

The Emergence and Development of the Naga Movement: A Historical Analysis up to the Shillong Accord

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Abstract: *This study examines the emergence and historical evolution of the Naga movement from the formation of the Naga Club in 1918 to the signing of the Shillong Accord in 1975. Using a historical and descriptive approach based on secondary sources, the study traces major milestones including the memorandum to the Simon Commission, the formation of the Naga National Council, the 1951 plebiscite, the establishment of the Federal Government of Nagaland, the Naga People's Convention, the Sixteen-Point Agreement, and subsequent peace initiatives. The study finds that while the movement consistently pursued self-determination and political recognition, internal divisions and differing approaches to settlement significantly influenced its development. The Shillong Accord marked a major turning point, reshaping the trajectory of Naga politics. It also became one of the reasons for later organisational splits and negotiations.*

Keywords: Naga Movement, Naga National Council, Self-Determination, Naga Political History, Sixteen-Point Agreement, Shillong Accord

1. Introduction

The Naga movement, one of the longest-standing movements in Asia, primarily advocates for self-determination and the integration of Naga-inhabited areas (Chhonkar, 2018). The Naga movement advocates freedom and self-governance and thus resists assimilation into the control of the Indian Government. Spread across states like Nagaland, Assam, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh, and parts of Myanmar, the Nagas have historically asserted their status as 'free people' who have governed themselves independently, and thus oppose any external rule or domination, which catalysed the inception of the Naga movement (Nagaland Tribune, 2026).

By claiming that they have the right to self-determination on the basis of their distinct ethnic identity and unique history, the Nagas opposed India's attempt to incorporate them into the post-colonial Indian Union. Initially, the Nagas employed peaceful forms of protest but the continuous repression from the Indian state eventually compelled the Nagas to pursue armed struggle for freedom (Srikanth & Thomas, 2005). Till 1952, the movement was peaceful and intended for an amicable settlement (Aosenba, 2001).

This study used historical and descriptive research approaches to examine the emergence and evolution of the Naga movement up to the Shillong Accord of 1975. The historical approach was adopted to trace the origins, major events, and developments of the movement over time. On the other hand, descriptive approach was used as a systematic account of the key events, agreements, and political processes associated with it. Secondary sources, such as books, articles, official government documents, reports, political agreements, and archival materials, form the basis of the analysis.

Inception of the Naga Movement:

The roots of the Naga movement can be looked at around the period of World War I. In 1917, the British colonial government recruited about 2,000 Naga men as labor corps to

be stationed on the French front. This got the Nagas in contact with different cultures and ways of living, thus cementing their consciousness of their distinctive cultural identity, languages, traditions, and unity. The realization of the unique heritage and collective identity drove them with zeal for organized action. After returning home in 1918, these Naga men founded the Naga Club. The establishment of the Naga Club in 1918 was an important step toward uniting the Naga people and articulating their desires and aspirations. The formation of the Naga Club is a landmark in the history of the Naga movement (Aosenba, 2001).

Memorandum to the Simon Commission (1929):

The main concern of the Nagas was the political future of their homeland when the British leave India. To secure their freedom and do away with any potential domination by the emerging Indian state, they actively sought ways to re-establish their freedom and independence. In 1929, the Naga Club, the sole organisation which included all the Nagas, submitted a memorandum to the Simon Commission declaring that the British should not leave the Nagas under the domination of the Indian state. They stated their refusal to accept Indian rule. (Horam, 1988)

Formation of the Naga National Council (1946):

The Naga Movement underwent change during the World War II period. This war brought a sense of 'oneness' and more unity amongst the Nagas. Sir Charles Pawsey, the Deputy Commissioner of the Naga Hills at that time formed a body called Naga Hills Districts Tribal Council (NHDTTC) in 1945 (Dzüvichü, 2010). This council was formed as a sign of appreciation for the services and help rendered to the British by the Nagas in the 2nd World War against the Japanese. The main motive behind the formation of this council by Pawsey was to unite the Nagas. However, this council was turned into a political organisation the following year. In its conference held at Wokha on 2nd February 1946, Naga Hills Districts Tribal Council was renamed to 'Naga National Council'. Thus, the name Naga National Council came into existence

and is in use even to this day. The NNC had 29 members representing some tribes during its inception. During this conference, T. Aliba Imti was elected as the president of NNC and T. Sakhrie as the General Secretary. The Naga National Council got its foundation from the Naga Club, sharing the same ideology that is, freedom from any external domination (Aosenba, 2001).

The Nine-Point Agreement:

The Nine-Point Agreement or the Hydari agreement was an agreement signed between the Naga National Council representing the Nagas and the Governor of Assam, Akbar Hydari representing Government of India. It was signed in June 1947. The agreement recommended that “the right of the Nagas to develop themselves according to their freely expressed wishes is recognized.” Clause 9 of the Naga-Hydari agreement turned out controversial and confusing becoming the core of the Naga political problem. It reads as, “Period of Agreement - The Governor of Assam as the Agent of the Government of the Indian Union will have a special responsibility for a period of 10 years to ensure the observance of the agreement, at the end of this period the Naga Council will be asked whether they require the above agreement to be extended for a further period or a new agreement regarding the future of Naga people arrived at” (Naga National Council & Hydari, 1947). The understanding of the Nagas with regard to clause 9 was that they would have their sovereign homeland and freedom after ten years. Some of the NNC members would pursue this agreement for a long time until the Indian government finally discarded it in 1951 (Nuh, 2012). Whereas, on the other hand, the Government of India asserted it means Nagaland would remain as a protected state of India even after the completion of ten years. Clause 9 of the agreement led to division between the extremists and moderates even amongst the Nagas. The extremist led by Phizo protested against this decision and considered this agreement null and void.

Phizo as President of NNC:

Phizo was elected as the President of the Naga National Council by the end of 1949. Having Phizo elected as the President formally acknowledged his de facto leadership amongst the Nagas. He continued to lead and advocate for the freedom of the Nagas until his exile to Great Britain. (Moram, 1988) A.Z. Phizo was a stern revolutionary, an extremist who was totally against the Hydari Agreement or the Nine-Point Agreement (Aosenba, 2001). He led the Naga movement using his revolutionary ideas.

The Naga Plebiscite:

To determine the views of conviction of the Nagas for a sovereign, free, independent nation, a plebiscite was conducted on the 16th May, 1951. This plebiscite was initiated by NNC under the leadership of AZ Phizo. The plebiscite focused on two issues. First, whether the Nagas wanted to remain under the dominance of India or whether they want to be a separate nation. Second, to deny the charge given by the Government of India that only a minority group is in support of the NNC (Aosenba, 2001).

The result of this plebiscite was published the following year in 1952 on 16th March. In the result, it was brought out that 99.9% of the Nagas who voted, opted for Naga freedom and

independence (Saikia, 2025). Several thousand from various villages were reported to have given their thumbprints and signatures in favour of independence, free from the dominance of the Indian government. Two volumes of thumb impressions from the plebiscite containing the details of the voters were then sent to the President of India, Dr. Rajendra Prasad. He considered the demand for independence as absurd (Aosenba, 2001).

Boycott of the first general elections of India:

To demonstrate that the Nagas do not accept the Constitution of India, the NNC boycotted the first General elections of 1951-52 after India's independence. The Nagas did not participate or contested in the Legislative Assembly in Assam nor they sought election to the Indian Parliament. Other than this, no District council was set up in any area of the Naga Hills. No Naga during the first general elections exercised even the right to vote (Hoshi, 2017). Although there was no participation from any of the Nagas, the Government of India went through the full procedure of the General election.

Walk-off during Nehru's visit:

On 30th March, 1953, Nehru along with the Burmese Prime Minister U Nu, Mrs. Indira Gandhi and B.N. Mullick visited Kohima. Many Naga representatives and leaders from various councils and Tribal organisations gathered to meet Nehru. During this visit of Nehru, the NNC was very eager to submit a memorandum to him and to speak openly with Nehru in front of the public on the issue of freedom for the Nagas. They were however, stopped by the Deputy Commissioner of Naga Hills, Barkokati. He rejected the NNC's request and therefore the Nagas could not do as they wish. As such, they were offended by this act and protested the Deputy Commissioner's decision. They also proclaimed that they would not listen to the Prime Minister if he would not listen to them. The thousands of Nagas gathered at the meeting thus walked out when Nehru was about to make his address and the place was left with only a few government servants. This way, the rally/ public meeting was boycotted (Shimray, 2008).

Not long after the walk-out, police then raided the house of the then Secretary of NNC T. Sakhrie on the night of 4th April, 1953. After a few days, several other villages around Kohima such as Viswema, Kigwema, Phesama, Jakhama and Khonoma were searched by armed police who seized all the guns and arrested a number of villagers. This added more fuel to the already offended people. Thereupon, many NNC executives, leaders and other Nagas went underground. Government of India also banned the month newspaper of the NNC “Naga Nations” deeming it an anti-India propaganda paper (Yonuo 1984).

Formation of the Federal Government of Nagaland:

The NNC on March 22nd, 1956 set up a government called the ‘Federal Government of Nagaland’ or FGN at Parashen in Rengma area, near Phenshonyu and Sendenyu villages. Upon this formation, they also hoisted the Naga flag and promulgated a Yehzabo (Constitution) for NNC (Kath, 2012). The preamble read as ‘Nagaland is a people sovereign republic....’. The FGN declared that land belongs to the people and it will remain so. There will be no land tax or any other tax and all forms of trade, business, transport, etc.

Would be free and will be in the hands of the people. They also declared that each Naga village full have full authority over it's own affairs like earlier (Naga National Council, 1971).

Naga People's Convention:

From 22nd August to 26th August 1957, the Nagas convened an all tribes Naga People's Convention at Kohima. Several delegates representing various Naga tribes attended the convention. The Naga People's Convention was held to act as a via- media between the Government of India and the Naga rebels. During this convention, Dr. Imkongliba Ao was appointed as President and Shri Jasokie as Secretary. The rebels did not participate in this convention. In this convention, the delegates declared their opposition to violence. The convention advocated settlement of the Naga issue through negotiations and to bring a final outcome to the pending Naga solution. It was also resolved by the leaders in this convention that the then Naga Hills District of Assam and Tuensang Division of NEFA was to be constituted under a single administrative unit under the External Affairs Ministry. A nine-men delegation of the NPC under the leadership of Dr. Imkongliba Ao submitted their resolution to the Indian Government. As a result, a regulation was passed in 1957 called the 'Naga Hills- Tuensang Area (Administration) Regulation, 1957. Under this regulation, the Naga Hills-Tuensang Area (NHTA) was constituted. This was a separate administrative which came under the Ministry of External Affairs and was to be administered by the Governor of Assam acting as an agent of the President of India (Nagaland Legislative Assembly Secretariat, 2026).

The second Naga People's Convention was held the following year in 1958. It was held at Ungma under Mokokchung district. It was held amidst the protest from the side of the revolutionists or the rebels. In this convention, a liaison committee was formed to contact the rebels or 'underground people'. However, there was no response. So, in the convention held at Ungma, a Drafting Committee was formed and they prepared a 16-point memorandum for the constitution of a separate state to be called 'Nagaland' within the Indian Union (Konyak, 2022).

The third Naga People's Convention was held in 1959 at Mokokchung from 22nd of October 1959 to 26th October 1959. It was through this convention that the 16-point draft which was prepared in the second convention was passed. Following the recommendations from various sub- committees and modifications made with the Government of India, the final settlement for the Naga political issue was laid down in the form of a 16-point agreement (Aosenba, 2001).

Sixteenth Point Agreement:

The sixteenth point agreement was signed between the Naga People's Convention and the Government of India. It was signed in the year 1960. In the agreement, it was written that the territories which were earlier known as Naga Hills Tuensang Area under the Naga Hills Tuensang Area Act, 1957 will be called as Nagaland. According to this agreement, it was also written in Clause 2 that Nagaland will come under the Ministry of External Affairs of the Government of India. The President of India shall appoint the Governor of Nagaland. There shall be a Council of Ministers with Chief

Minister as the head and this Council of Ministers shall be responsible to the Naga Legislative Assembly. No law passed by the Union Parliament shall affect the religious or social practices of the Nagas, their customary laws, their ownership and transfer of land and its resources. Each tribe shall have their own units of administration and law- making bodies such as village council, range council and tribal council. And each tribe shall have their own courts of justice as well. In this agreement, it was written that the Governor shall carry the administration of the Tuensang District for a period of ten years until such time when Tuensang District becomes capable of shouldering more responsibilities when it comes to administration. For Inner Line Regulation, the rules in the Protected Area 1958 shall remain in force in Nagaland (The 16-Point Agreement between the GoI & Naga People's Convention, 1960).

Formation of the state 'Nagaland':

The Thirteenth Amendment Act of 1962 enacted by the Indian Parliament provided for the formation of a state called 'Nagaland'. In this Act, it was written that there will be three districts in the newly formed state namely Kohima, Mokokchung and Tuensang (Government of India, 1962). Based on this amendment Act, Nagaland, the sixteenth state was inaugurated on December 1, 1963 by the President of India, Dr. S. Radakrishnan (Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, GoI, 2019).

In contrast to the NPC, the NNC did not agree on the 16-point agreement and the creation of Nagaland state. They declared that NPC alone cannot represent the Nagas.

Peace Agreement, 1964:

In the midst of uncertainties, different approaches and beliefs, some Naga church leaders under the Nagaland Baptist Churches Council (NBCC) believed they had to do something to bring peace. As such in a conference of the NBCC held at Wokha in February 24th, 1964, a resolution was passed to constitute a Peace Mission. After both the Government of Nagaland and the Government of India accepted the resolution, the Peace Mission was constituted officially and started their work by beginning of May the same year (Nagaland Baptist Church Council, 2005).

On the 24th of May, 1964, a ceasefire agreement or suspension of operation in Nagaland was signed at Sakrabama village by four members of the Peace Mission formed with Mr. B.P. Chaliha, the then Chief Minister of Assam, Mr. Jayaprakash Narayan a veteran freedom fighter and Rev. Michael Scott a popular missionary from England and six members representing the Federal Government of Nagaland (NBCC, 2005). In this ceasefire agreement, it was stated that the security forces of the Government of India will suspend their activities such as jungle operations, searching of villages, arrests, forced labour, etc. On the other hand, the FGN will suspend activities like sniping, ambushing, raiding and firing at security posts, towns, etc. In addition, no arms would be imported from abroad during the ceasefire period. The stoppage of operation became effective on the 6th of September, 1964. The peace period was initially for a month but it continued to be extended as the peace talks remained inconclusive. By July 1965, Mr. Y.D. Gundevia, the Chief of the delegation of the Government of India was replaced by

Mr. Dharma Vira, Union Cabinet Secretary. When this happened, the NNC leaders held that they would not continue the talks if it was not raised to the Minister level from the official level. Post this, several rounds of talks were held even in 1966 between the PM of India, Mrs. Indira Gandhi and the NNC leaders. But all these talks could not bring any closure to the Naga issue (Aosenba, 2001).

Shillong Accord, 1975:

Following a series of discussions between the representatives from NNC and Government of India, the Shillong Accord was signed on 11th November, 1975. This accord was signed in Shillong hence the name Shillong Accord. The Governor of Nagaland, L. P. Singh signed this accord on behalf of the Government of India. On the other hand, the representatives from NNC were Temjenba, S. Dahru, V. Rhakhu, Z. Ramyo, M. Assa and Kevi Yallay. Whilst some of the discussions were held only between the NNC members and the Governor alone, some other discussions were held in the presence of the advisors for Nagaland and also in the presence of the Liaison Committee members.

An agreement was made that the representation of underground organisations would accept the Constitution of India. In this accord, it was agreed that the arms which were underground at that period of time would be brought out and would surrender or deposit it at a particular place. It was also agreed in this accord that the representatives of the underground organisations should have reasonable time to formulate other issues for discussion for final settlement (Shillong Agreement, 1975).

Aftermath of the Shillong Accord:

The Shillong Accord was one core reason which led to the split of NNC. Whilst some representatives and members of the NNC agreed on the accord, there was opposition amongst the members. The other group of people was totally against this accord. NNC then split to NNC parent body and NNC Accordist. Later, Nationalist Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCM) split away from NNC in 1980. The NSCN later split to NSCN (K) and NSCN (IM). Likewise, due to differences in approaches and ways, NNC split into several other factions. Henceforth, even the agreements between the Government of India and Nagas kept on shifting from one faction to another. In 2001, the peace agreement was signed between the Government of India and NSCN (K). Later, in 2015, the Framework Agreement was signed between the NSCN (IM) and Government of India. All these agreements did not bring any proper or final closure.

2. Conclusion

The Naga movement evolved from an early political assertion of identity and self-determination into a complex movement shaped by negotiations, armed resistance, institutional developments, and internal divisions. From the formation of the Naga Club in 1918 to the Shillong Accord of 1975, the movement experienced significant transformations while maintaining its core aspiration for freedom and self-governance. The Shillong Accord marked a decisive turning point that reshaped Naga politics and contributed to later organizational fragmentation. Despite numerous agreements and peace initiatives, the search for a comprehensive and

enduring settlement has remained unresolved, highlighting the continuing significance of the Naga issue in contemporary political discourse.

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