves as in ancient times" (Naga Club 1929) (Lotha 2016: 15-16). There was even a proposed idea for a Crown Colony (1941) where "a civil administrative unit comprising the Hill Areas along the north and east frontiers of Assam and taking in as well the similar areas in Burma itself". However, when this did not materialise, the Coupland Plan (1946) according to which the Government of India and Burma were to share a responsibility for the Trust Territory was proposed. However, the Nagas opposed both the ideas and insisted that "the moment the British would go from India, it (the British) too would have to leave Nagaland, and they (the Nagas) should receive back their sovereignty. But the idea that the Nagas could be on their own was unacceptable to the British Government" (ibid: 17).

The Naga nationalism was further strengthened with the formation of the Naga National Council in 1946. Sir Charles Pawsey, the Deputy Commissioner of Kohima formed the Naga Hills District Tribal Council (NHDTC) in April 1945 with the

purpose of uniting the Nagas and to help with the reconstruction of the war-torn Naga areas. The following year, on February 2, 1946, the NHDTC met at Wokha and changed its name to the Naga National Council (NNC). Though the NNC's immediate concern was to help the administration of the post-war socio-economic reconstructions, the Council soon became a dominantly political organisation "whose purpose now became to achieve the unification and solidarity of all Nagas under one government as their legitimate national aspirations and interests" (ibid: 19).

On February 20, 1947, the NNC sent a memorandum to Her Majesty's Government and the Government of India, specifically requesting the "setting up of an Interim Government of the Naga People, with financial provisions for a period of ten years, at the end of which the Naga people will be left to choose any form of government under which they themselves choose to live" (NNC, Khadao Papers, quoted in Lotha 2016: 21). However, the British Government were not convinced with the appeals of the Nagas and insisted that the Naga Hills be part of British India. Accordingly, on June 26, 1947, Sir Akbar Hydari, the Government of Assam was sent to Kohima to persuade the Nagas to give up their demands for a separate nation on the grounds that it would not be feasible. Following a series of meetings from 27th-29th June, the Nine-point Hydari Agreement was signed for a period of ten years, at the end of which "the Naga National Council would 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 arrived at" (Hydari Agreement quoted in Lotha 2016: 23).

The signing of the Hydari Agreement gave an impetus to the Naga idea of freedom, and on August 14, 1947, the NNC declared the Naga independence. A cable was also sent to the United Nations General Secretary informing him that the "Nagas will be independent. Kindly put on record that Nagas will be independent. Discussions with India are being carried out on to that effect, Nagas do not wish to accept (the) Indian Constitution. The rights of the Nagas must prevail regardless of size" (Naga National Council, Unpublished Manuscript, quoted in Lotha 2016: 23). But the

Indian government remained firm in its position not to recognise the Naga independence. Thus, further negotiations between the Naga leaders and their Indian counterparts continued. And on November 3, 1949, when a three-man delegation, representatives of the Indian government were sent to Shillong to reiterate the implementation of the Nine-point Hydari Agreement. The Naga delegation was “bluntly informed that there was no Agreement made with the Nagas” (Lotha 2016: 24). Later on at a meeting held on December 30, 1949, The Naga National Council resolved “to establish at the earliest time a Separate Sovereign State of Nagaland” in fulfilment to the aspiration of the Naga tribes represented in the Naga National Council”.

The refusal of the Indian government to acknowledge the appeals of the Nagas, eventually led the Nagas to hold a voluntary plebiscite on the issue of Naga independence, the information of which was sent to the President along with an invitation to the Indian Government to send observers. Accordingly on May 16, 1951, a plebiscite was conducted where all the Nagas, both men and women, from 16 years and upwards voted in favour of Naga Independence, a remarkable figure of 99.9 per cent voted in favour of the stand. Following this the NNC made an effort to inform the Indian Government of the Plebiscite results through Jairan Das Daulatram, the Governor of Assam but he refused (ibid: 27).

The non-recognition of the Nagas as a separate nation by the Indian Government and the reiteration by the Nagas of their longstanding demand for independence consequently led to a war like situation in the Nagas areas. It was characterised by “Nehru’s ‘hard and swift’ policy of militarisation and violence” (ibid: 29). As the Indo-Naga conflict continued, the Nagas were growing weary with the continual thrust of violence and atrocities being perpetrated by the Indian Army. As the struggle continued, the leaders of the Naga People’s Convention entered into a negotiation with Nehru, whereby, the Sixteen-Point Agreement was signed which led to the creation of Nagaland as the sixteenth state of India on December 1, 1963. The terms of the Agreement provided that “the Naga state would comprise the Naga Hills District and the Tuensang Frontier Division, with added provisions that contiguous

Naga areas would later form part of the state of Nagaland” and the State of Nagaland was given special provisions under Article 371A of the Indian Constitution. The special provision is as follows:-

- (1) Notwithstanding anything in this Constitution,
 - (a) No Act of parliament in respect of-
 - (i) Religious or social practices of the Nagas,
 - (ii) Naga customary law and procedure,
 - (iii) Administration of civil and criminal justice involving decisions according to Naga customary law,
 - (iv) Ownership and transfer of land and its resources, shall apply to the State of Nagaland unless the Legislative Assembly of Nagaland by a resolution so decided.

However, the special provisions could not fulfil the demands of the Nagas to exist as a unified and independent nation. The entire Naga population was and still remains divided among the four states of Nagaland, Manipur, Assam and Arunachal in India and in the Kachin and Sagiang states of Myanmar. As such the tension between the Nagas and the Indian government continued, and the conflict between the two followed. At this juncture, the Naga Baptist Church Council (NBCC) initiated a move to bring about a cease-fire between the Nagas and the Indian Government by establishing a Peace Mission. Jayaprakash Narayan, Michael Scott and B. P. Chaliha were selected as members of the mission and on September 6, 1964, a cease-fire was declared between the Federal Government of Nagaland (FGN) and the Government of India. The cease-fire agreement was signed by Governor Vishnu Sahay, representing the Government of India, and Zashie Huire, Biseto Medom and L.Z. Zhenito representing the FGN.

The undertakings that have been given by each side for the period of the cease-fire (one month in the first instance) are as follows:

- The Security forces will not undertake-
 - (a) Jungle operation;
 - (b) Raiding of camps of the underground;
 - (c) Patrolling beyond one thousand yards of security posts;

- (d) Searching of villages;
- (e) Aerial action;
- (f) Arrests; and
- (g) Imposition of labour by way of punishment.

The Federal Government of Nagaland also undertakes to suspend:

- (a) Sniping and ambushing;
- (b) Imposition of fines;
- (c) Kidnapping and recruitment;
- (d) Sabotage activities;
- (e) Raiding and firing at security posts, towns and administrative centres; and
- (f) Moving with arms in towns, villages and administrative centres, wherever there were security posts and approaching 1,000 (one thousand) yards of the security posts (ibid: 32-33).

Accordingly six rounds of talks were held between the Nagas and the Government of India, but the already wide rift between the Nagas and the Government of India broadened, where the Nagas were insistent with the demand for “their birth right to independence” while the Government of India was adamant on the inclusion of the Nagas within the Indian Union. This made it impossible for the two negotiating parties to arrive at a resolution (ibid: 35). As the tussle between the Nagas and the Indian Government continued, the Indira Gandhi led government declared a state of National Emergency on June 26, 1975 that covered the entire state of India. Thus, President’s Rule was imposed in Nagaland and operations by the Indian army started and many nationalists, sympathisers and suspects were jailed. During this period, some of the members of NNC without the consent of the senior leaders signed the infamous Shillong Accord with the Indian Government, on November 11, 1975, whereby they agreed to accept the Constitution of India without any conditions. Further, the Undergrounds agreed to surrender all arms and ammunitions. However, as this Accord was signed just by a few without the consent of the Nagas, it was formally rejected and denounced as

a sell-out of Nagas' rights on the Naga National Assembly held on August 15-16, 1976. The Shillong Accord was the beginning of division among the nationalists leading to incessant killings and fighting among the Nagas. The rift between the Nagas and the violence that ensued leading to the division between the Accordist and the non-Accordist, further split up the nationalist into NNC and NSCN (Nationalist Socialist Council of Nagaland).

The NSCN was thus formed on January 30, 1980 under the leadership of Isak Chishi Swu, Thuingaleng Muivah and S.S. Khaplang with the objective to continue fighting for the Naga freedom. However, eight years later, Swu, Muivah and Khaplang fell out over continuation of the Ceasefire Agreement with the Government of India and over the ensuing struggle for leadership. And on April 1988, Khaplang and his supporters attacked the NSCN camp, which subsequently led to his expulsion from NSCN. This resulted in the splitting of NSCN into two factions: NSCN (I-M) under Isak and Muivah with its headquarters in Bangkok, Thailand and Hebron Camp in Nagaland and NSCN (K) under the leadership of Khaplang, with its headquarters in Myanmar. Today the NSCN (K) is further split into NSCN (Khaplang), NSCN (Unification) and NSCN (Reformation).

During these decades of struggle there have been numerous talks, engagements and meets between the Indian Government and the Naga National Workers. Recently, a Framework Agreement was signed between NSCN (I-M) and the Government of India on August 3, 2015. It was signed by R.N., Ravi, the Indian Government's Interlocutor for Naga Peace Talks on behalf of the Government of India and Lt. Isak Chishi Swu, Chairman NSCN (I-M) and Thuingaleng Muivah, General Secretary, NSCN (I-M) signed on behalf of the NSCN (I-M) in the presence of the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The historic framework was signed after over 80 rounds of talks between the government and various stakeholders, but the exact details of the agreement have not been revealed. In a statement after the agreement was signed the Government of India said it 'recognised the unique history, culture and positions of the Nagas and their sentiments and aspirations. The NSCN understood and appreciated the Indian

political system and governance’. Following this, another agreement was signed with the Working Committee of Seven Naga National Political Groups (NNPGs) on November 17, 2017. On October 24, 2019, R.N. Ravi, the interlocutor met the leaders of NSCN (I-M) to discuss the possible ways of finding an ‘honourable’ solution for the Nagas so as to come to a final agreement by the deadline of October 31, 2019. However, the talk remain inconclusive and the final peace deal could not be concluded but was further extended for further consultations with all the stakeholders.

The Role of Naga Women

“Many women in more civilised parts of India may well envy the women of Naga Hills their high status and their free and happy life; and if you measure the cultural level of the people by the social position and personal freedom of its women, you will think twice before looking down on the Nagas as savages” (Haimendorf, 1939:101). These observations of Prof. Haimendorf clearly reflect a lot on the status of women in Naga society. It goes to show how they are relatively well placed compared to many other women of a different society.

Throughout her life as a daughter, a sister, a wife and a mother, the Naga women plays an important role in the family as well as in the community life. They are considered as wise partners, whose guidance and opinions are regarded highly by their husbands. As mothers, they have a significant role to play in the family. They take the responsibility of looking after their children, teach them social etiquette and moral conduct, take care of the elders and make sure that the needs of the family are met with satisfaction. Besides taking care of the children and the elders at home, most of the domestic affairs are in the mother’s hands. Cooking food for the family, washing and cleaning, marketing for the family, looking after the kitchen garden which is a source of dietary supplement for the family, making sure that the children are ready for their schools in time, looking after their studies and needs, helping out their husbands, maintaining the household and ensuring the needs of their family, all these are the responsibility of the women. With

their wise and efficient management, the family earns respect and reputation in the society.

Besides their familial responsibilities, Naga women also contribute in various measures to the social life of the community. In case of the Naga women the coming of Christianity and the introduction of education has been a liberating influence for the Naga women. Unlike the olden days where in accordance to the tenets of their traditional religion they were mostly excluded from religious ceremonies, they now take an active part in different church activities. The introduction of education has further added to the advancement of their cause. Today, the female literacy rate stands at an impressive rate of 62 per cent. Education has helped immensely in ending their isolation and opened up contacts with other societies. Today many educated Naga women have made significant achievements in various fields and are working as administrators, entrepreneurs, educators, etc. They have also formed themselves into various organisations through which they voice their opinions on important social issues. Naga women's organisations, like for instance the Naga Mothers' Association, All Naga Women's Federation, organisations or forums which have been addressing issues like women's rights and protection, eradication of alcoholism and drug abuse, and promoting active participation in the socio-political sphere. The various Naga women's organisations have also been actively involved as peace negotiators between the Government of India, the Naga National workers and the Naga people when it comes to the matter of political discussion for the Naga movement.

However, at the same time despite all these achievements and advancements made Naga women seem to occupy a perplexing position in the society. Though the women appear to enjoy a certain degree of freedom and respect in the society yet at the same time their voice and participation in the wider social arena are unheard and invisible. The reason for such disparity becomes more apparent when one engages with the society at a deeper level. Naga society being patriarchal in structure, there is a sharp distinction between men and women regarding their rights, roles and status. Inheritance is principally a male domain; no

female can inherit the family ancestral property, except in some exceptional cases where landed property is given to the daughter as a marriage gift. However, any gifts such as agricultural land and houses given to their daughters should not be an ancestral property that has been passed down the male line but should be acquired or bought by the parents themselves. In case there is no male in the household, the property goes to the nearest among the clan members. This customary practice still continues in the Naga society. Women enjoy considerable autonomy with respect to decision-making and management of their households. They even have specific roles assigned in cultural ceremonies and rituals. But when it comes to discussing and making important decisions for the community they are debarred. Even in the governing system like the Village Council only male members can participate and no women are allowed to be members. Moreover, the patriarchal system followed by them has led to gendered division of labour between the men and women in the Naga society. Women are relegated to the domestic sphere of production, whereas men take over the more economically productive sphere.

In spite of occupying such a paradoxical position in society, the Naga women have always been vocal and have stood firm for their family, community and nation. They have suffered at the hands of outsiders but have steadfastly withstood the sufferings. As a mother, as a sister, as a daughter, the Naga woman cares, loves and protects the nation, takes care of her brothers, supports them and loves her motherland and sacrifices her life for her motherland. Instances of such sacrifices and hardships experienced by the Naga women are evident in the following narratives of atrocities committed against the Naga Women in the Naga Struggle for Self-determination (Source: NSWON Silver Jubilee Souvenir, 2006):

1954, 15th November: *Mrs. Supongmenla of Yongpang Village was pushed to the ground and dragged around pulling her long hair by the Indian Army. Weeping she begged for mercy but the political officer who was on command scalped her while she was still alive and then chopped off her head.*

1955, 26th April: Mrs. Pangilila, age 21 years of Mokokchung village, was pregnant with her first born child. The Assam Army beat her up and forced her to come out from her home, and was forced to give birth in public. The child so born could not survive because of the harm it incurred and due to the cold.

1955, 14th May: Mrs. Longrinungla (40 years) and Mrs. Nungsangkala (20 years) were brutally raped by the Assam Armed Police.

1955, 9th September: The Indian jawans along with the Assam Police entered the paddy fields of Mokokchung village and destroyed everything. After which Mrs. Nungslemla (24 years), Mrs. Chiningyangla (26 years), Mrs. Zulutemla, Miss Jentiyangla (14 years) and Miss Mapumenla were selected from among the women who were working in the paddy fields and brutally raped in a hut nearby.

1957, 22nd February: In Ungma village, the Indian Army under the command of Maj. Trelok Singh arrested some villagers including a woman named Mayangkokla who was arrested. They were beaten up and taken half naked to the church, and when they reached the church compound, Mayangkokla was stripped naked and raped by the soldiers one after the other in full view of the villagers. When the soldiers had finished, Kikamongba and Mayangkokla were dragged inside the church and forced to have sexual intercourse on the floor of the church. Later, they were taken to Mokokchung camp and kept there for a month, where Mayangkokla was raped every night and sometimes during the day time by the Indian soldiers.

1957, 12th July: When the villagers of Longmisa village went for cultivation the Indian Army ambushed them and Mrs. Takamongla was shot dead. Later all the women who passed by the path were brutally raped.

1959, 5th May: In Longmisa village the Indian Army selected women and raped them in their camp the whole day. Those who were not taken were forced to eat chilly powder.

1960, 6th September: In Lophory village, the Indian Army jawans from Sakhaba Brigade herded men and women together and they were separated in two rooms. All women, not sparing even pregnant women were raped.

1960: Miss N. Heshia (20 years) was shot dead by the Sikh Regiment at a place between Khuzama and Mao gate.

1968: The CRPF under the command of Major Ram Singh tortured the villagers of Tungjoy and Karong for two days. When the women tried to resist and tussled with the armed security personnel they were beaten up severely.

1969, 12th July: Three women Mrs. K. Losa (35 years), Mrs. K. Lidjiisa (33 years) and Mrs. K. Ashipro (34 years) were attacked and molested with attempted rape in the jungles near Mao gate by the CRPF jawans.

1970: 7th Maratha Indian Army physically harassed and tortured innocent Mao villagers and three women Miss A.Besa, Miss O. Kholia and Mrs. N. Ela-a were sexually harassed and molested.

1970, 9th December: In Cheswezy village, 18 girls and 9 married women were mass raped by the Indian troops and 53 women were molested.

1971, July: Four minor girls were taken inside the Yenkheli Baptist Church Nagaland and were raped on the pulpit of the church by the 1st Maratha Regiment soldiers.

1971, 24th July: Several women were raped and molested by the Indian Army at Songsong and Shajaoba village under Moa district.

1972, 12th December: The Indian Army intruded into the house of Mr. Khulus and raped his 14-years-old daughter Miss Kivili at gun point.

1972, 14th December: The Indian army ransacked every house in Hebolimi village and Mrs Saghali Shohe Swu was publicly beaten and all their properties were looted.

1972, 24th December: Miss Buangya (19 years), Miss Ngoangya (17 years), Miss Woanyu (17 years), Miss Ebung (17 years), Miss Joya (15 years) and Miss Baunya (16 years) from Longchang village were taken to Champang where they were mercilessly raped by the Indian Army.

1973, 16th January: The Indian Army entered the house of Mr Kivikhu, the Chairman of Ighanumi village and his two daughters Miss Vikali (16 years) and Miss Hokhuli (12 years) were raped at the bayonet points.

1973, 8th February: The 7th Jat Regiment under Lt. Choudhary attacked Sakraba village and committed mass atrocities where Miss

Vezohulu (5 years), Miss Khunuhulu (18 years) and Mrs Yiephutsula (65 years) were physically assaulted.

1973, February: The Indian Army forcefully detained Miss Jamya (18 years) of Lonchang village, kept her handcuffed for 16 days and took her to different army camps where she was repeatedly raped and was left in a critical condition.

1973, 25th February: The 4th Kumaon Regiment under the command of Capt. Jansbir Singh came to Hebolomi and committed sacrilege in the Church by using it as a camp. They raped Mrs. Pukhalu after knocking her husband unconscious, sexually assaulted Mrs. Yetovi while her husband was sent to bring alcohol for the army and also attacked Mrs Miyeli and Mrs Hosheli.

1973, 4th April: The Indian Army arrived as imposters demanding food from the Women's Society of Yongam and then inhumanely assaulted Miss Ayong, Miss Wongang, Miss Bungu and Miss Engu and took them to Longleng concentration camp.

1973, 12th May: The Dogra Regiment forced Miss Wongngoi (20 years), Miss Bauuh (19 years), Miss Wanje (20 years) and Miss Longngoi (18 years), who were members of Yonshie village women society to surrender under duress and further, Miss Wongngoi was detained and raped by two Indian Army Captains.

1973, 2nd June: Mrs Nouvuo, Chairperson of Southern Region Women's Society, home was ransacked at Phesama. She was asked to pay Rs. 10,000 or face exile in an Indian prison. She was also forced to sign a 'surrender' form and was under constant surveillance.

1973, 6th June: Mrs Ngumvuu, d/o of Vimedo of Siyhama was arrested and tortured for being part of the village women's society.

1973, 14th June: The Indian Paramilitary plundered a grain store house of Mrs Visue of Nerhema and sprayed rat poison on other food provisions.

1974, 4th March: Miss Rose of Ngaprum village of Ukhrul district committed suicide after she was raped in front of the village elders by Major Pundir and Capt. Negi of 95 BSF.

1974, 5th March: A group of army officials under Maj. Brahm Prakash of 95 BSF tortured and raped Miss Nagashinhla of Grihang village.

1974, 6th March: Mrs Paothingla and Miss Shiningla of Grihang village were taken away by two Indian soldiers under the order of Deputy Commandant Dharam Prakash. Mrs Paothingla was taken to the jungle, her garments were forcibly removed at gun point, after severely beating her and pulling her hair she was raped.

1979, 18th May: Mrs Januo from Kohima village was raped by the Indian Army.

1981, 9th July: The army personnel of 17 Raj Rifles posted near Mao Gate molested Miss D. Kapesa (26 years) and attempted to rape her.

1982, 25th February: K. Pangamla, K. Chareiphi, Ruth and Zingnila from Nungbi Khullen were sexually assaulted by the Indian Army. They were forced to undress and even their pubic hair was plucked as part of their torture. On the same day, Thotwonla, Thingthing and Khathingla were publicly molested and taken away by the army and were released after nearly two weeks. Two school girls Ngalangam and Ramthao from the same village were abducted by the Indian Army and 11 women from Paorei village were also taken away by the Indian Army.

1982: The 21st Sikh Regiment detained the entire villagers of Huining village including infants in a church without food and water. They were not even allowed to relieve themselves. They were kept in these conditions for two days.

1988, July: The 21st Assam Rifles physically assaulted the women folk of 30 surrounding villages around Oinam. They underwent forced labour and detention in the open space and three women were raped. Two women were forced to give birth in front of the Indian Army jawans during the 'Operation Bluebird'. Twenty-seven innocents were mercilessly killed, 300 persons tortured beyond life-form, 125 houses burnt down and another 112 houses dismantled, 6 schools and 10 churches were destroyed and properties worth more than Rs. 50, 79,000 were looted by the Indian Armies.

1989, 4th August: The 3rd Assam Rifles molested and attempted to rape an elderly woman, Mrs. N. Matia (55 years) near Pfukro, Mao gate.

1993, 15th August: Armed explosions took place at Ukhrul in the morning and the 20 Assam Rifles started indiscriminate firing on the Sunday Church goers, injuring 14 women with bullet injuries, 2 men

with bomb shrapnel and torturing 36 men. Moreover, the army doctors misbehaved with the victims of brutality. The victims were made to get up from their beds, lift their legs, spread their legs apart and made to stand for a long time and took photographs in such positions.

1994, 9th May: The Assam rifles bombarded the residential areas of Ukhrul village with 2 mortars injuring 100 children, men and women.

1994: Major Srivastava of 3 Assam Rifles along with his contingent hoarded the Shajouba villagers at Chitebu ground. They tortured the villagers, broke into their houses and robbed their valuables and attempted to molest 4 young women. Also a prayer group consisting of women, youth and elders from Khezakeno were waylaid and tortured at the same location.

1994, 27th December: The 16th Maratha Light Infantry shot dead 5 innocent civilians. Women, particularly the young girls were raped, molested and their clothes were stripped off and soaked in petrol and other inflammable chemicals to torch Mokochung Town where 6 more civilians were burnt alive, 48 buildings, 89 shops, 17 vehicles and 7 two wheelers were reduced to ashes in a 4-hour operation. There was a report of 16 cases of rape and molestation.

1995, 23rd January: The 15th Assam Rifles killed Mrs. H. Athing and injured her 3-month-old baby leading to amputation of the baby's right arm. Loina, a minor girl was also shot in the neck and hospitalised and kept in ICU at Akuloto, Zunheboto.

1995, 25th January: Mass evacuation of families by the 15th Kumaon Regiment from the vicinity of the Census Department Office at Kohima took place and they indiscriminately fired in the civilian areas leading to many men, women and children suffering from physical and psychological ailments.

1995, 23rd February: The 12th Assam Rifles fired indiscriminately in the heart of Wokha Town leading to the injury of two civilians including a minor girl aged 8 years.

1995, 5th March: Kohima town came under seige for 2 hours by the indiscriminate firing on the civilian areas by the 16th Rastriya Rifles, Assam Rifles and CRPFs. Seven persons including two minor girls one 3 ½ and the other 8 years old were killed, 22 persons injured by shrapnels and bullets, 15 physically assaulted and 22 person arrested and tortured.

Out of the total injured 14 were women victims. Moreover, the Indian soldiers prevented the doctors from attending to the injured.

1995, 8th-12th August: Five villages, namely Namtiram, Azuram, Saramba, Thuilon and Joute Pabram in Tamenglong district suffered violation of fundamental rights when the 21 Rajputna Rifles went berserk and looted their homes, tortured and sexually assaulted the women. The villagers were detained without food, except the civil administration and medical team from outside and the army demanded women in lieu of cash leaving many physically and psychologically wrecked.

1996, 2nd January: In Jessami, there was firing by the Indian Army where 63 persons were hospitalised, 2 Nepali women were raped and another woman, a mother was molested by shoving fingers and other objects into her vagina under the command of Capt. Ashwin Nayar.

1996, 11th March: Huishu villagers were used by the 20th Assam Rifles in exchange of fire between them and the NSCN. Miss Khachungla was made to cover Capt. Sharma with a Naga shawl from Poi post while reinforcing the Huishu post. About 103 dwelling houses and 19 granaries were burnt to ashes by the Indian soldiers.

1996 April: A 16-year-old girl was raped by the Indian Army in Wokha Town, threatened and offered Rs. 10000 to buy her silence.

1996 30th June: On 30th June at around 2:30 am, Ruknezonuo (18years) of Nerhema was shot dead by the 5 J&K Rifles at Chiphobozuo when she resisted molestation by the armies.

1996 31st July: The 20 Assam Rifles jawans ran amok in Viewland, Ukhrul Town. The jawans molested Miss T. Shimreiphi, Miss Awon and Miss Alan were attempted rape while their brother Ningshen was held at gun point and Mrs. Thaja who was pregnant was assaulted and attempted rape. Moreover, three minor girls on their way to buy medicine were cornered at Hotel Rin by some jawans and one woman got injured with the gunshots and many suffered from the army rampage.

1996 20th August: In Tseminyu, the 12 Assam Rifles butchered Mr. Akuku and three others and their wives, mothers and children (including a 7-day-old baby girl) were made to stand in the torrential rain watching their father's slain body. The village elders were detained for three days.

1997 30th March: The 15 Maratha Light Infantry molested and raped one minor girl while collecting firewood, two of her companions

could escape. About 7000 Ao women protested on 31st March and on 2nd April 1997, Sepoy K.Vilas Shendi was court martialled.

1997 28th June: In Mangmetong village, Mokokchung District, Miss Yanger (12 years) was shot on both legs by the 12 Madras Regiment, another minor was killed and two more persons were injured.

1997 15th October: The 11 JKLI committed cold blooded massacre of 9 innocent people which included 3 children and injured 3 others at Nungleiband, Nungba, Tamenlong district. Out of those killed and injured, 6 were innocent female victims.

2000 7th-12th August: Villagers of Tolloi, Kachai, Theiva, Tungshong, Khongdei and Ngari were harassed and there was random firing, frisking, threatening by the 20 Assam Rifles. Three minors Miss Ramyophy (12 years), Miss Tammila (14 years) and Miss Worngamla (12 years) along with scores of others were arrested and detained. Also 6 women from health programme workers of ICDS were detained at Tolloi.

2001 14th August: When the 'Human Chain Peace Rally' was held in Tadubi town where thousands of women and men from Moa areas and different Naga organisations in solidarity marched across the town, the soldiers of 3 Assam Rifles in civvies under Capt. K.K. Sharma opened indiscriminate firing on the peace rally and 3 persons were critically injured and many assaulted.

2005 6th August: Four women from Lanmlong Khullen were physically assaulted and verbally abused at Thangathel by the Indian soldiers. Mrs. Teshangphum, the mother of a lactating child, was seriously beaten.

2005 19th November: At Laungmai, the 38 Assam Rifles started indiscriminate firing at around 2 am leading to the killing of four civilians which included a 25-year-old mother and her 10-month-old baby boy.

Thus, the Naga women have suffered and are still living with fear for their lives, homes, families dear ones, community and nation. As such, Naga women have stood up to fight the injustices against their lives and essence of womanhood, to fight for those they have lost, to protect the Nagas and to defend their motherland.

The Women Cadres of the Nationalist Socialist Council of Nagalim (Isak-Muivah)

Since its inception, the women have played a crucial role in the Naga resistance movement. They have actively participated in both covert and overt operations. They have in their various capacities provided logistic support as effective couriers, informers, money collectors, intelligence gatherers, motivators, recruiters, trainers, medical aid and as prayer warriors and peace negotiators. Looking into the history of the contribution made by the women, during the time of the Naga Federal Government, the women members were known as the Naga Women's Federation. The Women's Society/ Organisations of all the Naga villages cooperated and gave their support to the Naga struggle for freedom. Given the support and diligent service of the womenfolk, the women were coordinated under the parent umbrella of GPRN-NSCN (I-M) as the National Socialist Women's Organisation of Nagalim (NSWON) within the civil wing and the Ladies' Unit within the military. However, all the women from both the civil and the military wings are members of NSWON by default. The significance of the Naga women cadres can be comprehended in the words of one of the Chinese officials when the Naga women joined the men for the first time for training in China *"now that the Naga women have also joined the resistance the Real Naga Movement has started"*.

(i) National Socialist Women's Organisation of Nagalim (NSWON):

The National Socialist Women's Organisation of Nagalim (NSWON) was formed on March 15, 1981 in the Tatar Hoho Session with the objective of providing a platform and registering the contribution of services of the Naga women in the struggle for the Naga nation. The working structure of the NSWON comprises the Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson, Secretary, Treasurer, Accountant and Executive Members. It opened up room for the Naga mothers and women to render their service for the nation and in the process sensitised the people about the Naga struggle. Thus, the NSWON functions with the objective of complementing and providing support to the overall political aspirations, ideology and philosophy of

the NSCN and strives for the emancipation, social upliftment and welfare of the Naga womenfolk in particular and women of all nations in general. It also works in tandem to preserve the uniqueness of Naga traditional and cultural heritage and combat against social evil, injustice, gender discrimination and human rights violation. As a strategic move to strengthen the organisation and mobilisation of the Naga people, the NSWON operate at two regional units, namely, Wung Tangkhul Region and Sumi Region in 1982 and in 1989 the Shephoumaramth Region was formed. It was centralised in 1992 but later Sumi Region and Shephoumaramth Region were revived on January 1, 2000.

- (ii) *Ladies' Unit*: The Ladies' Unit, the women's military wing of the NSCN (I-M) was formed on March 26, 1999. However, it is to be noted that even before a separate women's military unit was formed women were active participants in the different operations and fought shoulder to shoulder with their male counterparts to defend their motherland. Thus, the Ladies' Unit was introduced in recognition of the contributions made by the womenfolk in the Naga resistance movement. The cadres of the Unit undergoes training for two to six/seven months during which they are trained how to use arms and weapons, different tactics of war and survival skills. They are also provided proper education where they are taught the history of the nation, relations with the neighbouring states and countries, philosophy and ideology of the organisation. A distinctive feature of the Ladies' Unit is that only those who are unmarried can be a part of it. This is done keeping in mind the difficulty of balancing the family responsibilities she has as a wife, daughter-in-law and as a mother, and the need to diligently perform her duties and responsibilities as a soldier. However, if a woman from the cadre wants to get married she has to inform the authority and get a no objection from the office to relieve her from the military service. And once she gets married she is completely involved in the activities and tasks of the NSWON only.

Rationale Behind Joining the Naga Resistance Movement

To fathom what makes the woman leave the comfort of her home, her hearth for guns and “enter the dangerous world of clandestine lethal operations and embrace the uncertain life of an insurgent” (Sakena 2018: xvi) is to try to comprehend to what extent she is willing to sacrifice for her people and the nation. For every individual the motivation or reason behind her decision differs. For one of the senior-most members of the organisation, her helplessness when her home and her village was burnt to ashes and all her villagers tortured by the Indian armies for days sowed the seed in her to protect her nation and fight for the rights of the Nagas. As she said, *‘I was just nine years old when the Indian army came and raided our village, and set fire to our homes and granaries, I could not do anything but hide behind a tree, trembling and stifling my sobs’*. This was the ninth time the Indian army has set her village Shesulimi (a Sumi-Naga village) ablaze just within a short span period between 1963-64 to crush the ongoing Naga resistance movement against becoming a part of India which was spearheaded by the Naga National Council under the leadership of Angami Zapu Phizo. This incident was not the last for her. In 1964, when the Indian army came to her village again, all the villagers were grouped together in one house and made to stand day and night. Her mother had given birth just 5 days back, but she was arrested since she was the Chairperson of the village’s Women’s Society. As they were all huddled together, and the children started crying out of hunger and tiredness, the army gave some time to the villagers to cook, so her father went home and cooked for the family. As they were about to have the food the army jawans came knocking at their door. So her father put all the food inside the pot and along with the food send the children outside through the backdoor. She peeped through the door and saw her father fall as the jawans stabbed him with the butt of the gun and dragged him outside. And at that moment *“when I saw my father fall I felt a searing pain deep inside my heart and thought only if I were a boy I could have fought back the army but I*

am just a girl". The powerlessness she felt against the Indian army made her decide to join the Naga freedom struggle once she grew up, to put an end to such gruesome acts. It was not only such incidents but her parents who were active in the Naga Resistance Movement had an influence on her. As she said, "My mother was the Chairperson of our Village Women's Society so from the early hours till late at night she would be working, cooking for the hundreds of Naga Army, arranging places for them to stay, attending meetings, etc. Sometimes she did not even get enough time to look after us, her own family as she was busy helping out the resistance movement. And my father was a Dak Runner (similar to postman), so even at midnight he used to leave when he had to convey important information. So I was introduced to the Naga struggle from an early age through my parents and I knew this was the movement I wanted to work for". And as she promised herself when she was just nine years old, on September 21, 1974 when she was just nineteen years old, she joined the Naga freedom movement as an active member and there is no stopping her till date.

Another member of the NSCN (I-M) recounts how as a young girl she experienced the Kuki-Naga conflict, Meitei-Naga conflict and the conflict with the Indians. As she narrates *"My village (Muirang village) is situated just 30 kms away from Imphal, Manipur. I was still very young but I remember the conflict with the Kukis, Meiteis over our land and the conflict with the Indian army. I studied till Class X and could not get proper education because of the Army operation which interrupted our school routine daily. Though I was not aware of the many issues when I was young, I still remember the way we were treated, it was very insulting".* Due to such issues, and to stand for justice for her people she joined NSCN (I-M) on June 3, 1985. It is more than three decades since she started her fight and she is still willing to fight till the last for the Nagas.

The women cadres have also joined the movement as they consider it as a calling for them. For instance, a Major in the Ladies' Unit states that when she was young she heard about the Naga Movement but since she was staying in the school's boarding accommodation, she did not have much idea about it. But as she graduated and joined her postgraduate studies, she

came to know the details of the movement through discussions with her friends and joined the movement in December 2002. Apart from the influence from their friends who had already joined the movement, mobilisation by the Naga Army also had an impact on the decision of the female cadres. In another case, a 24-year-old Sergeant Major, who joined the Ladies' Unit in 2017, states that she joined the movement because her father and brother requested her to join. *"At first I did not have any plan to join the Naga Resistance Movement, instead I was planning to go for my further studies. But right after my graduation, my father and brother came to meet me and told me to join the movement representing the women of our community. I flatly refused and told them I had plans to go for further study but my father again requested me to come and serve the nation. My father was a sincere and diligent national worker who had served the nation selflessly all these years and since he requested me to walk on the same path as him, with his full support, I agreed to join. Since the time I joined here, I don't have any regret for listening to my father"*.

The young ladies also joined because of their own personal interest. As in the case of a 19-year-old woman cadre, who states that *"I was very interested to join the Naga freedom movement since my childhood days. I used to tell my parents that one day I would join the Naga Movement. When the time came for me to join the movement, my parents told me to continue my studies but I told them I had to join the movement. My parents could not stop because they knew this was my interest. After I joined, I underwent training. For many others the training period was a time of struggle, but for me since I was very interested the training period seemed just like a few weeks and it just flew by"*.

There are also young women coming from the neighbouring states and areas. A young Ollo-Naga lady from Arunachal Pradesh came all the way at the beginning of 2019 to join NSCN (I-M). She was at first a member of the Eastern Naga National Government (ENNG), an organisation which is fighting for the rights of the Nagas in Arunachal Pradesh. The discrimination she faced both at home and outside made her stand up for her people. She shares that she mostly studied outside Arunachal Pradesh and during this period when *"I studied in Darjeeling and Kolkata, I faced a lot*

of discrimination. We were treated as second class citizens. Back home in Arunachal also, the Nocte and Olo-Nagas faced an identity crisis as we are neither Apatanis nor Atis, so we are completely left out economically, educationally, socially and politically. And during my stay in Kolkata, one of my friends told me about ENNG (Eastern Naga National Government) and how it was fighting for our own people so I left home and joined the organisation. We went to Burma and there we were trained by the Kachin Independent Army (KIA) and during my stay there in Buma I saw that Nagas in Burma were badly treated by the Burmese and they were in a worse condition than us. During this period, I had been following NSCN (I-M) through social media and other alternatives, and since I felt that this was the right movement for all Nagas, I left ENNG and joined NSCN (I-M).

Also, there are women who have given up what they were doing to serve the nation. A young lady who was pursuing her PhD and working in World Vision, in New Delhi, left her job there and joined the movement. As she states, *"When I was in Delhi, many of my friends were not politically conscious of our Naga struggle, and that was really painful because there are many young Nagas like them. And though I was working in such a reputed organisation I was still not happy, I felt like something was missing in my life. So I prayed for a long time after which, I resigned from my job there and came and joined the movement. When I joined this movement, I could get the sense of satisfaction and felt I had come home"*.

Thus, the Naga women have joined the struggle due to experiences that they have suffered at the hands of the Indian Army. For some it was their friends who influenced them, for others it was out of their interest and for some because of their own understanding that they had to work for the nation. However different the motivation may be for these women, all of them had a shared sense of connectivity based on their sheer will to stand for the right of the Nagas and the love they had for their motherland.

Experiences of the Women Cadres

When the women cadres joined the movement they came with a purpose, with a heart to stand for the right and freedom of the

Nagas till the end. For some they struggled for more than four-five decades, for some ten to twenty decades, for some they had just joined freshly but they had all gone through pleasant as well as unpleasant experiences. These women had fought in the battles, worked as medical aids, stayed in the interior areas of Nagaland as teachers and pastors. They were involved in clandestine operations, worked as informers, carriers of arms and ammunitions, gave cover to their male counterparts and were also posted in Ali Commands (Foreign Missions).

During the years of the commencement of the Naga Resistance Movement, there were extensive military operations by the Indian army to end the Naga insurgency movement. It was during this period grouping of villages by the Indian army took place, where villagers from different villages were taken and confined together in one village, or all the villagers were kept in one particular area in the village and made to stand day and night, in the rain and sun without food or water. Not only that, the Indian army also looted their properties, set the whole village ablaze and burnt it down to ashes. Many of the villagers, young and old had to survive in the jungles for months without food or shelter, hiding from the brutality of the Indian army. In the meantime, the national workers were battling against the enemy forces. Thus, for the senior women cadres they had been through the many hardships because during their times the conflict between the Nagas and the Indians was at its worst. For instance, the experience of one of the senior-most women shared by her, *"If I have to tell you my story, it's a very long story and talking about it is very painful. Words cannot express the deep pain and hurt I still feel, it's very difficult and painful to discuss it. We have no proper arms and ammunitions with us to fight the brutality of the Indian Army, the guns that we have were mostly old guns which were used during the Second World War. On top of that, we did not have any formal training in war skills. So when the men were shooting at the enemies, we loaded the guns for them, collected the guns of our dead soldiers since we had very few, carried the wounded and took care of them. As the resistance continued, seeing the contributions of the womenfolk the leaders realised the imminent importance to train the womenfolk and decided to send us to China, Pakistan and Bangladesh*

for trainings. I have been to China twice. My first journey to China started in December 1974 and reached China only in August 1975. Our group was the second batch and was led by Mr. Isak Chishi Swu. The nine-month long journey to China by foot was rattled with gunfires and shooting from dawn till dusk, so many of our comrades lost their lives, some were killed during the ambush by the Indian army and the Burmese army, some died out of hunger and thirst, some because of sickness, so out of 375 of us only thirteen (13) of us could cross the India-Myanmar border. And out of the thirteen (13) only five (5) of us were women, but unfortunately when we reached Chindwin, there was an ambush by the Burmese army and one of my lady-friends was killed in the ambush. As we were undergoing training in China, we heard the news of the Shillong Accord. The Chinese officials also informed us and as we were getting ready to return they gave each member of the Naga Army arms and ammunitions enough for our own self-defence but not more than that. We started from China in December 1975 and reached Eastern Nagaland in February/March 1976. But after staying for a few months, we heard the news that we had to go back again so we started the second trip to China in September 1976, underwent training in arms and ammunitions, medical training, and political classes and returned back and reached Eastern Nagaland in February 1977. The journey to China was a difficult period, because I lost many of my friends in that period, every step of ours was surrounded by enemies, we went on without food and water at a stretch of 5 to 6 days. Sometimes it was too painful because some of our companions became too sick. So we left the little rice and water that we had carried as our ration though we knew that they would not be able to eat it. Our journey was full of hardship and when we reached China our feet were bleeding because we walked barefoot for days in rain and sun and all our clothes were tattered. When we returned the journey was more tough because we were carrying semi-rifles, pistols, rocket shells, and different arms and ammunitions, carrying that heavy load which reached down to my knees, I have to move fast because we were attacked by the armies". Her hardship did not stop there. While staying in the Khamniungan area in Eastern Nagaland, working there as a teacher at the same sharing the message of Christianity with the people her first husband was murdered by the same people whom they had helped convert to

Christianity after instigation by the Shillong Accordist. They also tried to kill her but she was able to escape from their clutches, and till today she works tirelessly for the Naga nation.

Another woman from the cadre who retired as a Captain but is still serving in NSWON also mentioned how she had to teach the children in the difficult situation. She worked as a teacher in the Mission School opened by the national workers. During an attack by the enemies, *"we made the students write their exam in the jungle with bullets hailing down on us because if they did not write the exam, they would lose one academic year which would be a great loss for them"*. While staying in Eastern Nagaland, *"we had to shift from one place to another as we couldn't stay in one place for long because the Burmese Army kept attacking us. The 1988 crisis was the worst and the hardest period for me because it was the fighting between our Naga brothers and sisters. We were hiding in the forest without food or water for days. There were monkeys in the forest. So we used to wait below the trees and when the monkeys jumped to the next tree we would take the food gathered by them and have it. If I think about it now, I still feel like crying because I saw with my own eyes and experienced it, my Naga brothers fighting against one another and killing each other."* She also talks about the role of the Naga women in establishing the headquarters in Bangkok. The women's cadres, *"our seniors used to sleep in the forest without food and during the day they came out to the towns and cities and worked in the hotels, washing clothes and doing dishes, they worked as housemaids and gradually when they gained the trust of their employers they revealed their true identity and shared with them our Naga struggle. This was how they convinced the Thai people to support and help our cause and because of them only the Thai people helped us and we could open the headquarters there in Bangkok"*.

She also highlights the role of the Naga women cadres as being involved first in the medical area, *"because the care of a woman is different, we are better caretakers and softer in such skills. Earlier, we did not have any medicine. So all we did was clean and bandage the wounded and pray for the sick. Dr. Unice the medical in-charge used to pray and apply the herbs or prepare the herbal concoctions for the sick"*.

Secondly, women play a very important role in education. *"Wherever the women cadres are assigned, they impart education to the people, they teach them how to read and write, teach them about cleanliness and hygiene, teach them how to take care of their health and teach them about helping each other."*

Thirdly, the women's cadres have an important role to play in the Mission because *"we can make the people understand our Christian way of life and make them understand what 'Nagaland for Christ' means. Also prayer is very important for us, so we should unceasingly pray for our nation"*.

Fourthly, women also play a pivotal role in mobilisation. *"We can easily approach the villagers, talk to them and convince them about the importance of our struggle"*.

Fifthly and *"most importantly we have to empower our womenfolk, especially those from the rural areas and work together for the upliftment of the Naga women"*

Thus, the Naga women cadres contribution is much more than just fighting in the battle zone, or going for a security command, carrying out a mission, or going to places which are inaccessible for men, or transporting weapons or conveying messages, or shielding the male cadres or getting information about the enemies.

The younger women cadres may not have experienced the trials their seniors underwent but they also carry their own stories. One of the common experiences all these young women underwent is the misconception the civil society has about the women cadres of NSCN. For instance, a 21-year-old lady narrates how after she joined NSCN (I-M). *"All my friends started deserting me. And when I went back home after my training, my friends and neighbours started talking behind my back and even started calling me names which was very hurting"*. Another young lady also expresses how frustrated she felt when *"my relatives and friends started comparing and saying that now my family must be rich and have lots of money because I had joined NSCN. But I did not join the movement for money. I joined because I wanted to work for my nation"*. Sometimes the public also associates the women's cadres with loose character, as one of the women's cadre says, *"when I was about to join NSCN some of them*

even asked why do you want to go there? You will become nothing but just a company for the men there to use. But that is wrong, we have a disciplined life here and in fact the men here respect us and consider us like their sisters”.

However difficult their experiences are the women's cadres unfailingly keep their principles and work for the better future of their nation. Their life in the organisation is much more than learning how to use the gun and how to fight the enemies. They are also trained in life-skills as many of the young cadres share, *“before I join the organisation, I did not know how to cook, wash or clean but after coming here, I know how to cook, wash my own clothes and clean my own room and the surroundings”*. The office of the Ladies' Units which was built by the ladies themselves is also an example of how well trained they are. They are also taught about the history of the Nagas and the Naga struggle, those who are not well educated are helped by their seniors and friends how to read and write and are moulded and guided in the Christian ways. The experiences they share about the feeling of being at home in NSCN signifies the emotional support they get. And though the government supplies all their essential needs, the fact that they are taught to weave clothes, stitch clothes and knit baskets for sale, maintain their own vegetable garden is an explication of their principle of self-sufficiency. Thus, their life in the NSCN is not just about combat trainings but moulding them mentally, emotionally and spiritually.

Women Cadres' Position vis-a-vis Male Cadres in NSCN (I-M)

The women cadres of NSCN (I-M) are at par with the male cadres of the organisation. Moreover, when it comes to the NSWON one of their main objectives is to work for the emancipation of the Naga women from economic and social bondage, combat gender discrimination in Naga society and work for the social upliftment and welfare of the Naga womenfolks.

And since the inception of the Naga struggle, Naga women have been working and fighting in the battles shoulder to shoulder

with their male counterparts against their enemies. The experiences of women cadres going barefoot to China without having food or water for weeks, carrying the same load of arms and ammunitions as their male cadres when they returned from China to Nagaland on foot, when they battled together against the Indian and Burmese soldiers or took care of the injured and carried the wounded on their back, these are some of the extraordinary examples of the equal contribution of womenfolk.

Unlike other organisations where women are not given equal opportunities, amongst the NSCN (I-M) cadres both men and women work together according to his/her potentials. Starting from the training period right after they join they are given the same training and trained together, go through the same hurdles and even go for the same duty together. When it comes to carrying out various tasks and operations, as stated by a Lady Sergeant, *“there are no rules that say that just because I am a woman I cannot command the male cadres. If we are assigned together and as long as they are under my command they have to obey my orders and vice-versa”*.

Hence, when it comes to the women and men within the organisation, there is sound coordination and cooperation among the cadres. The number of women cadres may be comparatively less but this does not make their contribution any less than the male cadres. As observed by a woman cadre, *“of course there are differences between the women’s and men’s cadres, but this is natural. But there is no discrimination on the basis of our gender. Conversely, our men’s cadres respect and appreciate us for our contributions to the resistance”*. And women are also given an opportunity to represent in the GPRN. Thus, at present there is one woman member in the Steering Committee, one woman Deputy Kilonser (or Deputy Minister), four women Tatars (or Members of Parliament) and two women’s cadres have participated in the Indo-Naga political talks so far.

Voices of the Naga Women Cadres

What do these Naga women have to say when they have been through all the hardships? Have the hardships tired them out?

Or have they burned out their dreams and aspirations? Their love for their people and their nation has made these women continue the struggle and called out all the Nagas, women and men, young and old to come forward and support the nation's struggle. Their clarion call for all the Naga women is to *"pray for the nation, and support us through your prayers as it is only through prayers we can achieve the nation's need. And everything is in the hands of God"*. They also appeal to, the public to do away with the misconceptions that some of them have of the women's cadres as women who are disobedient at home, women who have a loose moral character because *"we have a disciplined life here, and we have volunteered our services for the nation"*. Also there is a wrong conception that people join NSCN for money because *"we are not there for money nor are we after any wealth. Our only concern is how to save the Naga nation? How can we successfully serve the nation."* Another important message to all the Nagas is to be proud of their heritage and know their own roots and their own history. As narrated by a woman from the cadre: *"Many Naga women have sacrificed their lives for the Nagas but many of our own people do not know the value of their sacrifice and that is the saddest part"*. Their appeal to the Naga parents is *"instead of sending the most disobedient child, the spoilt child or the one who is not good in his/her studies, send your best child to serve the nation. Because to build the nation we need young men and women of honour, young people with good strength of character can build a strong nation"*. As women from the cadre also talk about good Naga mothers. Just as Napoleon said, *'if you want a great nation, give me a good mother'*. Today we need *"good mothers, who is a God-fearing and dedicated woman who can firmly stand for the community and for the nation. Women are the backbone of the nation and if we don't know the Lord, no church can be built, no family can be built and no nation can be built"*. As for the young Naga women, *"we need educated and knowledgeable women in our movement. So to our sisters and our daughters, we really need you in this movement. Instead of going outside to earn your livelihood, toil in the soil of your motherland. If you do not serve your nation, who will work for your nation? So if you are willing, this is the right place because this is the greatest cause that we can sacrifice our lives for"*. Besides, to all the young educated Naga

women, *"it is not possible for all the women to join the movement but even if you cannot physically join us you can contribute to the nation by sharing our nation's struggles and by spreading our message of love and freedom wherever you go"*. And a far-reaching critical message from the women's cadres is for all the Nagas to come together and unite for the cause of the Nagas. *"The different Naga factions, different tribes and the different organisations should all forget their differences and stand together for our Nation and claim our legitimate right"*. To all the Nagas, *know the value of your rights, know the value of your nation"*. And to all the women who are fighting for their nation, for their people, *"Do not give up your struggle. We will face many hardships and difficulties, but stay steady and stand strong on your ground and one day you will be able to enjoy the fruit of your sacrifice. So do not give up, but finish the fight"*.

Way to Look Forward

Decades of long hardship and sufferings have not withered the spirit of the women's cadres but instead it has taught them to be brave and strengthen their resolve to serve the nation. They have forgiven those who have committed atrocities against them and their nation and learnt to move forward without any grudges. One of the best weapons for these women is their prayers. As one of them stated, *"we have to pray unceasingly because if we have faith in God, I believe that God will give us Nagas what is rightfully ours"*. The women also have confidence that under the able leadership of the leaders, and with the support of the public, the Nagas will reach an honourable and peaceful solution with India. For all these women 'surrendering' is never a thought that crosses their thoughts but as the young 20-year-old woman said, *"I have given myself, my life to the nation, so as long as I can, with all my ability I will serve our motherland"*. Another woman who has served for more than four decades says, *"I believe in our struggle, in our unique history and it is our right so we will win one day or the other. Our sacrifices won't go in vain. And whatever may happen, I am ready whenever the nation calls me. I will fight for the Naga nation till the last, till my last breath"*. With all these hopes and aspirations, and their hard work, the Naga women's cadres have thrived like *"a drop of*

water that makes a mighty ocean” and today “the ocean is flooding” because of the sacrifices they made. Today, they are sitting down with the Indian leaders negotiating for the peace that they have yearned for so long. Just as the support they have given to their male counterparts when they first joined the movement as stated by one of the Senior male cadres that *“joining of women gave us strength, made us more brave and made us faithful to the cause.”* Even today the Naga women cadres are holding out the burning light for Naga peace and continues to give the Nagas the hope for a better Nagalim.

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