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Raids, Customary Laws and Slavery: Re-interpreting pre-colonial Naga warfare*

Rammathot Khongreiwo**

Abstract

Stereotyping and misrepresenting native peoples by outsiders pose a major problem in the histories of many peoples in India, especially those categorized as 'tribes'. The geopolitical and cultural region, known today as 'Northeast India', is a classic example of this historical handicap. Under the garb of 'civilizing mission' and carrying the White men's burden, both colonial officials/ethnographers and Christian missionaries penetrated the interiors of the region beginning in the early nineteenth century. They did many good things for the 'natives' of the region, but not without damages. In fact, the wounds inflicted on the image of the 'natives' and their culture were as deep as the impact of Western education and Christianity they brought to them. This paper critiques the colonial constructions of 'wildness', 'savagery', 'barbarity' and 'unruliness' in the context of Naga society, and re-examines various aspects of Naga warfare, colonial officials, Western ethnographers and missionaries had stereotyped and misrepresented.

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I. Introduction: Situating the Nagas and Pre-colonial Naga Warfare

The generic term "Naga" connotes a conglomerate of more than fifty allied 'tribes' inhabiting a contiguous geographical space at the tri-junction of India, Burma and China. The allied 'tribes' share common cultural traits and common legends of origins/migrations and similar, if not identical, modes of production and economic patterns marked by both swiden (jhuming) cultivation and wet-rice cultivation. Their village political systems range from democracy to semi-republic to gerontocracy to quasi-federalism (of many villages) to autocracy. With a set of customary laws and a governing assembly, headed by the king/chief and his council of representatives from all clans in the village, each Naga village comprises settlement areas, cultivated fields, streams, rivers, lakes, mountains, hills, valleys, meadows, and woods for hunting and hewing fire-woods, all within a well-demarcated territory.

The Naga country, which they call *Nagalim* (lit. 'land of the Nagas'), or in Sumathi Ramaswamy's term, their 'enchanted space', i.e. "the patriot's notion of territory" (see Ramaswamy 2002: 153), situated at the tri-junction of India, Myanmar and China, is geographically a contiguous landmass but politically divided into two parts — one half is part of India and the other forms the north-western frontier of Myanmar. The Indian part of *Nagalim* is sub-divided into four parts, forming the state of Nagaland, parts of Assam (viz. North Cachar Hills, Mikhir Hills, Lakhimpur and Sibsagar districts), Arunachal Pradesh (viz. Tirap and Changlang districts), and Manipur (viz. the hill districts of Ukhrul, Senapati, Chandel and Tamenglong, and a few Zeliangrong villages in north Churachandpur). The Naga ancestral domain in Burma, also known as *Eastern Nagalim* falls under two similar administrative units of the Kachin State and Sagaing sub-division. About one-third of the entire Naga populace of over 3.5 million is in these parts of Burma; and the majority (two-third) of it is on the Indian side of *Nagalim*, which is also referred as *Western Nagalim*.

Nagas are better known for their often misconceived tradition of wars/raids, pervasively recorded as 'head-hunting' in colonial ethnography and colonial official records. Represented as 'head-hunting', pre-colonial Naga warfare was visualized by colonial administrators and Western ethnographers as an unruly affair. The reality was contradictory, and the underlying reasons were multiple.

The term 'pre-colonial', in this context, signifies a transitional period, from 1826 to 1866, i.e., between the fall of the Ahom kingdom and the expansion of British colonial rule in the wake of the First Anglo-Burmese War (c. 1819–1826) and the final establishment of the colonial administrative headquarters at Samagudting, i.e., Chumukedima in Dimapur district, Nagaland (in 1866). The paper is not confined to this brief period; it frequently swings back to the preceding Ahom period (1228–1826) and forward to the colonial era (1866–1947). The study of the period in question entails a perusal of the pre-existing and the succeeding periods, because Naga raids prevailed in the Ahom period and continued during British rule.

This paper situates pre-colonial Naga warfare within a cultural/study area, first proposed by Willem van Schendel as *Zomia*, which connotes a mountainous region, comprising parts of Kashmir (India), Northeast India, Tibet, the Chittagong Hill Tracts (Bangladesh), Burma, Thailand, Laos, Yunnan and Sichuan (China) and Vietnam, marked by "shared ideas, related lifeways, and long-standing cultural ties" (Van Schendel 2002: 653; see Fig. 1). In 2007, "following discussions with scholars of the western Himalayas, Van Schendel tentatively opted to extend Zomia further westward and northward, including southern Qinghai and Xinjiang within China, as well as a fair portion of Central Asia, encompassing the highlands of Pakistan, Afghanistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan" (Michaud 2010:188; see Fig. 2). As James C. Scott puts it, "Zomia is the largest remaining region of the world whose peoples have not yet been fully incorporated into nation-states" (Scott 2010: ix). Therefore, Zomia is technically a conglomeration of contiguous areas lying

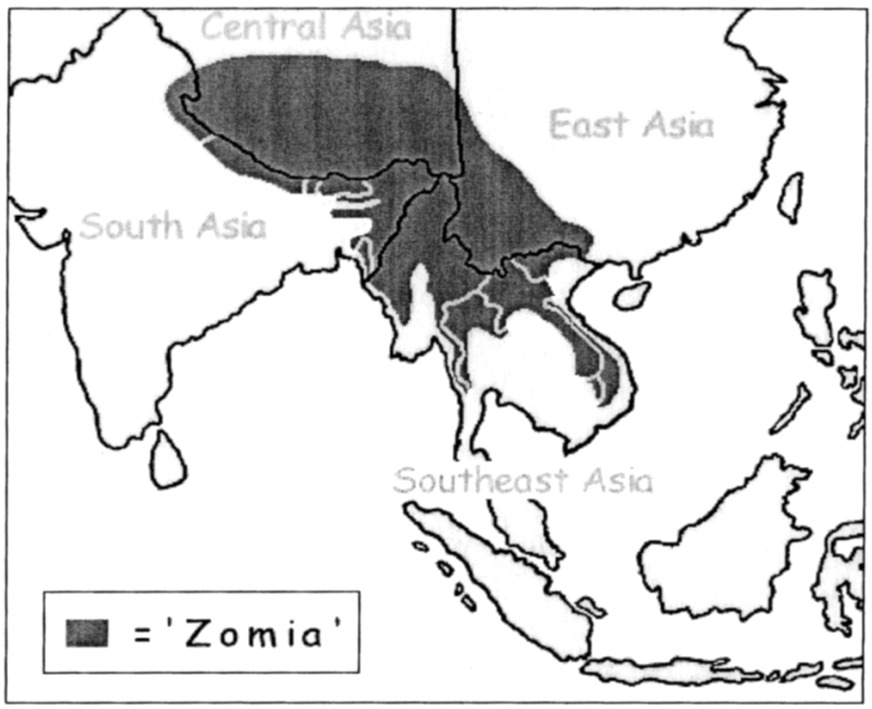

Figure 1. Map showing the limits of Zomia. *Source*: Van Schendel 2002:653.

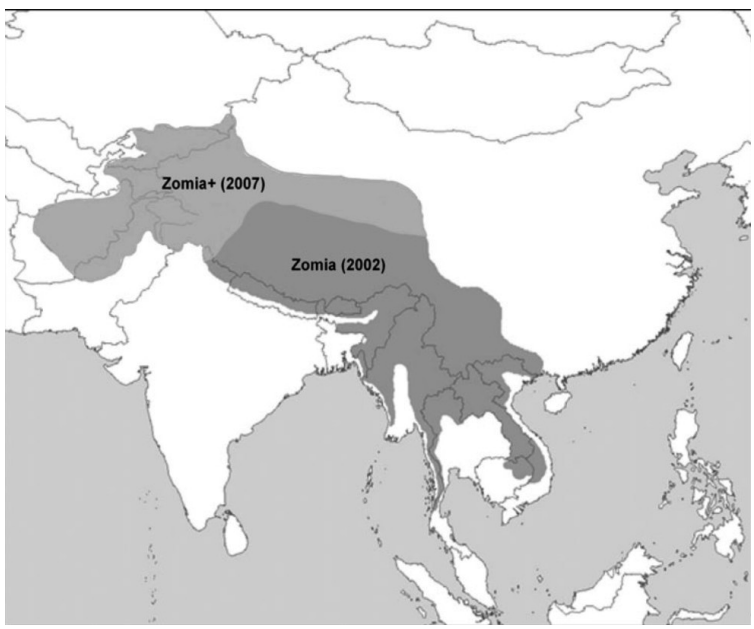

Figure 2. Map showing the limits of Zomia with the area extended in 2007. *Source*: Michaud 2010:188.

outside the political spheres of important states, and formed only "politically *marginal regions of states*" (Van Schendel 2002: 655; emphasis, original). In other words, to put in Jean Michaud's words, Zomia is "marked by a sparse population, historical isolation, political domination by powerful surrounding states, marginality of all kinds, and huge linguistic and religious diversity" (Michaud 2010:187–188).

II. Advent of Christianity and Colonial Encounters: The darkness of the light

Christianity first set foot on the Naga soil in March 1838 with its ambassador, Rev. Bronson, who extended the Shan Mission of the American Baptist Mission to the Namsang Nagas and won the first two Naga converts to the new faith. Unfortunately neither of them lived long enough to carry the gospel to their own people, and the Namsang mission was aborted in 1841 due to various reasons. In November 1872, Godhula returned from the village to Assam with nine Nagas convicted by the new faith and Rev. Edward Winter Clark baptized them at Dikhu River in November, 1872 (see Rivenburg 1886: 81) and made them members of the Sibsagar church (Sangma 1987: 223). Returning to their village, the Naga converts built a small chapel for worship (see Rivenburg 1886: 81), thus marking the founding of the first church in the Naga country. Arranged by the nine Naga Christians, Rev. Clark, along with Godhula and another member of the Sibsagar church, reached Molungkimong village guarded by sixty strong Naga warriors in December 1872, and on 22nd December (1872), Rev. Clark baptized fifteen more Nagas in a well, called *Chungli Tziibui*, near the village (see Ibid.). These events marked the beginning of Christianizing the Nagas of present Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh states. Twenty-four years later, in 1896, another missionary, Rev. William Pettigrew, reached the Tangkhul Naga country in the Ukhrul district of present Manipur state and got the first converts in 1901. This event similarly marked the beginning of Christianizing the Nagas of the state and Somra Tract in north-west Burma.

To begin with, the missionaries invariably represented the Nagas as 'heathens' bereft of religion, unadulterated by Hinduism and Islam, thereby representing their society/country as a pristine field for evangelism (see Misra 1998: 3279, Murry 2003: 14). Commenting on the Kyong (Lotha) Naga converts (of present–day Wokha district, Nagaland), Rev. Dr. W.E. Witter (the first missionary to the Lothas/Kyongs), for instance, wrote in one of his reports (dated Wokha, Sept. 18, 1886):

> …I cannot tell you how it thrills our hearts to hear these heathens' voices singing so sweetly the praises of Jesus. Oh that their hearts may soon respond to the unfathomable sweetness of the words they sing! I see that ten precious young souls have been gathered in from heathen homes (reported in the *Baptist Missionary Magazine*, January 1887, and reproduced in Murry 2003: 14).

In his report of 1902, S.W. Rivenberg (a missionary at Kohima) also represented the Nagas in the same pejorative tones:

> The heart thrills as one reads of the opening of the work among the Nagas by intrepid Miles Brownson in 1840 at Namsang *"far away on the rugged peaks of the mountains where the Sabbath (Jan. 13, 1839) finds me with a people rude and wild as the untamed beasts"* (reproduced in Ibid. : 35; italics, original).

Hemmed in between established and conquered native states/ kingdoms of the valleys, namely Assam, Manipur and Burma/Ava, the Naga country and those of other neighbouring stateless peoples ('tribes') had been brought to the knowledge of the British during, or even prior to, the First Anglo-Burmese War (1819–1826), and, the Britishers' contact with the Arung Nagas (of North Cachar Hills, i.e., Zeme Nagas, as per Captain Butler's account) in 1832 is officially recorded as their first contact with the Nagas (see Mackenzie 1979: 82–83). Yet, with the conclusion of the Treaty of Yandabo (1826), the entire Naga country in present Northeast India was virtually incorporated into, or seen as part of, the territory of British India (without the knowledge and

consent of the natives), simply because it lay in between two belligerent states/empires (viz., British India and Burmese empire). Colonial rule, in the true sense of the term, however, began in the Naga country in 1866 when British officials opened the Samagudting station with an aim at extending their influence and control to the interiors of the Naga country. Since their earliest encounter with the Nagas, colonial officials represented Nagas in the same pejorative tones as the American missionaries did. Colonial records of the period represented the Nagas as "imperfectly civilised tribes…savages and wild men" (*FDP*, *Pol. A.*, *No. 39*, 1879, NAI), "culturally backward" and living in a "condition of barbarity" (*FDP*, *Pol. A.*, *No. 37–39*, 1866, NAI). At the most extreme level in their attempts at finding acceptable grounds for colonizing the Naga country, the colonial officials represented Nagas as "living in circumstances not very dissimilar from the conditions under which wild animals exist…drawing health and vigour from an atmosphere which is a swift, subtle and deadly poison to all other human beings" (*FDP*, *Pol. A.*, 1866, NAI). Thus, colonizing of Naga territory was seen an act of "acquainting wild people with an advanced civilisation…out of moral consideration" (*FDP*, *Pol. A.*, *No. 37–39*, 1866, NAI).

Throughout their zealous colonial ventures and proselytizing missions in the Naga country, thus, condemnation and hypocritical altruism (which forms the gist of the 'White men's burden', implies 'White men's responsibility to civilize the 'savage', primitive', barbaric' and 'wild' peoples of the rest of the world) acted as the most powerful legitimizing twin weapons of the British colonial rulers and American Baptist missionaries in subjugating and proselytizing the Nagas. As the colonial and missionary intrusions into the Naga country were seen by the Nagas as a threat to their independent existence, Nagas posed a common enemy to the colonialists and missionaries. As such, the colonial rulers and missionaries joined hands in condemning the Nagas as 'wild', 'savage', 'barbarous', 'unruly', 'pristine primitive' and 'heathen people' possessing no established religions and political or legal systems. It was a well-crafted strategy designed to legitimize their colonial venture and

proselytizing missions in the Naga country. Indeed, misrepresenting the natives (here Nagas) and their cultures was a necessity, especially for the missionaries, to convince their funding authorities, for Nagas were then not in the missionaries' list of target communities. As natives of the region, overwhelmed by the waves of British colonialism and American Baptist missionary zeal, Nagas thus best epitomize the victims of the 'White men's burden'.

Even as the British colonialists and American missionaries had different goals in their ventures in the Naga country, they were dependent upon each other, and the success of one was almost always a path-finder for the other's successful penetration into the Naga country. This is emphatically borne out in many instances. Sometime in the early 1840s, considering the vulnerability of the revenue-paying villages in the plains of Assam to the perpetual quarrels among Naga villages and clans, Captain Brodie (then Principal Assistant to the Governor General's Agent in Assam) "suggested that he should be allowed to bring *all Nagas of the Patkai Range* under formal agreement to the British Government and exact a small annual tribute as token of submission" (Mackenzie 1979: 91; italics, mine). Interestingly, Rev. Miles Bronson (an American missionary working in Naga country from 1842 to 1852) "was all in favour of Brodie's plans of direct and active control" of the Nagas (Ibid. : 92). More than Rev. Bronson's ideological support to British India's colonizing strategies was the colonial government's concern about Bronson's venture in the region. In response to Rev. Bronson's appeal to the Government for sanctioning him a sum of Rs. 100/- a month towards his "Naga schools", the Government "agreed to pass for a year any small sums shown in the Agent's contingent bill" (Ibid.). It may be worth noting here that the colonial government had made grants to the Garo missions in 1829 and witnessed "very fair results" (see Elwin 1969: 518). Writing from America, Dr. Witter and his wife reported that the Deputy Commissioner of the Naga Hills visited and examined their mission school at Wokha twice, and the latter was reportedly pleased with the progress of the boys and recommended to the Chief Commissioner

of Assam that a grant of Rs. 300/- be appropriated for school work among the Lothas (reported in *Baptist Missionary Magazine,* July 1888, and reproduced in Murry 2003: 20). This was also true in the case of the mission in the Naga country in what is now Manipur state. Many mission schools in Naga villages in colonial Manipur state were run by the joint effort of the American Baptist missionaries and the colonial state. In his "Reports for the Years 1907–1909" (presented at the Assam Baptist Missionary Conference, 1910), Rev. William Pettigrew (the first missionary to the Tangkhul Nagas of present-day Ukhrul district, Manipur) reported that while the colonial state paid the salaries of teachers of the mission schools in the villages of the hill tribes (Nagas), and gave "prize money of Rs. 3 to every boy or girl" who passed "their annual examination", the missionary gratuitously supervised the teachers' work, did inspections of the schools twice every year and examined the pupils for the prize money (reproduced in Solo and Mahangthei 2006: 61). The literature provided for the schools, Pettigrew reported, were "prepared by the missionary, the cost of the same being borne by the State" (Ibid.). Rev. William Pettigrew also reported (in *BMM*, Vol. LXXXII, 1897) that in 1896, seven boys of the Ukhrul mission school "were awarded scholarships of Rs. 311/- per month for two years by the state" ("Ukhrul – 1896", reproduced in Solo and Mahangthei 2006:30). In its February 1904 issue, the *BMM* also reported that Rev. William Pettigrew added, "*in his letter of recent date*", that two teachers of the mission schools at Ukhrul were appointed "by the Manipur state authorities" and that their salaries and of two others were "paid by the state" (Ibid. : 32; italics, original).

The dependence, though not necessarily always, of the American Baptist missionaries on the British government in the Naga Hills in their mission is hinted in some of Rev. Dr. Clark's reports in the *BMM*. One of these reports implicitly conveys that the missionaries had been expecting the British government to occupy the Naga Hills so that they could penetrate the interiors of the Naga country once the colonial state had established peace and order in the Naga country; however, as the prospect was

deemed gloomy at that time, they were bent upon pressing forward on their mission work determined to face all possible dangers and risks (see Murry 2003: 1). In another report (*BMM*, July 1885), writing from the Ao Naga village of Molungkimong (his first station in the Naga country), Rev. Clark wrote: "The other chief event of the year for me to chronicle was the touring in this Ao tribe of the Nagas by government officers, with an armed escort, in the months of January and February 1885" (Ibid. : 4). "All the villages of the tribe," he continued, "were ordered to live at peace with one another, and those villages which violated these instructions were to be severely punished" (Ibid.). Rev. Clark also expected that those orders would "probably be enforced, and, if so," he was convinced, "peace be secured in the tribe, and mission operation greatly felicitated" (Ibid.). In another report (dated Molung, June 5, 1889), Rev. Clark wrote:

> A secular event of considerable importance is the territory of the tribe (Ao Naga) being formally annexed to the British Empire….now we are to have full benefit of English law and rule. Mission work can now be prosecuted anywhere in the tribe with all safety" (Ibid. : 5–6; parentheses, mine).

It may be worthy of note here that the transfer of Rev. W.E. Witter and his wife from Sibsagar (Assam) to Wokha (Naga Hills) in 1885 was ordered under considerations that Wokha was "centrally situated for the work among the Lothas, some thirty thousand of whom were then under government control" (*BMM*, July 1886, reproduced in Murry 2003:9). Moreover, when permission was sought for this transfer, the Deputy Commissioner of Kohima (then headquarters of Naga Hills district) not only granted permission, but also placed a rest house at Rev. Witter's disposal (Witter 1886: 90; see also Murry 2003: 27).

Similarly, as affirmed in Rev. W.E. Witter's report of 1886 ("Historical Sketch of the Lotha Naga Mission"), presented at the Jubilee Conference of the Assam Baptist Missionary Union, held at Nowgong, in December (18–29) 1886 (reported in *BMM*, Jan. 1901, and reproduced in Murry 2003: 25–34), the dispatch of the

first missionary to Kohima in the Angami Naga country, Rev. C.D. King, was largely determined by "the occupation of Kohima as the headquarters by the English government in the Naga Hills" (Witter 1886: 89 and Murry 2003: 26). Kohima was made the headquarters of the Naga Hills district in 1878, and Rev. C.D. King and his wife began their missionary work in Kohima and the Angami country in 1879 (see Murry 2003: 36).

Correspondingly, Christianity or missionaries also paved the way for the colonial state to intrude into and establish control over the Naga country. As the inter-village war-stricken Naga country had been partially converted, the Christianized Naga villages were automatically lured away from the tradition of warfare, and thereby became easy prey for the other Naga villages/'tribes' then still clinging to their old traditions. In his letter (dated Jaipur, May 7, 1876) to Lieutenant R.G. Woodthorpe, H.M. Hinde noted Babu Godhula's bitter complaint about the oppression Deka Haimong village had to undergo in the hands of the powerful Hatigoria (i.e., northern Ao) villages in the interior (see Elwin 1969: 516). As such, the Christian villages not only desired, but appealed to the British colonial government for assistance and protection against their fellow-Naga enemy villages (see Mackenzie 1979: 100). This was how in many cases the colonial expansion into Naga villages took place and got automatically legitimized. Similarly, Rev. William Pettigrew (working in the Tangkhul Naga country) also confessed (in his *Reports for the Years 1907–1909*), that he would certainly "do favour taking help from the Government or the State for schools, village or station, especially if the majority of the pupils are heathen, as is the case with Ukhrul Mission" (reproduced in Solo and Mahangthei 2006: 62).

Thus, the colonial state and Christian missionaries almost always went hand in glove in bringing the Nagas under their control or in 'civilizing the Nagas', to put it in Westerners' parlance. Therefore, H.K. Barpujari was right when he observed (in his *American Missionaries and North-East India*, 1986: 265) that in the decades after 1858 Christian mission work was

accomplished with considerable aid from the colonial state (see Misra 1998: 3279). And, in their attempt at justifying their colonial project in present-day Northeast India, colonial officials and western ethnographers deliberately denied the existence of any form of established political and legal systems among the natives of the region. Similarly, Christian missionaries also, in order to authorities, denied the existence of any form of religion or religious institutions among the various 'tribes' of the region. Under the garb of the 'civilizing mission' or in carrying forward the 'White men's burden', both the groups penetrated the interiors of the region beginning in the early nineteenth century. They did many good things for the 'natives' of the region, but not without damages. In other words, the wounds inflicted on the image of the 'natives' and their cultures were as deep as the impact of Western education and Christianity they brought to them. As one of the fiercest and strongest native communities of the region, Nagas became genuine victims of colonial and missionary stereotyping.

III. Colonial Representations of Naga Wars/Raids and Feuds: Savaging the natives

It appears that in the twilight of the nineteenth century, some of the colonial administrators and army personnel started taking interest in understanding the Nagas and their socio-religious set up. As early as in 1854, A.J. Moffatt Mills, endeavoured an exhaustive study on the Nagas in his report on the province of Assam (see Mills 1980). Moffatt Mills was followed by Major John Butler, who in his work of 1855 (*Travels and Adventures in the Province of Assam, during a Residence of Fourteen Years*) also provided a vivacious description of his travels in the Naga country, the climate and topography of the Naga country and the routes between Assam and Burma (up to the Chindwin River) through the Naga country, Naga customs and traditions, agriculture and material culture, food habits and manners, their relation with the Cacharees, Naga women and their physique, etc. (see Butler 1978). Then, in 1859, in his *Ethnology of India*, R.G. Latham noted, besides other things, the existence of

megalithic burial monuments and the associated mortuary practices prevalent in Naga society then. Latham was followed by a host of western ethnographers, mostly from the military camp, such as Captain Vetch, Major Godwin-Austen, Captain John Butler, and Lieutenant Colonel R.G. Woodthorpe, who wrote numerous articles on various socio-religious aspects of the different 'tribes' of present Northeast India. Yet, the first breakthrough in the colonialists' attempts at achieving a holistic understanding of the Nagas and neighbouring 'tribes' was made at the dawn of the twentieth century. For the first time, the first four decades of the century saw the British colonial officials publishing a series of thirteen ethnographic monographs on the major 'tribes' of the province of Assam. Of these, six were on some of the major Naga 'tribes' of present Nagaland and Manipur states. They are: T.C. Hodson's *The Naga Tribes of Manipur* (1911), J.H. Hutton's *The Angami Nagas* (1921) and *The Sema Nagas* (1921), J.P. Mills' *The Lhota Nagas* (1922), *The Ao Nagas* (1926) and *The Rengma Nagas* (1937). It was during this period that some of the colonial administrators (J.H. Hutton and J.P. Mills on Nagas of Naga Hills, and T.C. Hodson on Nagas of Manipur Agency) and Christian missionaries (e.g., Rev. William Pettigrew) began to pay genuine attention to the diverse belief systems and socio-political aspects of the Nagas. However, it is of utmost importance to treat the monographs critically, for undeniably they were part of an official ethnographic project, sponsored by the colonial Assam government.

To this may be added Dr. William Carlson Smith's *The Ao Tribe of Assam: A Study in Ethnology and Sociology*, wherein he enumerated thirteen characteristics common to various Naga tribes, viz. head-hunting, common sleeping-places for unmarried men which are taboo to women, dwelling-houses built on piles, disposal of dead on raised platforms, trial marriage or great freedom of intercourse between the sexes before marriage, betel-chewing, aversion to milk, tattooing by pricking, absence of any powerful political organization, the double-cylinder vertical forge, the simple loom for weaving cloth, a large quadrangular or hexagonal shield, and residence in hilly regions and a crude form

of agriculture. Besides, there appeared a solitary adventurer who wandered the country of the Konyak Nagas sometime in 1936–1937. Living with the Konyaks like one of its members for these two precious years, the well-known Austrian anthropologist Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf produced a monograph on the 'tribe' (*The Naked Nagas*) in 1939. In this book, he maintained a very lively account of the tradition of raids ('head-hunting' as he called the tradition) and the associated socio-political patterns, beliefs systems and practices as he encountered and observed among the Konyaks then.

Of all the cultural aspects of the Nagas, the most often misinterpreted subject was/is their warfare, widely recorded as 'head-hunting' in colonial ethnography and colonial official records. Most colonial authorities represented Nagas as "'genuine' headhunting tribes" (Zou 2005: 84; see also Hodson 1909). While elements of 'savagery' and 'lawlessness' were attached to the severing of heads of slain enemies by peoples outside Europe, notions of "justice and civility" were attached to the act of public execution as practised in the West (Europe), when in fact both involved the same act — the act of killing, including execution by the guillotine, hanging to death or burning at the stake to death as prevalent in Europe. In their attempts at annexing the Naga country, colonial officials were compelled to device some legitimizing mechanism. They found the mechanism best in what they called 'headhunting' to which they could conveniently attach such derogatory tags as 'wildness', 'savagery' and 'unruliness'/ 'lawlessness', concepts that imply the absence of law and social norms, and hence the absence of (and the necessity to introduce) 'civility'/'civilisation' (in Western parlance). In such a perceived/ constructed situation, the infamous 'White men's burden' ideology could be conveniently fitted in, and all the colonial acts of violence, territorial annexation and control over the Nagas and adjoining 'tribes' could easily gain legitimacy, for they were supposedly 'civilising the savage'. In other words, 'savaging the natives' became an inevitable rhetorical/legitimising mechanism for both colonial officials and the Christian missionaries as well, for they perceived colonising and converting the 'tribes' (here

Nagas) as acts of 'civilising the savage'. As regard to "the discursive formation of headhunting and human sacrifice in north-east India, with special reference to the colonial period", David Zou has, thus, rightly argued that "control and 'pacification' of the colonised was largely legitimised by language that defined the local population variously as raiders, slave-hunters, headhunters or human-sacrificing tribes" (2005: 76). In other words, the legitimising function of 'headhunting' as a trope was systematically manipulated by the colonial officials deputed in the North East Frontier of India.

The worst of all the interpretations of the pre-colonial Naga raids is seeing it as 'headhunting' and source of fertility, prosperity and good health (as colonial officials and ethnographers, writing on Nagas, such as Major John Butler, A.W. Davis, T.C. Hodson, J.H. Hutton, Christoph von Furer-Haimendorf, etc., did). In his work of 1855, commenting on the Angami Naga warfare, Major John Butler wrote:

> Exclusively of revenge, however, one of their most barbarous customs is that of cutting off the heads, hands, and feet, of any one they can meet with, without any provocation or pre-existing enmity, merely to stick them up in their fields, and so ensure a good crop of grain (1978: 156–157).

In 1898, A.W. Davis (then Deputy Commissioner of Naga Hills district) also remarked:

> There can be no doubt that the tribes in this district consider that by killing a human being in certain cases they are doing the most effectual thing towards averting the displeasure of some evil spirit (*terhoma*) (Quoted in Hutton 1969: 160).

Davis also noted a few cases in which men, women, children and babies were supposedly killed to avert disasters (diseases, misfortune, etc.) and to ensure good crops (Ibid. 160–167). In 1909, T.C. Hodson also conjectured that taking heads of slain enemies or of strangers in raids was held among the Nagas as a

means of effecting good health (by averting illnesses) and prosperity (in the form of good harvests) to the victorious village (1909: 138, 140). Almost a decade later, J.H. Hutton theorized a relationship between the so-called 'headhunting' (or raids involving taking the heads of slain enemies) and fertility of the soil and crops which was supposedly transmitted through the medium of the 'soul' or 'soul-substance' that resided, as he proposed, in the head (1928: 402, 403). Taking heads in raids was, therefore, seen as an act to absorb the soul-substance of the victim by the slayer to enhance the latter's personality or to enlarge his spirit. The futility of the theory that proposes a connection between raids and 'fertility' is testified by the self-contradicting observations of the colonial ethnographers. J.H. Hutton epitomized best in this respect. Even as he held the theory very strongly, Hutton also observed that "if it can be retrieved, the Angami does prefer the whole body, and if the whole body is not available he will take the arms, hands, legs, and feet of the corpse as well as its head" (1969: 157–158). This implies that Nagas held the arms, hands and legs or the feet, of slain enemies as equivalent to the head (as proofs of victory in raids), and the head as less valuable than the whole body. Then, if the head was so important a piece as the receptacle of the 'soul-substance' that enhanced a warrior's personality or enlarged his spirit (as colonial ethnographers projected), why would the Angami Nagas hold it no superior to other parts of the body, and implicitly, less valuable than the whole body? This totally invalidates the theory that draws a connection between raids and fertility of the soil and crops, as proposed by colonial ethnographers, esp. J.H. Hutton.

IV. Warfare and Customary Laws

IV.1. *Pre-colonial Naga Wars/Raids and Regional Leagues/ Councils*

The theory of 'headhunting', as propounded by colonial ethnographers, portrays Naga raids as unruly affairs, implying that Nagas raided villages and travellers/strangers for heads in the way a carnivore would pounce upon its helpless prey for no other reason than for enhancing the fertility of the soil and for ensuring

good harvests of the victorious village, and also for enhancing the warriors' personality or enlarging their souls (see Hutton 1969: 160; Butler 1855). An analysis of a few legends of the Angamis and Luhupas (i.e., northern Tangkhuls), reveals a picture that is unambiguously contradictory to the colonial 'constructs' of the pre-colonial Naga warfare. While the Angami legends in question talk about the rationale and brutality of wars/raids involving taking the heads of slain enemies, the Luhupa legends talk about regional councils/leagues responsible for looking into various socio-economic, political and judicial affairs of the people within their respective jurisdictions, and also about the peaceful conduct of such affairs through the rhythms of seasons (see Kapai 2011). The legends of both the communities, thus, directly invalidate the idea of pre-colonial Naga warfare being rife, conducted in a state of lawlessness.

In pre-colonial Naga society, both economy and polity were organized at the village levels, not at the entire tribal levels. Sometime in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, Tangkhuls formed some kind of inter-village or regional leagues/councils (called *long*) comprising villages sharing the waters of certain streams and rivers (for their paddy fields). They are:

i) *Wenchengkai Luiyan Long* and *Nongshar Kai Luiyan Long* in the north (*Raphei*) of Tangkhul country in present Ukhrul district;

ii) *Kasom Kong Luiyan Long* and *Ngaham Luiyan Long*, comprising some adjoining western (*Kharao*) and northern (*Raphei*) villages of present Ukhrul district; there were also four sub-*long*s under the *Kasom Kong Luiyan Long*, viz.: i) *Masai Luiyan Long*, ii) *Ngachang Luiyan Long*, iii) *Yakrei Luiyan Long*, and iv) *Maham Luiyan Long* (see Shimray 1986: 104).

iii) *Shongva Luiyan Long*, consisting of some northern and eastern villages of present Ukhrul district;

iv) *Varra Luiyan Long*, comprising some northern villages

of present Ukhrul district; and

v) *Nungshang Kong Luiyan Long*, consisting of villages in the central part of the Tangkhul country in present Ukhrul district (see Ronra 2006: 37–38 and Shimray 1986: 102–104).

There also existed two *long*s comprising villages perched on the same mountain ranges, viz.: i) *Pharung Shimtang Luiyan Long*, and ii) *Ringui Hongrei Luiyan Long*, both in the western part of the Tangkhul country (see Shimray 1986: 104).

All these *long*s acted for a long time as courts of justice concerning crimes, wars/raids, and other issues within their respective jurisdictions. The councils/leagues were endowed with the power to demarcate "safe zones" and "war zones", and also to decide upon "warring seasons" and "off seasons". The existence of such *long*s (councils/leagues) is testified by certain landscapes identified as *ngalei khamor* ("no war zone" or "safe zones") and *ngalei khamur* ("no man's land"). For instance, in Marem village (57 km to the north of Ukhrul district headquarters), there is a small *menhir*, called *Wenchengkai Lung* (lit. 'a stone of the *Wenchengkai Luiyan Long'*). The stone marks a landscape, which was identified as *Ngalei Khamor* in pre-colonial/pre-Christian days (Peter 2004: 176–182). It was forbidden to kill anyone within the perimeters of *ngalei khamor* which every village demarcated at the outskirts of the village by erecting a small menhir (see Ronra 2006: 37). Whenever a warrior of the village returned home from raids/wars, he could not be harmed by the enemies/pursuers once he had crossed the menhir or entered the "no war zone". In some parts of the Tangkhul country, every village demarcated an area (about 70 to 80 sq. m) as *ngalei khamur* ("no man's land", for it was an area not covered by the laws of any *long*), by erecting a white stone, and war captives and criminals were usually executed at such places (Ngareophung 2008: 15). Murders/crimes committed at *ngalei khamur* were not considered as punishable, and therefore, people would run pass such places lest they might fall victims to waylaying enemies (Ibid.).

Sometime at the dawn of the 19th century, northern Tangkhul villages formed a larger council/league, known as *Raphei Long* (*Raphei* connotes a region encompassing the villages of north Ukhrul). It is well preserved in the collective memories of the Tangkhul Nagas that prior to the advent of the British colonial rule, the *Raphei Long* used to organise a seasonal trade fair, now remembered as *Somsai Leih-ngapha*, named after a place (called Somsai, located below the premises of the present Somsai Brigade of the Indian Army in Ukhrul district headquarters) where the fair was held. People from different villages and different walks of life thronged to the fair to barter the best products of their villages and to participate in various competitions, such as wrestling, javelin throw, top-fight, etc. (Somthar 2004: 10). The *Raphei Long* (with ten executive members, one each from ten villages) also laid down laws pertaining to wars, raids, property, work, etc. Unfortunately, the *leihngapha* was discontinued for some unknown reasons, and the *long* too became defunct. Nonetheless, the formation of the *Raphei Long* had a long-term impact on the social formations of the region in the succeeding centuries in the sense that the existing leagues/councils, viz. *Ato Longphang* (northern council/league) and *Raphei Katamnao Long* (Raphei students' league/council), have their roots in the pre-colonial *Raphei Long*.

Thus, some processes of socio-political formations seemed to have been taking roots in the Tangkhul Naga country by the end of the 18th century and the dawn of the 19th century. Such processes were, unfortunately, aborted by the advent of two forces, viz., Manipuri invasions of the interiors of the Tangkhul country and extension of British colonial rule to the Tangkhul country in the 19th century and early 20th century respectively. As preserved in the collective memories and some folksongs of the Tangkhuls, Lunghar village (situated to the north of Ukhrul district headquarters) lost three great warriors, viz. Khaiyar, Langzar and Maikanga, who succumbed to the firearms of the *rāja*'s soldiers and East India Company's sepoys. Several footsoldiers were also killed. As their spear-wielding heroes fell

to the gun-wielding Manipur *rāja*'s troops and the company's sepoys, Maikanga's father sang in grief:

Inao Maikanga
Hao rai sāsānisi kajiva
Nana zangvam khuimara (Shimray 2003:7).

It means,

"My son Maikanga
Had it been a Naga war,
You would have easily embraced it."

This incident could not have taken place before the early 19th century, because it was only in 1762 that Jai Singh (i.e., Bhagyachandra, the *rāja* of Manipur) for the first time acquired firearms from the East India Company, with the help of a man, Haridas Gossain, who at the behest of the *rāja*, signed a treaty with the official-in-charge of the Company's arms factory in Bengal (on 14th September) for acquiring arms and ammunitions, for the *rāja* realized that the reason for his defeat in the hands of Alaungpaya (King of Burma) was European military technology (arms and ammunitions) which the latter had acquired from the French and Portuguese (see Kabui 1991: 266–268). It is also vividly recorded in the *Cheitharol Kumbaba* (royal chronicle of Manipur) that the Tangkhul villages of Nungbi (i.e., Longpi/ Loree, situated to the north of Ukhrul district headquarters) and Nunghar (Lunghar) were conquered by some 140 sepoys in October A.D. 1839 (see Singh 1995:116). The *Cheitharol Kumbaba* also gives an account of an incident on 13th January 1868 when Hawaibam Sanglenlakpa and Wangkheai Subadar went to Paowee (i.e., Paoyi/Peh, a Tangkhul village in north Ukhrul) with 400 sepoys (see Ibid. 1995: 178). Sometime in February A.D. 1868, Longjamba Major and Kangjam Major with 1,000 sepoys and 1,000 Khongjais (Kukis) and 800 followers destroyed a Naga village and took 10 Nagas as captives (Ibid. :179). Undoubtedly, the British colonial rulers and the Manipur *rāja* collaborated in subjugating the Naga villages, because the

"sepoys", in all the incidents mentioned above, may be understood as natives employed as soldiers/troops in the colonial army, as the British colonial rulers in India had already established a political agency in Manipur in 1835 (see Parratt 2012:1). For the first time in the history of colonial Manipur, census of the hills was taken in 1910 and 1911, and the first hill Sub-Divisions of Ukhrul, Tamenglong and Churachandpur were created in 1919 (Shimray 2003: 9). This marked the beginning of the extension of formal administration from Manipur state to the hill countries of the Nagas and Kukis, and thereby the official incorporation of these hill countries to the pre-existing native kingdom of Manipur.

Similar social formations are observed in other Naga communities in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. For instance, when the first European (Lieutenant H. Brigge) set foot on Lotha Naga soil in 1841 (Mills 1922: 2), leagues of villages (formed for purposes of war) were in existence in the Lotha Naga society (Ibid. : 96). Such leagues were headed by the more powerful villages, like Pangti and Tsingaki, which respectively headed two different leagues, formed for wars against the Aos and Semas (Ibid.). J.P. Mills observed that wars between Lotha villages were rare, and a Lotha taking another fellow Lotha's head was "absolutely forbidden" (see Ibid. 104). This suggests the prevalence of a consciousness among the Lotha Nagas of their collective identity despite the absence of any socio-political organizations comprising the entire 'tribe'. Among the Angamis, it was *genna* ('taboo' or 'something that is prohibited') to kill within the village community; only in case of adultery did they punish the guilty wife with death (Hutton 1969: 150). The Mao Naga quasi-federal system, wherein a paramount *movou* (king) ruled over many villages under their respective *movou*s (kings) and enjoyed annual tributes (see Watt 1887: 359), also suggests the prevalence of socio-political formations among the Mao Nagas.

Thus, wars/raids in pre-colonial Naga society were conducted under the purview of some kinds of legal system and/or inter-village/regional councils/leagues. In pre-colonial Tangkhul Naga

society, the *long*s acted as the custodians of *raiyan* (i.e., 'laws pertaining to warfare') and as regional courts of justice. When a warrior/village captured/killed men/women without justifiable reasons, or violated codes of conduct in warfare, the concerned *long* would punish the village or the individual warrior as per its 'laws of warfare' (Angkang 2000:167). For instance, not very long ago, when Shongran/Somdal village (in west Ukhrul) killed some women at a 'safe zone' in Huining/Halang village (in north Ukhrul), the *Kasom Kong Luiyan Long* (a regional league/council of villages including Halang) decided upon a 'war of justice' against Shongran village (see Shimray 1986: 81, 103). Moreover, their beliefs in the dynamics of nature and the resultant fear-psychosis always provided 'checks-and-balances' to probable reckless acts in warfare.

IV.2. *Naga Customary Laws and Types of Wars/Raids*

That wars, raids and feuds in pre-colonial Naga society were conducted under the purview of laws of certain socio-political and judicial organisations is also testified to by the prevalence of different types of war. They are:

(i) 'Open/declared war' (*ngaphar rai* in Tangkhul): This type of war was usually related to disputes over territorial boundaries of two adjoining villages, and was as a rule fought in an open field, called *raiphar* (lit. 'battle field') in the presence of a neutral village or an inter-village/ regional council/league, and at times in full view of the womenfolk and children of the belligerent villages. That Nagas fought wars for disputes over boundaries between two villages is suggested by the term *ngaphar*, generally identified with certain places where two adjoining villages had engaged in war, n*gaphar* usually marks the boundary between the villages even to this day. Open wars between two villages might also occur to settle certain issues concerning the villages which could not be settled by other means (see Mills 1926:192). No heads could be taken in such wars, for there was no necessity

to prove victory as such wars were generally fought in the presence of a third party and the result was declared on the spot.

(ii) 'Undeclared war' (*ngathirai* in Tangkhul; *rüzutsü* in Angami): It was technically a 'secret war of revenge' between individuals, families/clans, and rarely involved entire villages (see Shimray 2001: 174–175; Hutton 1969: 158, fn. 2). This was the only type of war in which heads of slain enemies could be taken. Raids upon enemy villages or villages of the plains can be fitted into this type of war.

(iii) 'War of challenge' (*ngasung rai* in Tangkhul): Technically, it was an 'open combat' between two warriors, each from two belligerent villages, who duelled at an appointed place in the presence of the warriors of the two villages. The result of such a combat had legal binding (Shimray 2001: 175). This type of war was very common among the Angamis and Tangkhuls; and no heads could be taken in this type of war (see Shimray 1986: 84).

(iv) Inter-*khel* (locality within a village) or inter-clan feuds: This type of war was predominant among the Angamis and Tangkhuls, and rarely prevalent among other Naga tribes, was yet another type of war in pre-colonial Naga society. While Angamis used real weapons of war, Tangkhuls used only bamboos and pointed sticks in such feuds; and taking heads in this type of war was a taboo (see Ibid.).

(v) 'War of hostage' (*kharing-tuk* in Tangkhul, lit. 'capturing alive'): In this type of war, a village might capture men of an enemy village for appropriate reason(s) and keep the captives alive, during which time their kinsmen/ villagers could pay ransom for them. Enemies could not be captured for inappropriate reason(s), for it could

ultimately lead to 'open war'; and no heads could be taken in this type of war (see Shimray 2001: 176–177).

IV.3. *Pre-colonial Naga Raids/Wars and "Women Mediators"*

The tradition of "women mediators" in pre-colonial Naga society is yet another important aspect that invalidates the colonial portrayal of Naga society as an unruly society and their intestinal wars and raids as mindless sports. As per Naga customary laws pertaining to warfare, whatever the nature of wars/raids might have been, no warrior could kill/harm certain women, called *phạ̲khareilā* in Tangkhul and *demi* in Chakhesang (see N.G. Ngareophung 2008:15; Yuingam Jajo 2009; and Zehol & Zehol 2009: 33). The terms *phạ̲khareilā* and *demi* connote women married to men of villages other than their natal villages. Among the Tangkhuls, in case a *phạ̲khareilā* was harmed/killed by a warrior (in a war between her natal village and her husband's village), the reckless warrior or his village could be punished by a long to which the warrior or the *phạ̲khareilā* belonged (Ngareophung 2008:15). It was also a taboo among the Chakhesangs to kill *demis*; and for such a status and protection they enjoyed, it was a duty of the *demis* to deliver the heads of slain enemies to their kinsmen as a token of offering peace or as a symbol of settling peace (Zehol & Zehol 2009: 33).

Thus, the existence of regional or inter-village leagues/ councils, the prevalence of different types of wars/raids, laws pertaining to warfare, capturing enemies and taking heads of slain enemies, and the existence of "women mediators" invalidate the colonial portrayal of the Naga society as lawless and unruly/ anarchic society.

V. The Rationale and Political Economy of Pre-colonial Naga Wars/Raids

V.1. *Pre-colonial Naga Raids/Wars and "The Responsible Man"*

In his Assam Census Report of 1891 (Vol. i: 249) A.W. Davis observed that "the desire for head-hunting was more the fault of

the women than of the men, who were laughed at if they turned out at the village festivals without the decorations assigned to the successful warrior" (see Hodson 1909:141). As there was no other better field than war where a man could prove his masculinity and social responsibility to gain social recognition, earlier authorities, as T.C. Hodson observed, declared that no young man in Naga society "could find a wife for himself until he had taken a head and thereby won the right of the warriors' kilt...or necklace of bears' tusks and the wristlets of cowries" (Ibid. 140). Hodson also confessed that he himself was "inclined to believe that success in head-hunting was at one time, if not essential to marriage, regarded at least as a token of having passed from adolescence to maturity", and as "a title to full rights and duties" in the clan and village community (Ibid. 141, 142). In this sense, raids formed a rite of passage through which a male member of the village community transcended from boyhood to responsible adulthood. In pre-colonial Naga society, certain markers of social status, such as certain types of shawls, headgears and tattoos, were entitled only to men who had killed their enemies, meaning those who had participated in raids/battles. Such men were also entitled to perform the coveted feasts of merit (called marān in Tangkhul) and erect stones and wooden structures (called marānlung and marāntarung, respectively, in Tangkhul) and to build houses roofed with wooden/stone shingles and adorned with wooden horns on the front gables (called *lengchenggui* in Tangkhul; *hikya/hida* in Angami). This in turn helped them gain higher social status in society and entitled them certain status-markers, such as shawls and headgears. In a status-based society of the Nagas, such hallmarks of social status were of utmost importance. Moreover, in Naga society, generally unmarried man could not perform feasts of merit or erect megaliths, for at such feasts the "wife had an important and conspicuous role to play" (Ramunny 1993: 2). In such a situation, every eligible man had to find a suitable woman for marriage in order to rise to a higher social status. Yet, until he had become a "responsible man" of the village community, he would not be considered by any woman for marriage, for until a man had proved his feat in a raid/war, he was not considered capable of

defending the village against external forces/enemies. Thus, the nexus between warfare, social status or social responsibility and megalithic traditions seemed to have been very strong in the pre-colonial Naga society. Considering all this, it may be wrong to interpret raids as 'headhunting', in that raids were largely aimed at taking revenge or at striking justice or preserving peace, not necessarily at taking heads. Heads were taken in raids for proving victory and for some economic reasons (ransom, for example) and under certain inevitable circumstances, such as when the war captives rebelled or attempted to escape, for the raids/captors had to hurry home lest the kinsmen of their captives might get the better of their sluggish stride (see Elwin 1969: 204).

V.2. *Pre-colonial Naga Raids/Wars and Notion of Justice and Vengeance*

The colonial representation of the Nagas was also contradicted by findings in the course of their (colonial officials) expeditions into the Naga country where incidents of raids were much less frequent and lower in magnitude than they were represented. Little did the colonial officials/ethnographers consider that the large numbers of heads secured in some *morung*s (youth dormitories) and private houses in the Naga villages were actually collections of many generations (see Kapai 1911). It is also of utmost importance to pay cognisance to the connection between the large collections of heads and the Naga practice of severing the heads of their slain friends rather than leaving them behind for the enemies. Major John Butler's observation (in his work of 1855) stands out a classic example here:

> Amongst the Nagas it is considered a point of honour to recover the skulls of their friends, who have fallen victim to an enemy attack and prisoners are always decapitated if they refuse to accompany or return with the victors to their homes (Butler 1978:156).

Vengeance formed one of the most important determinants in pre-colonial Naga warfare, for most importantly, vengeance, to

pre-Christian Nagas, was an act of exacting justice. To the Nagas, as Major John Butler observed, "revenge *was* a sacred duty never to be neglected or forgotten" (Ibid. 147; italics, mine); "years may elapse; but the murder of a relative is never forgotten, and when a favourable opportunity offers, probably twice the number of victims sacrificed" (Ibid. 156). Butler further observed that it was "also totally incompatible with Nagah honour to forego taking revenge", and it was "incumbent on him to ransom or recover the skull of a relative murdered or captured in war" (Ibid. : 156). In other words, in Butler's words: "A Nagah can never give up his revenge; he must avenge the death of a relative in some way or other, either by stealth or surprise; kill one or two in return, and carry off their heads" (Ibid. 1978: 150). So, as vengeance could be taken after a lapse of many years, raids (wars of vengeance) appeared to be unruly affairs, conducted for no reasons; yet, they were wars of justice driven by their unfading memories, for it was tantamount to dishonouring their relatives to let go their murders or deaths, and this responsibility transcended this mundane life into the land of the dead (see Hutton 1969:161).

V.3. *Pre-colonial Naga Raids/Wars and Exaction of Tributes and Ransoms*

Nagas also evidently conducted raids upon fellow Naga villages or other tribes and peoples of the plains for 'tributes' and ransoms. Sometime in January 1839, on enquiring about the reasons for the Angami Naga depredations on the villages of the subjects of "Toolaram Senaputtee" (of the Kachari kingdom), E.R. Grange (Sub-Assistant to the Commissioner at Nowgong, Assam) "was informed that they were merely to extort shells, cloths, & c. and that the Angamees seized as many people as they could, to obtain ransom from their relatives, and killed all that attempted to escape, cutting off their heads...which would be ransomed by their relatives also" (see Elwin 1969: 204). Both A.J. Moffatt Mills (in his work of 1854) and Major John Butler (in his work of 1855) noted that among the Angami Nagas, when stronger villages attacked small defenceless villages, the

inhabitants were usually plundered and were carried off into captivity until their friends paid a ransom for them by giving cloth, conch shells, beads, pigs and cows to the marauders (see Mills 1980: cxlv; Butler 1978: 156). It may be worth noting here the significant roles these articles (cloth, conch shells, beads, pigs and cows) played in the Naga society of the time; cows and pigs were, and are still, among the most sought after animals for meat, while brass ornaments and beads formed important constituents of their traditional attires, such as armlets and necklaces.

Writing on the Angami Nagas, Major John Butler also commented (in his work of 1855): "All of the small villages are subject to the large villages Mozo-mah, Kono-mah, Kohe-mah, and Lopsheh-mah, and they are obliged to secure their own safety by paying them an annual tribute of cloth, fowl, cows, pigs, & c., according to their means, or as much as will satisfy the rapacity of the freebooters" (Butler 1978:144). In 1867, the political agent at Munnipore wrote to the Commissioner of Assam (Letter No. 21, 13 March 1867) that the "inhabitants [sic] of Phweelong (Willong, Senapati district, Manipur) inform me that during the past year they have paid to Angamees Rupees 105, and are threatened with an attack from Konomah (Khonoma, Kohima district, Nagaland) if they do not pay Rupees 30 more" (*FDP-A., Nos. 99–102* 1867, NAI; parentheses, mine). The Khiamungan villages of Yimpang and Waoshu, according to Major General Sardespande (of the Indian army), used to pay "customary taxes" to the Konyak villages of Shamnyu, Tanking and Yangkhao in present Mon district of Nagaland (1987: 7), and till the 1980s, Pangsha village on the Indian side collected such taxes (perhaps tributes) from Hemphu and Tsaplaw villages across the post-colonial Indo-Burmese boundary; and some members of Thonoknyu village enjoyed taxes/tributes from the Yimchunger village of Yokur (Ibid. : 59). Among the Konyaks, some great *Ang*s/*Wang*s (kings/chiefs) of powerful villages used to have under them four to twenty-one tribute-paying villages (Shimray 1986: 56). If folk songs of the Tangkhul Nagas are reliable, then, some powerful villages definitely enjoyed tributes from the weaker and defeated villages around them. For instance, a war

song exalts Phungcham village as a powerful village at the sight of whose warriors the neighbouring villages surrendered and offered 'tributes'. Such tributes were called *raishai* in Tangkhul (lit. "war tribute"). In his work of 1985, R.R. Shimray (a Tangkhul Naga scholar) reported that his "great great grandfather", the chief of Shongran (Somdal) village (Ukhrul district, Manipur), was treacherously murdered by another village where he went to collect annual tributes due to him by the village (Ibid. : 74). In a paper, entitled 'The Aboriginal Tribes of Manipur', presented before the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland (in 1886), Dr. George Watt also observed:

> The whole of the Mao tribe is under one chief who receives tribute in the form of one basket of rice a year from each family, and exercises the usual authority possessed by all monarchs or rajahs. There are twelve villages of Maos, each comprising on an average about one hundred houses (1887: 359).

The king/chief of Mao village (Senapati district, Manipur) in the colonial period also had under him sixteen tribute-paying villages (see Shimray 1986: 56). As I learnt from a Mao Naga friend, even to this day, all Mao Naga villages, with their respective kings (*movou*s), regard one of the kings (*movou*s) of Pudunamei, Makhel and Makhan as their paramount king whose authority has been now, however, reduced to fixing the dates of various traditional festivals on the basis of their lunar calendar. All these are legacies of pre-colonial practices which in many ways were the results or determinants of wars and raids in Naga society. Such traditions might have originated from the laws of warfare whereby the defeated villages became subordinate to the victorious villages and were obliged to pay tributes as a token of subordination or for protection provided by the powerful villages.

V.4. *Pre-colonial Naga Raids/Wars and Mode of Preserving Peace*

The British colonial administrators self-patronizingly claimed for themselves the credit of terminating the pre-colonial Naga raids (or 'headhunting', as treated in colonial ethnography and

official records). Yet, the history of British colonialism in the Naga Hills reveals that incidents of raids were intensified by the British interference in the internal affairs of the Nagas, for their presence in the region interrupted the relationship among the Naga villages as well as between the Nagas and the plainsmen — Assamese, Ahoms, Kacharis, etc. For centuries, probably in the wake of the Ahom invasion of present Northeast India sometime in A.D. 1228 and the establishment of the Ahom kingdom in the Upper Brahmaputra, Nagas had been trading with the people of the Assam plains bringing their locally processed salt, cotton handloom cloth, ginger, tea-leaves and seeds (*FDP, Pol. A., Nos. 71–74,* 1841, NAI). Not only did the Ahoms also construct a road, called *Naga Ali* ('Naga Road'), to have an easier access to trade as well as to provide a route of escape into the Naga Hills when invaded by enemies, Ahom rulers also followed a policy of accommodation with the Nagas and gave them revenue-free lands and fishing rights (in the plains), respectively known as *Naga-Khats* and *bheels*, for the Naga country was strategically important for the Ahom kings (see Mackenzie 1979: 91 and Baruah 2005: 326).

Thus, on the eve of the advent of British colonial rule, some Naga villages maintained cordial relations with the Ahoms; several Ao, Konyak and Angami Nagas had been enjoying grants of land in the plains (Ahom territory) obtained from the Ahom kings, but the British refused to honour those rights once the Assam valley fell into their hands. Their "sense of honour" and "sense of justice" being challenged, Nagas were compelled to embark upon raids on the plainsmen's territory more frequently and more intensively. The British saw the raids as offensive acts; but for the Nagas they were wars of justice in defence of their rights (see Kapai 2011). Thus, the British intervention, rather as I prefer to say 'interference', led to intensification of Naga raids on the plains of Assam (then controlled by the British) to uncontrollable heights that the British had to adopt a policy of 'non-interference' in the period from 1851 to 1865. That the British 'interference' resulted in intensification of Naga raids upon the plains of Assam is, for instance, clearly borne out in B.C. Allen's work of 1905 (*Gazetteer of Naga Hills and Manipur*), where he says:

> In January 1866, the Nagas of Razepema cut up a Mikir village in North Cachar. In March, Lieutenant Gregory visited Razepema and burnt it, but three months later the hillmen retaliated by killing twenty-six Mikirs in the village of Sergamcha (2002: 19).

That Nagas raided villages in their neighbouring communities is not denied, yet as evident in the quotation the colonial interference seemingly compelled them to retaliate in a much higher magnitude victimising the Mikirs (Cacharees) for the relation/peace between the two communities was disturbed by the interference of an external force — the British colonial rule. Similarly, with the establishment of their first headquarters at Samagudting (Chumukedima, Dimapur district, Nagaland) in 1866, by virtue of their military might, the British stalled Naga raids for a while, yet as their presence was seen as a threat to their freedom and rights, from 1874 onwards Nagas reciprocated the British with raids of greater magnitude that finally resulted in the siege of Kohima (by the British) in 1878. The Naga raids were, in fact, largely part of Naga response to the British colonial expansion into their country and partly a result of the rupture of relations between the Nagas and the Ahoms on account of the presence of new and alien rulers, the British.

E.R. Grange observed that in his days in the Naga Hills (1830s), Angamis "extracted tribute from their pusillanimous neighbours of the lower hills, and collected from Mahye to Gumegoagoo *villages*, obliging the Semkher Cacharees even to give them salt, & c. to preserve peace" (Elwin 1969: 212; italics, mine). Apparently, powerful Angami villages, when raiding the Cacharees of the lower hills adjoining the plains of Assam and present day Dimapur, not only exacted tributes from the vanquished villages, but also considered the imposition of their might as submission from the vanquished for preserving peace with the latter. This also allowed the victors to obtain their regular supply of basic necessities like salt, which was manufactured mostly by the Cacharees of the foothills and plains. In this sense, raiding was seen by Nagas as a means of preserving peace with

the vanquished villages, which ultimately paid submission to the raiders and thereafter became tribute-payers and occasionally trading partners of the more powerful villages of the raiders. This in turn suggests that weaker villages could pre-empt raids by the more powerful by faithfully and regularly paying 'war tributes' (*raishai* in Tangkhul). Apart from ethnic affinities and/or kinship ties across the present Indo-Burmese boundary, Khiamungan Naga villages and other neighbouring Naga villages till the late 1980s had "a very practical system of maintaining socio-political peace" by means of taxes ranging from certain number of *khangs* (basketful) of food grains (millet, rice) to parts of domestic animals such as mithan (*Bos frontalis*), pigs, and even hunted wild games (Sardespande 1987:19). In this sense, we may infer from Dr. George Watt's observation that the village of the powerful "one chief", who enjoyed tributes from "all Mao Naga villages" subservient to him (discussed above), was at peace with all those villages, for they had understandably offered the village their submission. In other words, submission and domination in the Naga concept of peace occupied an important place in pre-colonial Naga warfare.

V.5. *Pre-colonial Raids/Wars and Slave-gathering*

Michael Charney observes that in Southeast Asia, where arable land was abundant and in many areas largely unexploited, warfare often centred on large-scale capture of rival populations (2004: 17–21). Similarly, Bryce Beemer has emphatically pointed out that "capture and transfer of rival populations were [sic]...a prominent feature of *pre-colonial* Southeast Asian warfare" (2009: 489; italics, mine). At the height of the Burmese empire during the reign of Bodawpaya (1782–1817; Bodawpaya was the greatest of all the Konbaung kings and also the longest reigning monarch in the history of pre-colonial Burmese empire). His eldest son, Thado Minsaw (Prince of Shweidaung), leading a Burmese army of 30,000 men, invaded Arakan (a small kingdom along the Bay of Bengal) in early 1785 (see Myint-U, 2001:13–14). In this campaign, the crown prince carried off some 20,000 captives to populate his father's new capital of Amarapura, the 'Immortal

City' (Ibid. : 14). Similarly, during the first and the second Konbaung invasions of Manipur kingdom in 1758 and 1764 respectively, thousands of Manipuris were forcibly deported to the Burmese capital; "many of the war captives...became hereditary crown servants at Ava, and for generations they, their descendants and later Manipuri deportees formed an underclass in the valley, acting as domestic servants, menial labourers and agricultural workers for the Burmese royal family and nobility" (Ibid. : 15). Living around the city of Ava, "a large number of people in the lower status occupations, as well as slaves and soldiers, were Manipuris, people from the Imphal valley...brought as war-captives or were their immediate descendants, and by the mid-nineteenth century they were said to form perhaps as much as a quarter of the population or at least 25,000 people" (Ibid. : 55). Thant Myint-U, therefore, observes that in the early 19th century, "with the exception of slave raids and occasional trade, the Court of Ava showed little desire to impose her authority" over the extensive upland regions between the Irrawaddy valley in Burma and the Brahmaputra valley in Assam (Ibid. : 25).

Considering the geographical proximity and historical connections between Southeast Asia and what is today Northeast India, Sanjib Baruah's observation that in what is today called "Northeast India", "traditionally [sic], wars were not about territory, but about capturing slaves" (2005: 8; see also Scott 2010: 24) seems to have some elements of truth. It is recorded in the chronicles of the kings of Manipur (*Cheitharol Kumbaba*, for instance) that many Naga villages were repeatedly invaded by successive Manipuri kings, and that some Naga villages also plundered Manipuri villages in the valley, and carried away captives (see Singh 1995). The *Ahom Buranji* (chronicle of the Ahom kings) is also replete with accounts on encounters between Ahom soldiers and Nagas (known by their village names) and on Ahom military expeditions to the Naga villages on the surrounding hills (see Barua 1985). In both the cases, every king is attributed with capturing war captives, livestock and other produces from villages of the hill peoples. It appears that those military expeditions enumerated in both the chronicles were

largely for war captives and war booties. Therefore, it may not be just a coincidence that only at a few places does the *Cheitharol Kumbaba* talk about conquests of Naga villages, and even that without specifying the villages (see Singh 1995). What can be inferred here is that, the tradition of territorial annexation apparently came very late, in fact, it came with British colonialism.

During the pre-colonial period or early encounters between the British and the Nagas (c. 1826–1866), wars/raids among the Nagas, and/or between Nagas and other communities, involved mainly capturing prisoners of war who were subsequently, in most cases, sold into slavery if not ransomed or rescued by their kinsmen. In his letter to G.F. Bayfield Esquire (Assistant to the Resident of Ava), dated 3rd March 1837, A. White (Political Agent in Upper Assam) noted that on the very day of his arrival at the Patkai mountain range (3rd March 1837), he learnt that "a party of Migrang Singhfos residing on the Burmese side of the Patkai in combination with the Moonchong Yoonglee Nagahs on the same side had attacked and killed three of the Kusack Nagahs within the British Territory, beside burning the village and carrying off 20 of them into captivity" (*FDP*, *10th April 1837*, *No. 121*, NAI). According to Major John Butler (in his work of 1855), just on the eve of his arrival in the Naga Hills, the Angami village of Beerahmah "was *a* great mart...for the sale of slaves" (Elwin 1969: 251; italics, mine). Moffatt Mills also noted that during his days in the Naga country (early 1850s), a male slave was worth "one cow and three conch shells", a female slave was worth "three cows and four or five conch shells" (see Mills 1854: cxlv and Butler 1978: 157). E.R. Grange noted in his tour-diary of 1838 that the Semkher Cacharees (of the plains) bartered with the friendly Nagas around them their dried fish, beads, conch shells, brass ornaments and salt (from their salt springs) for cotton, wax, ivory, chillies and slaves, and sold to the Bengali merchants who went up there for cotton (Elwin 1969: 204). It is worthy of note here that in the 17th century, the Indian Sub-continent (Malabar, Coromandel and Bengal-Arakan coasts) formed the middle circuit of three circuits of sub-regions from where the Dutch East India

Company, with Batavia (Jakarta, Indonesia) as its Asian headquarters and seat of the Governor-General and Council of the Indies) drew captive labour (slaves) for the "Dutch Indian Ocean slave system" (see Vink 2003:139).

It is, therefore, probable that Naga raids upon non-Naga villages of the plains of Assam and Cachar were, to a certain extent, prompted by the prevailing lucrative trade in slaves. E.R. Grange learnt that a slave was worth twenty packets of salt, and confessed that he "saw many Muneeporees, who had been seized whilst young, and sold both amongst Kookees, Cacharees, and Nagas" (Elwin 1969: 204). Salt, as a hard-earned commodity in the Naga country, was a very precious commodity equivalent to rice, the staple food of the Nagas. In the days of yore, before the advent of salt from the Indian sea shores, salt produced in a few villages of northeastern part of the Tangkhul Naga country, was a source of life not only for the Tangkhul villages but also for other Naga communities, such as the Poumai and Mao Nagas of present-day Senapati district (Manipur), the Angami Naga villages of Khonoma and Jotsoma in Kohima district of Nagaland, and also Somra villages in northwest Burma. It is worth quoting here T.C. Hodson's observation on the salt industry of the Tangkhuls prevalent in his days (late 19th century and early 20th century):

> The salt industry provides employment for a number of villages in the North East of the Tangkhul country….The salt…meets with a ready sale among the hill people, so that the salt wells are a meeting place for all sorts of traders, men from the Nāga Hills, from Khonoma and Jotsoma, and from the Somra villages (1974: 48).

Salt was scarce in pre-colonial Naga society, and the people of Marem (a major salt-manufacturing village in northern Tangkhul country), is said to have survived solely on bartering salt for rice brought to the village by people of other villages.

Even after the establishment of British colonial rule over certain parts of the Naga Hills (in 1866–1878), Nagas continued

to engage in inter-village wars and raids. For instance, in 1876, the Political Agent at Munnipore wrote to the Commissioner of Assam in Gowhatty (No. 31, 17th April, 1876), that Angamis of Khonoma attacked the village of Taningjum (then claimed to be subject to the *Rāja* of Manipur) plundered it and carried away six people as captives; and that five of the captives had been sold to the people of Tanghai while the sixth person was believed to be in Konomah village (*FDP, Pol. A., Nos. 99–102,* Dec. 1867, NAI). The Deputy Commissioner of the Naga Hills, in his reply to the Political Agent in Munnipore (Letter No. 181, dated Golaghat, Upper Assam, 1st October 1867), affirmed that of the five captives sold, "four were restored to Munnipore", while the fifth was reported to have been sold to the "Kookies" (*FDP, Pol. A., Nos. 99–102,* Dec. 1867, NAI). Commenting on the incessant struggles amongst the 'tribes' (especially Nagas) of Manipur during the early stage of the British colonial rule in the state, Dr. George Watt wrote that during raiding expeditions, the villages under attacks were "completely destroyed, the old and weak men and women murdered, the strong and young men and women carried into slavery, and the infants cruelly butchered before their parents' eyes" (1887: 349). Indrani Chatterjee observes that the chronicles of Manipur kings "record that a seventeenth century scarcity drove the poor of a village to kill a royal elephant for food, but the offenders compensated the king with 'twenty-two slaves, cows, and horses," and that in the Manipur kingdom, "by the eighteenth century, food shortages *drove* the value of each captive to a critical point: 'nineteenth *mounds* of grain'" (2006: 289; italics, mine).

Thus, it may not be far from truth in contemplating pre-colonial Naga warfare in the light of contemporary Southeast Asian situation, and in treating it as part of the larger Southeast Asian webs of slave trade, and also as part of medieval and early modern warfare of what is today known as "Northeast India". It is said that Khiamungan Nagas became a nuisance for the British colonial rulers "for capturing slaves from the adjoining Yimchunger, Chang and Konyak belts *for* selling them to Tsawlaw, Tsaplaw and Hemphu *villages* across the *India-Burma*

border" (Sardespande 1987: 19; italics, mine). With "the only known pass into Burma" (as pointed out by J.P. Mills, Deputy Commissioner of Naga Hills district in the early decades of the 20th century) falling within the territories of Pangsha, Nokhu and Noklak, slave trade lucratively survived up to the 1940s (Ibid. : 60). A perusal of the political economy of pre-colonial wars/raids in these parts of Zomia confirms that, rather than acquiring territories, slave-gathering and other economic factors (tributes and ransoms, for instance) played pivotal roles in driving peoples/villages of the hills and kings of valley-based kingdoms/states into wars/raids. In early modern South Asia, especially in the eastern part of the Indian sub-continent, as Richard M. Eaton has noted, "endemic warfare between states in Manipur, Tripura, Cachar, and Assam produced enslaved captives whom those states deployed to clear forests for cultivation" (Eaton 2006:1). Indrani Chatterjee also observes that during the period between the fourteenth and nineteenth centuries, "labor was wealth to be accumulated in warfare between the Burman, Arakanese, Ahom, Manipuri, Tripuri, and Tai-Shan polities", and therefore, "captives *were* counted" (2006: 288, italics, mine; for examples, see Singh 1995).

Like in pre-Hispanic (c.1550–1650 AD) Philippines, where slaves were not only saleable commodities, but also a physical marker of the owner's social status (see Lieberman 2003: 216), owning slaves was considered prestigious and honourable in pre-colonial Naga society also (Longchar 1999:100). Ao Nagas, Lotha Nagas, and Rengma Nagas, for instance, owned slaves in large numbers (Ibid.; Mills 1926: 210); and some rich men among the Aos, according to Robert Reid, possessed as many as ten or twenty slaves (1983:124). Colonial administrators, deputed in the Naga Hills district, A.W. Davis (1898) and J.P. Mills (1922), for instance, recorded that prior to the annexation of "their country, the Aos were great slave owners" (see Hutton 1969: 161; Mills 1922: 111), and that Aos "were always ready to trade in slaves with the Lothas" (Mills 1922: 111). Even till the days of J.P. Mills in the Naga Hills (i.e., early decades of the 20th century), selling and buying slaves, at times even troublesome freemen also, were

very common among the Phom Nagas (see Ibid. : 110), and Ao Nagas enslaved even fellow-Aos in large numbers (see Mills 1926: 211). When, in early colonial days, the colonial authorities issued orders to abolish slavery in the Ao Naga country, there was a rush among Ao slave-owners to sell off their slaves to their "independent neighbours across the Dikhu" river (see Ibid. : 210–211). "It was the custom for a rich man", among the Ao Nagas, J.P. Mills observed, "to be surrounded by a body-guard of slaves when in contact with the enemy" (Ibid. : 211). In such a society where owning slaves was esteemed as a hallmark of high social status, raids apparently formed one of the most important sources of slaves, for war captives or victims of raids, when not ransomed or were young and strong, were generally reduced to slaves or sold into slavery.

Slaves also played vital roles in the politics of the pre-colonial societies of present Northeast India. Ahom kings and nobles, for instance, used slaves as items of gift to their favourites or friends (see Longchar 1999:100). The kings of Manipur also seemingly used to give slaves as reward to polo players and carpenters of royal apartments (see Chatterjee 2006:289). The Thongjais (Kukis) paid their "tribute" in "human wealth" (obviously slaves or war captives) "along with guns, gongs, and animal wealth" to Manipur kings. (see Ibid. : 289). Among the Konyak Nagas, it was "common for a slave to be bought for the chief's son to kill in order that the boy may wear ceremonial dress without risking the dangers of war" (Hutton 1969: 59; see also Mills 1922:110, fn. 1). Similarly, slaves among the Ao Nagas, according to A.W. Davis, were occasionally made use of for some semi-sacrificial purpose, such as killing them for making peace between two belligerent villages, "and as a sacrifice to the spirits of the dead who have gone unavenged" (see Hutton 1969: 161). Among some Phom Nagas also, in making peace between two belligerent villages, a slave might be killed at the spot where fighting began, just as Hukpang and Ourangkong villages (which were "often at war") did while making of peace between them (Ibid. : 156, fn. 1).

Some of the leading colonial ethnographers linked Naga raids to eschatological reasons/beliefs. Drawing ideas from the Kuki belief in the need of sending a dead chief with slaves to serve him in the next world, T.C. Hodson (1974) hypothesized that eschatological reasons played significant roles in taking heads in raids. J.H. Hutton also observed: "the Ao Naga...holds that the souls of the heads he takes serve him in the next world" (1928: 406). Whatsoever the reasons behind severing the heads of slain enemies might have been, either for worldly ends (tributes, ransoms, etc.) or for eschatological reasons (the need to transport the souls of their deceased members to the netherworld safely guarded by their war victims or slain enemies, as many Naga communities then held), the ultimate goal was to 'find slaves' to serve the master on this earth as well as in the 'Land of the Dead'.

Another important reason behind raids was, perhaps, as was the case in pre-colonial Southeast Asia, "demographic necessity", in the sense that besides making slaves provide services to their masters, the slaves also helped increase the population of their captors' community in as much as "slaves were often well cared for, and the younger men were allowed to take wives, or even given in marriage to their captors" (Watt 1887: 349). In the context of the Luishais and Kukis, Lt. Colonel J. Shakespear observed:

> As a rule only children and marriageable women were taken captive, and the latter were disposed in marriage, the lucky captor acting in loco parentis and taking the marriage price. The children grew up in the captor's house as his children (1912: 50).

In pre-European Southeast Asia (late 16th and early 17th centuries), "enemy soldiers were often too valuable to be killed", for prisoners of war or captives captured in raids were important for labour and for enhancing the captors' social status, and so, warfare was characterized by "the consistent emphasis not on annihilating the enemy, but on capturing prisoners for employment, public display, or sale" (Lieberman 2003: 217).

Among the Nagas also prisoners were well fed and looked after till they were ransomed by their friends; and when not ransomed, the captives became slaves of the captors or were sold into slavery. In many cases, the enslaved captives and/or debtors lived as members of their captors'/masters' families; and all slaves lived in their masters' houses, and children born of male-slaves and female-slaves automatically became the masters' property (see Mills 1926: 211). That slaves in pre-colonial Naga society were well-treated is testified to by the fact that when, in early colonial days, the colonial authorities by orders freed many slaves to abolish slavery in the Ao Naga country, many of the slaves chose "to stay with their masters rather than go home" (Ibid.). A male-slave could win freedom for "a specially meritorious deed" by killing and taking the head of a man (his master's enemy) who threatened to break through to his master guarded by him and other slaves (Ibid.). Such a slave could also "build a house, and would become the adopted son of his former master" (Ibid.). Thus, it may not be far from truth in claiming that the same situations as prevalent in pre-European Southeast Asia and the Luishai-Kuki societies were also prevalent in pre-colonial Naga country/society.

Considering all the practices and beliefs associated with raids/warfare in pre-colonial Naga society, and also the prevailing nature of warfare and socio-cultural realities in what has been proposed as Zomia (especially Southeast Asia), pre-colonial Naga raids may be seen as chiefly, if not solely, meant for capturing slaves or war-captives for selling into slavery. In other words, the nature of the social, economic and religious settings, within which the pre-colonial Naga raids may be situated, suggests that pre-colonial Naga raids were conducted primarily for gathering/capturing: i) slaves for serving their masters on this earth; ii) slaves for serving in the netherworld or afterlife, in that a warrior's victims in wars/raids were believed to become his slaves in the netherworld; iii) slaves for enhancing the owners' social status; and iv) war captives for selling into slavery, or for exacting tributes and ransoms.

VI. Conclusion

Warfare in pre-colonial Naga society was, in the first place, not an unruly affair. Nagas conducted wars/raids within the frameworks of well-established social norms, belief systems, socio-political settings, legal systems, and for some apt social, economic and political benefits, and apparently for eschatological reasons as well. Raids were, in fact, carried out not for the sake of procuring heads as generally held by colonial authorities and ethnographers. It appears that 'heads' were merely outcomes, not the cause of the raids. In other words, raids in pre-colonial Naga society were driven by eschatological reasons, socio-economic necessities and political considerations and ideas of justice and honour/revenge.

Having said that slave-gathering played a pivotal role in pre-colonial Naga warfare, it is imperative to define slavery in pre-colonial Naga society and of the adjoining communities of present Northeast India. Just as in medieval and early modern South Asia, as well as in pre-colonial Southeast Asia, slavery in pre-colonial Naga society may be understood as a contractual system or a reciprocal relationship between the slaves and their masters, wherein, quoting Richard Eaton, "the slaves owed obedience and loyalty as well as service to the master, while the latter owed protection and support to the slave" (2006: 3). Considering the similar sources of slaves, slavery in pre-colonial Naga society may also be seen in the light of the slavery prevalent among the Kachins of Upper Burma and of the slavery prevalent in pre-colonial Burma (kingdom of Pagan). In the former case, till the 1930s, according to J.H. Green, there existed two distinct types of *mayam* (bonded men and women): viz. *Ngong mayam* ('outside *mayam*), who were "in many respects similar to the serf" of England; and *Tinung mayam* ('household *mayam*'), who were deprived of all legal and land ownership rights (Leach 1954: 299). Of the bulk of *Tinung mayam*, "some were bought, a few were captured, others were obtained as handmaids to brides and others purchased as wives", and "the big majority (were) inherited or born as *mayam*" (Ibid. : 300; parentheses, mine). In the latter

context, slaves were divided into *hpaya-kyun* ("irredeemable slaves"), composed mostly of pagoda slaves, descendants of people donated to religious establishments and war captives in origin, and *kyun* ("redeemable slaves"), mostly victims of debt bondage, who could buy their freedom back in time (Myint-U 2001: 33 & 41; see also Jardine 1984: 248). Father Vicentius Sangermano (an Italian missionary, who lived in Ava and Rangoon from 1783 to 1806) called the two categories of slaves "perpetual" and "temporary" slaves (see Jardine 1984: 262). In pre-colonial Naga society also war captives and victims of debt bondage seemingly became "perpetual" slaves and "temporary" slaves respectively, because while war captives were often sold into slavery or to non-Naga slave traders, some slaves (enslaved for their inability to repay their debts/loans) were either freed or absorbed into their masters' families in course of time. Slavery in pre-colonial Naga society, as Richard Eaton observes in the context of medieval and early modern South Asia, may also, thus, be understood as "*the condition of uprooted outsiders, impoverished insiders — or descendants of either — serving persons on* (whom they were) *wholly dependent*" (2006: 2; italics is original, but parentheses, mine). And, it is pertinent to postulate that warfare in pre-colonial Naga society was inextricably intertwined with slavery, in that it was a very productive source for gathering slaves on one hand, and on the other hand, it was also a means of emancipating slaves bonded for inability to pay off their debts/loans, because their kinsmen could capture captives in raids and pay off their debts with the captives who were then ultimately enslaved when not ransomed.

Thus, warfare in pre-colonial Naga society played multiple forms of productive socio-economic roles inasmuch as it contributed to gathering slaves, capturing war captives for ransoms, exacting tributes and commanding submission from defeated villages. Warfare in pre-colonial Naga society also reproduced both social cohesion and economic bonds among friendly villages as much as it reproduced and nurtured socio-political contestations between belligerent villages. Not to endorse raids/wars, yet, it is pertinent to assert that the politics and

political economy of raids preconditioned the simultaneous existence of friendly villages and enemy villages. Each victory in raids/wars was followed by grand feastings and merry-makings that consumed huge amounts of wealth in the form, especially, of rice-beer and animals — mainly buffaloes, cows and pigs. In case of non-availability of the animals in the victorious village, friendly villages were looked upon as trading partners. Therefore, exchange of products among cordial villages was an essential feature of the political economy of pre-colonial Naga warfare. In many ways, warfare in pre-colonial Naga society thus stimulated and facilitated economic exchanges and socio-political networking in no small magnitude. In this way, even villages at war were also not altogether exclusive of each other. In other words, warfare in pre-colonial Naga society raised multiple social and physical barriers, yet it also simultaneously helped build inter-village/family/clan socio-economic and political bonds.

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