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State and Indigenous Intermediaries: Aspects of administrative arrangement in British India's Naga Hills, 1881-1945

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Abstract

From the foothills at Samaguting, the British occupied the hills of the Angami Nagas at Kohima as the headquarters of the Naga Hills district in late 1879, a move made permanent by February 1881. In the aftermath, innovative administrative measures were implemented into the social systems of hill communities. This paper traces the formation of indigenous intermediaries and their part in the transition from conquest to occupation. Scattered evidences suggest that the administrative arrangement along with major local-global upheavals not only created a class complementing colonial rule but also responding to what modernity had ushered in. These intermediaries, much overlooked by scholarships so far, serves as excellent entry points to: first, see the everyday practices of a frontier regime; second, elaborate the oft-cited abstract sounding 'British administration' used for explaining changes in the Naga Hills; and third, contribute to what could possibly be a study of 'colonialism from the middle'.

Key words: Naga Hills, colonial intermediaries, 'invented traditions'.

The 1870s-80s was a prominent phase in the Naga Hills district of British India's North-East Frontier. Foremost in the agenda of the state were surveys and strategic repositioning of headquarters. For the Nagas, their days of evading the state were over and an existence based on ancestral ways numbered. A class of interpreters (*dobashis*) and

village headmen (*gaonburas*)[1] were appointed tasked with tax collection, customary consultations, conscription of labour and maintenance of order. This innovative administrative arrangement affirms that colonial powers invented tradition to help legitimise their subordination of colonised peoples, a concept credited to the edited anthology by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger.[2] Much as this thesis has global applicability, it has also led to the question of authenticity. This paper, however, is less concerned with the debate on tradition as invented or genuine. Instead, its interest is more on how tradition was reinterpreted and reconstructed in the context of wider socio-political changes. Rulers did this continually, but so did subjects alike as several studies have shown. For instance, Emily Lynn Osborn has highlighted the agentic capabilities of African colonial employees – their active involvement in shaping the everyday operations of the French colonial state.[3] This paper is headed towards what could possibly be a study of 'colonialism from the middle'.[4] Based on scattered evidences, it traces the formation of indigenous intermediaries and their overall implications on society.[5]

Section I outlines Naga village polities and hierarchies in the 1860s-70s. Section II traces its restructuring under British rule particularly post February 1881. Section III explores what the administrative arrangement entails. Section IV highlights the manoeuvres of mediators. Section V examines how the intermediaries engaged with

[1] Note on orthography: Names, terms and places are used in this paper as found in colonial sources. For cases of multiplicity, I settled on one for uniformity.
[2] Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds, *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.
[3] Emily Lynn Osborn, '"Circle of iron": African colonial employees and the interpretation of colonial rule in French West Africa', *The Journal of African History*, Vol. 44:1, 2003, pp. 29-50.
[4] Ralph A. Austen, 'Colonialism from the middle: African clerks as historical actors and discursive subjects', *History in Africa*, Vol. 38, 2011, pp. 21-33.
[5] I initially got this germ of an idea for the specific context of the Naga Hills in Peter Robb, 'The colonial state and constructions of Indian identity: An example on the Northeast Frontier in the 1880s', *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 31:2, May, 1997, pp. 245-83.

the changes brought about by major local-global upheavals and colonial modernity.[6]

I
Delegates System, Naga Social Systems

The Naga Hills district was first formed in 1866. Samaguting, located at the foothills, was its first headquarters and Lieutenant John Gregory its Deputy Commissioner (henceforth DC). Since then the state had been making gradual inroads into the hills but without sustained occupation. Another Lieutenant John Butler toured most winters and at times accompanied the Topographical Survey of India party. Best epitomising frontier 'political officers',[7] he supervised the delegates system sanctioned in 1868.[8] Started on an experimental basis, about ten representatives from the Angami Nagas clans were invited to reside at Samaguting on a pay scale of ten Rupees per month.[9] Two years later on 29 November 1870, the Government of Bengal, then administering Assam, asked for a 'special report' to determine its success or failure.[10] Butler responded that he had initially met 'considerable difficulty in getting the Nagas to … furnish

[6] The study use 'colonial modernity' to refer to a range of modern state-making apparatus and ideas which flows into 'contact zones' with British colonialism.

[7] The officials of this frontier roughly conformed to Henrika Kuklick's remarks about 'political officers' in British colonies. They were expected to be 'educated amateurs' and relied upon to discharge most of the delicate functions of the state. These 'practical men' were the ideal administrator who could tactfully handle their subjects so as not to draw the state into unnecessary jeopardy. They often had to conduct constant tours to get acquainted with local conditions and customs. See Henrika Kuklick, *The Savage Within: The Social History of British Anthropology, 1885-1945*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, pp. 48, 198-99.

[8] National Archives of India, Foreign Department, Branch Political-A (henceforth NAI, FD, BP), Proceedings Number (henceforth Pro. No.) 283, August 1881, C.J. Lyall, Officiating Secretary to the Commissioner of Assam (henceforth SECCOA), Shillong, to A.C. Lyall, Secretary to the Government of India, Fort William (henceforth SECGOI), 20 June 1881.

[9] Assam State Archives, Bengal Government Papers, (henceforth ASA, BGP), File No. 122/219, Serial No. 1-8, 1872-73, Lieutenant J. Butler, Officiating DC, Naga Hills, to the Personal Assistant, Commissioner of Assam, 1 May 1872.

[10] ASA, BGP, F No. 122/219, Serial No. 1-8, 1872-73, Colonel H. Hopkinson, Agent to the Governor-General, North-East Frontier (henceforth AGG, NEF), Shillong, to the Officiating Secretary to the Government of Bengal (henceforth SECGOB), Judicial Department, 12 May 1872.

"Dobashas" from their respective clans.'[11] But as the Nagas got to know the advantage of spokesmen residing at Samuguting, his 'only difficulty had been to settle which village should be allowed the privilege'. Out of the total ten posts sanctioned, eight were appointed at first. All posts were filled by 1872.[12] Butler paid a glowing tribute to these men who provided the 'greatest assistance' and 'ensure a hearty welcome' from several Naga communities through which he passed. The 'complete success' of tours into the interior was attributed 'to the indefatigable exertions of these "Dobashas".' The large and powerful Angami village of Jotsomah was coerced into giving up three men who had murdered Kuki scouts a year before near the Diphu River as a 'result of the advice given by one Satha, the "Dobasha" of the Thekronoma clan of that village.' Butler implored that should the state 'determined to make any forward movement, these men will be invaluable to us.'[13] Higher authorities agreed.[14] Further applicability of the system to other jurisdictions was proposed. However, this was negated by the DCs of Sibsagor, Lakhimpur and Darrang – all plain districts of Assam.[15] The system thus was a unique facet of hill districts. The sanctioned delegates for the Naga Hills increased to fifteen by 1873.[16]

Through the tours, Butler also attained some insights into the social systems in the hills. He reported that the 'Naga nowhere really accepts a chief' but 'merely the nominal heads of each clan, men who by dint of their personal qualities have become leaders of public opinion, but without the least particle of power beyond that given them'. 'The Government of every Naga tribe with whom I have had intercourse is a

[11] ASA, BGP, File No. 122/219, Serial No. 1-8, 1872-73, Butler to the Personal Assistant, Commissioner of Assam, 1 May 1872.
[12] Butler 'secured the services of one man from each of the following villages: Kohima, Megamah, Jotsoma, Khonomah, Kerumah, Nerhamah, Phesamah, Jakamah, Sepamah, and Chichamah.' See *Ibid*.
[13] *Ibid*.
[14] ASA, BGP, File No. 122/219, Serial No. 1-8, 1872-73, C.J. Lyall, Assistant Under SECGOI, FD, to A. Mackenzie, Junior SECGOB, Judicial Department, 11 June 1872.
[15] ASA, BGP, F No. 122/219, Serial No. 1-8, 1872-73, Colonel H. Hopkinson, AGG, NEF, to the Officiating SECGOB, Political Department, 21 November 1872.
[16] NAI, FD, BP-A, Pro. No. 283-84, August 1881, K.W. No. 1, Delegates for the Naga Hills, from Commissioner of Assam, No. 770, 20 June 1881.

purely democratical one,' noted Butler, 'and whenever anything of public importance has to be undertaken, all the chiefs (both old and young) meet together in solemn conclave, and then discuss and decide upon the action to be taken'.[17] Apparently, he had come across mainly 'democratic' and not 'aristocratic' village polities.[18]

	Democratic Regime/Council of Village Elders	**Aristocratic Regime/Hereditary Chiefs**
Naga Groups	Angamis, Aos, Konyaks (Thengkoh section), Lothas, Rengmas, Sangtams, Tangkhuls	Changs, Semas, Konyaks (Thendu section)
Other Groups		Thado Kukis

Table 1: Types of village polities.

Butler's supervisory role of the delegates system was, however, cut short. He died of a spear wound inflicted by the Lotha Nagas of Pangti village near Wokha while on survey duty in December 1875. Retribution followed. Lieutenant R.G. Woodthorpe, the official in charge of that survey, 'promptly burnt Pangti'.[19] He also proposed Wokha as a suitable station.[20] Meanwhile, the Angamis of Mozema village raided one Gumaigaju village in the Cachar lowlands in

[17] NAI, FD, BP-A, Pro. No. 74, January 1874, Brief Memorandum on the Naga Country, John Butler, pp. 1-14.

[18] The general formulation many years later by an administrator-ethnographer of the Naga Hills and a British anthropologist seemed purposeful for understanding the social systems of this region. Roughly, there are two divisions: 'democratic' and 'aristocratic'. In the former, each village is on its own presided over and ruled by a council of elders. The elder acts as a representative of one lineage but no particular lineage are intrinsically superior to any other. The elder may achieve his office either by seniority or by passing a test of merit. Contrastingly, in the 'aristocratic' regime, a single chief claims dominion over a number of scattered villages. Each of these villages was ruled by a headman who holds office by a hereditary right. The headman's and chief's lineage are usually linked by ties of affinity. See J.H. Hutton, 'Introduction' in J.P. Mills, *The Lhota Nagas*, London: MacMillan and Co. Ltd., 1922, p. xxxiii; and E.R. Leach, 'The frontiers of "Burma"', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 3:1, October, 1960, pp. 63-64.

[19] Alexander Mackenzie, *The North-East Frontier of India*, New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 2005 [1884], p. 129.

[20] NAI, FD, BP-A, Pro. No. 146-51, K.W., Office Note, January 1877.

February 1877. That same year on 6 December, a punitive military expedition was despatched from Samaguting under P.T. Carnegy, PO. The village of Mozema, 'with the exception of three or four houses, was burnt to the ground.'[21] Close on the heels of this expedition, Lieutenant-Colonel R.H. Keatinge, the first Chief Commissioner of Assam (COA),[22] personally explored the Angami hills. On 2 February 1878, at 4:00 p.m., he held a meeting with the headmen of Mozema and Khonoma villages. Excerpt of the meeting made similar observation as noted earlier by Butler:

> The fact of the matter is that the head men have really little or no influence, the young men who have no … land or goods are in the majority, and prefer to raid, as old "Rokitzu," the chief of the middle Khel of Mozema, said – "We old men wish to keep quiet, but the young men won't let us." The great difficulty in dealing with the Naga tribes is that there is no recognised head, and that each village is often divided into three or four parties.[23]

The *khels* or divisions within villages which was not necessarily clan based was a marked political system of some hill communities like the Angamis.

From that tour, Keatinge decided the headquarters in favour of Kohima instead of Wokha (which would be a sub-station):

> The site selected has strong strategic advantages, is at a very healthy elevation, and had facilities for an ample water-supply, while its situation in the heart of the Angami country, and on the road to Manipur, is favourable both for controlling these tribes and for encouraging the development of trade and civilized intercourse.[24]

[21] Khonoma and Jotsoma villages were pardoned. See Mackenzie, *The North-East*, p. 131.
[22] On 6 February 1874, Keatinge assumed the first Commissionership which was separated from the Government of Bengal. See *Report on the Administration of the Province of Assam for the Year 1882-83* (henceforth *Administration Report*), Shillong: Assam Secretariat Press, 1884, p. 41.
[23] NAI, FD, BP-A, Pro. No. 21, October 1878, Diary of Lieutenant C.R. MacGregor, 44th Regiment, Sylhet Light Infantry, Commanding Escort of COA during tour through Naga Hills, 2 February 1878.
[24] NAI, FD, BP, Pro. No. 27, October 1878, Pro. No. 27, S.O.B. Ridsdale, Chief SECCOA to SECGOI, 1 March 1878; and K.W. No. 6, Office Note.

In October 1878, under S.C. Bayley who succeeded Keatinge in June, sixteen Naga villages were brought under British rule.[25] This was a huge increase since the spring of 1874 when Captain J. Johnstone, Officiating Political Agent/Officer (henceforth PA/O), had first brought two Naga villages under British 'protection on payment of revenue'.[26] On 14 November 1878, Kohima was occupied without opposition on an experimental basis.[27] By 24 March 1879, the transition from Samaguting to Kohima was made effective.[28] During this phase, G.H. Damant, PO, opined:

> I attach great weight to the realising of revenue from these savages, not so much from a fiscal as a political point of view …. Briefly, a savage who pays revenue considers himself a British subject …, while a savage who does not … considers himself independent ....[29]

However, the Angamis, hitherto unaccustomed to living under the dictates of others did not like the intrusion of the state at all. Hardly seven months had passed when on 14 October 1879, Damant was shot dead at the Khonoma village gate and many of his men massacred. This was the spark that set off a rebellion by many Angami villages spearheaded by Khonoma. Kohima station was targeted, laid siege to and nearly taken. It was with difficulty and timely reinforcements by the British PA and Raja of Manipur that Kohima was relieved.[30] By 22 November 1879, the lower portion of Khonoma village was occupied, noted a contemporary colonial official/historian, 'after the severest

[25] The COA maintained that the Naga Hills district was 'a geographical expression, not an administrative fact.' It was designed the 'keep the Manipuris out of it'. The British only administered those villages which 'voluntarily' came under their control seeking protection 'from raids'. Out of the sixteen villages, thirteen paid annual revenue of 1,032 Rupees. See NAI, FDBP-A, Pro. No. 70-71, K. W. No. 3, October 1878.
[26] Mackenzie, *The North-East*, p. 127.
[27] *Ibid*., p. 132.
[28] NAI, FD, BP-A, Pro. No. 497, January 1880, Notification No. 30, COA, 14 April 1879.
[29] NAI, FD, BP-A, Pro. No. 509, January 1880, G.H. Damant to the SECCOA, 21 February 1879.
[30] James Johnstone, the official who brought help from Manipur, narrated this event in his *My Experiences in Manipur and the Naga Hills*, London: Sampson Low, Marston and Company Limited, 1896.

fighting ever known in these hills.'[31] The Angamis retreated to higher grounds at a well-fortified defence called Chakka Forts which was their stronghold. They held their position but were forced to surrender on 28 March 1880. The rebellion had lasted almost six months.

After the rebellion was suppressed, a Captain commented:

> The election of a headman in each village is a most important matter, and it should engross the very early attention of the Political Agent, who will certainly find the work of administration immensely difficult until this necessary reform is introduced.[32]

Based on such reports and pondering over the best policy for the Naga Hills, higher authorities agreed that there did exist 'a germ of a system of village government' which could 'be developed into something practical with judicious handling.' This conclusive policy was arrived at along with a promise reward of 250 Rupees for the surrender of 'two persons' primarily responsible for Damant's murder. But this strategy did not work partly because of 'the conditions of Naga life' and as there was 'no recognised or constituted head of a village'.[33] Perhaps this was a collective stand even in defeat by those rebellious Angami villages. Harsh punishments followed.[34] They were fined and conscripted for coolie labour. Their guns were confiscated. So was their livelihood – the terraced wet-rice cultivating fields had to be left fallow. Turned out of their homes and not allowed to return, they were tried to be resettled in Manipur or in fresh tracts of land within the Naga Hills through a 'dispersion policy'. The Angamis, however, refused to comply, choosing instead to become a 'houseless wanderer' and lived off on the charity of neighbouring villages.[35] From time to time one Major Michell appealed that the punishments inflicted had been too severe. Some redresses were made. The dispossessed lands

[31] Mackenzie, *The North-East Frontier*, p. 137.
[32] NAI, FD, BPU-B, Pro. No. 153-54, February 1881, W.J. Williamson, Chief PO, to the SECCOA, 21 April 1880.
[33] NAI, FD, Branch Public-B, (henceforth BPU-B), Pro. No. 153-54, February 1881, C.J. Lyall, Officiating SECCOA, to the SECGOI, 17 June 1880.
[34] NAI, FD, BPU-B, Pro. No. 153-54, February 1881, Appendix 1-15, Treaties between Williamson, Chief PO, and Angami Chiefs.
[35] NAI, FD, BPU-B, Pro. No. 153-154, February 1881, Memorandum on Naga Hills Affairs by S.C. Bayley, COA, 29 January 1881.

were granted permission for reoccupation. The exception was Khonoma village whose three *khels* – Merhoma, Semoma and Thevoma – were directed to build their houses on separate sites marked off for them by the PO.[36] By February 1881, the plan was put into practice. The Naga Hills was also finally decided as a British district and Kohima affirmed its headquarters.[37] Shortly later, Bayley left and was replaced by C.A. Elliott on 1 March 1881.

II
'From a Warlike and Marauding to a Peaceful Race'

Assuming the Commissionership in a politically unstable climate, Elliott embarked on as much a judicious as pragmatic approach. In the first month in office, he took an extensive tour of the Naga Hills.[38] Based on this first-hand experience, he drafted a memorandum dated 31 March 1881. The following observations were made:

> In order to change the Nagas from a warlike and marauding to a peaceful race, it is essential that the habit of carrying arms should be stopped, and that everything should be discouraged which has a martial tendency, or leads the people to believe that they can successfully resist our arms.[39]

Licenses to carry arms were to be issued for guns and even spears. Naga traps made of sharpened bamboo pikes often camouflaged near villages or planted on pathways called *panjies* were to be removed and deep ditches around villages filled up. Heavily fortified villages were to be demolished, levelled to the ground and no new village was 'allowed … to put up any stone walls of any kind.' Tax was fixed at two Rupees per house. The Nagas were to be reformed through education, compulsory labour, public works and road constructions as well as encouraged to use the medical dispensary and vaccinations. Potato farming was even idealised in an effort to discourage shifting

[36] *Ibid*.
[37] *Administration Report, 1880-81*, pp. 1, 5, 22-23.
[38] Elliott entered the Naga Hills through Nichuguard and visited Khonoma, Sachema, Mezuma, Kohima and so on (Angamis territories), marched as far as Wokha (inhabited by the Rengma, Sema and Lhota Nagas) and concluded his tour on the plains at Merapani. See *Ibid*., p. 24.
[39] NAI, FD, BP-A, Pro. No. 135, January 1882, Memorandum on the Administration of the Naga Hills District, 31 March 1881 (henceforth Elliott's Memorandum).

cultivation and conserve forests. A member of the Governor General's Council reviewing Elliott's memorandum noted that the COA, unlike earlier policymaker, intended 'to adopt a more vigorous system of control'.[40] Destabilising the strength of Naga villages but firming up the administrative centre was integral to Elliott's scheme. A total of forty five frontier police outposts were set up to make the British government 'more visible' to people within the borders.[41]

The election of village headmen was taken up in earnest. Elliott's predecessor Bayley had stress that they would be a 'great help to good government.' Accordingly, their appointment was proposed with their salary fixed at twenty per cent of the total revenue collected from the administered Naga villages. Initially christened '*lambardars*' to differentiate them from the '*mauzadars*' of Assam valley, *gaonburas* were neither 'contractors' nor made liable to make good in case of problems in revenue collection.[42]

The role of delegates was brought up for review too. A report noted:

> ... besides acting as interpreters, they serve as the medium for all communications between the Political Officers and those whom they represent. They reside at the head-quarters, convey the orders of the Political Officers to their villages, and in various ways render themselves useful to him.[43]

It was further noted that 'the original object of their appointment was to reconcile existing feuds and to check their recurrence …, but in the course of time … regarded more as the escort and intelligence department of the Political Agent, and as interpreters.' Elliott also asked higher authorities for two more delegates in addition to the fifteen already sanctioned on the same pay scale of ten Rupees for the Wokha Sub-division. The two had been on temporary employment since the subdivision opened in 1878.[44] This was granted.[45] Thus, six

[40] NAI, FD, BP-A, Pro. No. 134-37, January 1882, K.W. No. 1, No. 134-36, Administration of the Naga Hills Tract, (Sd.) E.W.C., 24 May 1881.
[41] Robb, 'The colonial state', pp. 258-59.
[42] Elliott's Memorandum.
[43] NAI, FD, BP-A, Pro. No. 283, August 1881, C.J. Lyall to A.C. Lyall, 20 June 1881.
[44] NAI, FD, BP-A, Pro. No. 283-84, August 1881, K.W. No. 1, Delegates for the Naga Hills, from COA, Assam, No. 770, 20 June 1881.

months into the Commissionership, Elliott decreed that the employment of these delegates 'had passed beyond the stage of experiment … and that they should now be regarded as part of the ordinary machinery for the administration of the district.'[46]

In addition to this, Elliott attributed 'the greatest importance to constant and free personal intercourse between District Officers and their Assistants on the one hand and the people of the country on the other'.[47] A principle was laid down 'that tours should be so planned that every village, or at least every group of villages, should be visited by a superior officer of covenanted rank once in two years.' For that, a record had to 'be kept of past tours'. At the close of each year, a tour map had to be prepared and hung up in office to know what part of the district had 'been visited in any particular year.' The tours would lead to a proliferation of diaries by district officials. By design, it was to make the presence of the state felt more strongly. Soon, the Nagas had become 'convinced' that the British 'intend to stop at Kohima', that there was no point offering 'resistance' anymore and thus began 'to offer voluntary labour on making and clearing the road in considerable numbers.'[48]

The enterprise of Elliott appeared effective in bringing a change in the disposition of the Nagas. He sought to see his plans through. He also had a particular penchant for the term of the Naga Hills' political head which had undergone changes over the years: DC (1866-1872) and PA/O (since 1872). Higher authorities wanted to continue using 'Deputy Commissioners and Political Officers'. Elliott rejected this as it tended to foster the belief that the principles of administration in the Naga Hills were different from those enforced in other British territories.[49] In mid-1882, 'Political Officer' was discarded for 'Deputy

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[45] NAI, FD, BP-A, Pro. No. 284, August 1881, H.M. Durand, Under SECGOI, to the COA, 9 August 1881.
[46] NAI, FD, BP-A, Pro. No. 169, October 1881, C.J. Lyall, Officiating SECCOA, to A.C. Lyall, SECGOI, 3 September 1881.
[47] Elliott's Memorandum.
[48] *Administration Report, 1881-82*, pp. 7-8.
[49] NAI, FD, BP-A, Pro. No. 8, August 1882, C.J. Lyall, Officiating SECCOA, to C. Grant, SECGOI, 5 July 1882.

Commissioner'.[50] In this way, R.B. McCabe became another first DC of the Naga Hills who proved instrumental in implementing what Elliott envisioned. By then, he had managed to visit almost every village of the Angamis. British rule appeared much welcome in his renderings:

> The Kutcha Nagas, who were formerly oppressed by the Manipuris and Kukis and looted by the Angamis, told me repeatedly that they much preferred the fixed assessment of the British Government to the constant demands for tribute made by the Angamis, and requested that an outpost might be fixed in their country, so that they might feel sure of protection.[51]

This statement might read as an obvious propaganda for the legitimisation of British rule. But it was also suggestive of the state striking roots in the hills and there for the long haul. Within the newly formed district headquarters, the form of government was designed to facilitate the transformation of the Angamis into the docile body that colonial authorities had desired for long. Since the earliest encounter in 1832 or as recent as 1866, policy makers had been implicitly convinced that military domination of the Nagas must be a precondition. Yet frontier conditions and financial expediency had ensured that much of the nineteenth century state-Nagas' relations be regulated through military expeditions into the hills without sustained occupation. A defensive strategy to establish stability and the gradual 'civilisation' of the Nagas from afar ended in consistent failure. This was embodied in the foothills station at Samaguting. Elliott's regime was a landmark in the way the Naga Hills was administered. Not only were the Nagas incorporated into the colonial order, their 'disciplining' through innovative administration had begun.

III
Attire, Authority

The insertion of innovative practices produced results. This was illustrated in a head-taking incident of the headman of Chelokesame by Kukiagami village in 1886. As per the account of the headman's son,

[50] NAI, FD, BP-A, Pro. No. 9, August 1882, H.M. Durand, Under SECGOI, to COA, 24 July 1882.
[51] NAI, FD, A-Political-E, Pro. No. 136, September 1882, COA's Resolution on the Naga Hills Administration Report 1881-82, 25 August 1882.

some men of Kukiagami had summoned him to a place called Missami and asked 'why he had gone to see the Wokha Sahib & what he had given to the Sahib.' Accompanied by three men, the headman replied that 'he had given the Sahib a red spear.' He was then demanded two cows which he refused. For refusal, his head was taken while his friends fortunately escaped the bloody deed.[52] Much to his own peril, he possibly thought that he was now answerable only to state officials. Power relations in the hills were altering. The episode perhaps pointed out how previously mightier overlord villages were losing its hold over weaker ones and state-appointed chiefs becoming aware of their new status in the colonial regime. Meanwhile, interpreters began informing incidents not conforming to the colonial idea of law and order whenever it occurred in their vicinity. Even an ex-interpreter reported a murder while he was on a trading business to the Wokha SDO in 1887.[53] The medium through which state officials and interpreters communicated was through Assamese or Naga-Assamese (quite possibly the pidgin Nagamese as now known).[54] But interpreters were also expected to have command of some Naga dialects. In 1894, when A. Porteous, PA of Manipur, had to settle a raiding case at the Manipur-Naga Hills border, he had to rely on 'Dobashas Lotaji and Kabha from Kohima' who acted 'as interpreters through the medium of the Mao dialect.'[55] Interpreters also acted as customary consultants as instructive from the diary of an official in 1902. For two days, one

[52] Nagaland State Archives (henceforth NSA), Political Department, File No. 6, 1886, Report regarding the murder of the Gaonbura of Chelokesame Sema tribe, W. Brodrick, SDO, Wokha, 10 May 1886.

[53] NAI, FD, Branch External (henceforth BE)-A, Pro. No. 65, November 1887, A. Porteous, DC, Naga Hills, to the SECCOA, 17 August 1887.

[54] 'From a military point of view,' a report noted, 'the most generally useful language spoken in Assam is Assamese, the lingua franca of the Brahmaputra Valley, and the universal means of inter-communication among the various tribes of Nagas to whom the tribal dialects are mutually unintelligible.' See NAI, Home Department, Brach Establishments, Examinations, Pro. No. 5, March 1883, C.J. Lyall, Officiating SECCOA, Shillong, to the SECGOI, 6 October 1882. Another official, J.P. Mills, wrote that a 'staff of interpreters is maintained whose duty it is to translate from the Naga dialects into Naga-Assamese, the *lingua franca* of the District, and to advise on custom.' See J.P. Mills, *The Ao Nagas*, Delhi/Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1973 [1926], p. 406.

[55] NAI, FD, BE-A, Pro. No. 42, May 1894, Diary of A. Porteous, Officiating PA and Superintendent of Manipur State for the Month of May 1893.

'Kepani Dobhasha' provided information on the 'Memi' community and their 'customs for the ethnographical survey.'[56]

Within a decade or two after the occupation of Kohima, the state had secured the allegiance of a select few to a certain degree. This was made operative by the authority vested on the go-betweens. They were made distinctive from the rest through the obvious mode: appearance. For 'good services' during the military operations of 1878-80 in the Angami hills, sixteen headmen and interpreters had received rewards in the form of money and 'a piece of broadcloth.'[57] Gift giving as a goodwill gesture had a longer history. This presentation might not be an annual affair. But evidence existed of occasional gifting of '600 yards of scarlet broad cloth' in 1891 and 1894.[58] Another supply was made by a Punjab based company in 1900.[59]

This red cloth was the means of negotiation of relationship between the British and Nagas. It cannot be worn by commoners. Defaulters were liable to be prosecuted. It became a sort of uniform. It invoked decorum. So much so that headmen often tried to coax out this cloth from British officials on tour. In 1900, Captain A.E. Woods was at Nichuguard inspecting the police station when the 'Samaguting headmen came down nominally to pay their respects, but in reality to try and get a few concessions out'. The latter had anticipated that the DC 'having just come out from home refreshed in body and mind … would be easier to get round.' The move paid off as Woods 'gave the gaonbura a "chit" for a red cloth.'[60] Requests for this cloth could be seen in the diaries of other officials over the years. In 1925, J.H. Hutton, who had been in the Naga Hills since 1912, noted at Piphima that 'Thepfusale the old Gaonbura of Chipama who claims to date his

[56] Manipur Secretariat Records and Library (henceforth MSRL), Cabin 39, File No. 11, Tour Diary of Captain W.M. Kennedy, Officiating DC, Naga Hills, 26-27 July 1902.
[57] NAI, FD, BP-A, Pro. No. 616-40, August 1881.
[58] NAI, FD, BE-B, Pro. No. 62-68, June 1891; and Pro. No. 140, May 1894.
[59] NAI, FD, BE-B, Pro. No. 143, November 1900, F.H. Haggins, Manager, The New Egerton Woollen Mills Company Ltd., Dhariwal, Punjab, to the Under SECGOI, 1 November 1900.
[60] MSRL, Cabin 39, File No. 11, Tour Diary of Captain A.E. Woods, DC, Naga Hills, 10 October 1900.

service before 1880 has asked for a salaami cloth.'[61] The same year at Pyangsa, a headman called Yano claimed that he retired after thirty years in service and that his cloth was 'over-due'.[62] Cases of 'over-due' plausibly indicated that the cloth was given sparingly. This could be a means to ensure the effectiveness of headmen as indicative in another earlier diary entry at Sotukurr. Hutton wrote that it 'is ridiculous to give those villages red cloths if they give no help when we visit them'.[63] The cloth had become synonymous with prestige and authority through time. At Kiphire, 'a small Sangtam village', Hutton was visited by 'vast number of people' who were '[m]ostly the headmen of the small Sangtam villages on the western slopes of the Zungki valley.' 'They all complain of a village called Pensure … which has demanded the red clothes from some of the smaller villages in the corner area under threat of raids if they don't get them.'[64] Hutton had noticed the hold the cloth had while camping near Tita River below Yezashimi village. It had the power to protect. Hutton wrote that a headman by the name Zukishe put a corner of his red cloth over a man's head to save him 'from his village who wished to kill him'.[65]

The power embodied by the red cloth applied not only for the Naga Hills but for this colonial frontier. 'The importance attached to a red cloth is well illustrated by the fact that one of the punishments meted out to the Kukis in Manipur for the 1918 rebellion was the stoppage of red cloths to headmen', an official aptly noted.[66] This penalty was also evident during the Jadonang-Gaidinliu movement (1931-40). Headmen deemed inefficient had their red cloths taken off, a symbolic strip of

[61] ASA, Appointment and Political Department (henceforth APD), BP-B, Pro. No. 974-98, March 1924, Tour Diary of J.H. Hutton,27 June 1925.
[62] ASA, APD, BP-B, Pro. No. 974-98, March 1924, Tour Diary of J.H. Hutton, 10 December 1925.
[63] ASA, APD, BP-B, Pro. No. 974-98, March 1924, Tour Diary of J.H. Hutton, 20 November 1923.
[64] APD, BP, Pro. No. 710-712, Tour Diary of J.H. Hutton, 5 February 1926.
[65] ASA, APD, BP-B, Pro. No. 974-98, March 1924, Tour Diary of J.H. Hutton, 24 November 1923.
[66] ASA, APD, BP-A, Pro. No. 127-34, June 1928, H. Weightman, 28 April 1928.

power.[67] J.P. Mills, another prominent official of the Naga Hills who was briefly posted to another district in 1928, also advocated:

> It is highly desirable that interpreters and the headmen of the larger villages in the North Cachar Hills should be supplied with red cloths as is done in the Naga Hills. It adds greatly to their self-respect, and the greater their self-respect the easier is administration through them ....[68]

One way of creating 'self-respect' was by granting certain privileges which, among other things, came in the form of free liquor.[69] Another method was by making the post of headmen and interpreters hereditary.[70] Lineage played a big determinant as ascertainable from the various accounts about one Khupu/Kupu Sema who had an illustrious career as an interpreter. He was likely recruited in the 1880s. His name cropped up often in the tour diaries. As district touring was an arduous task, officials could cover only parts of the Naga Hills in a particular tour. Khupu used to fetch the headmen of interior villages to come and meet the British official on the touring path who would settled grievances like land disputes. On one occasion, Khupu provided 'correct information' of a 'raid in the Sema political control area'.[71] For his service through the years, he was rewarded the Imperial Service Medals along with Imnamiren Ao on 4 June 1917. Both their

[67] Captain C.W.L. Harvey took away the red cloth of the headman of Yangkhulen village in Manipur for being inefficient. See Manipur State Archives, Accession No. 201, R-1/S-C, Harvey to Higgins, PA, Manipur, 21 May 1932.

[68] ASA, APD, BP-A, Pro. No. 128, June 1928, J.P. Mills, DC, Cachar, to the Commissioner, Surma Valley and Hill Division, Silchar (henceforth CSVHD), 3 April 1928.

[69] For instance, six dozen and eight dozen bottles of U.P. Rosa Rum were given to the Mokokchung SDO and Naga Hills DC respectively 'for the entertainment of Naga chiefs.' See ASA, Local Self Government, Branch Secret and Revenue, J.C. Sen, Assistant SECGOB, to Secretary to the Government of Assam, 24 July 1935.

[70] The headman post was rotation-based too between *khels*. At Pyangsa village, Hutton had appointed the brother of the headman Yano who was retiring. Hutton 'only found out too late that the other section of the khel ought to have been given the chance of supplying the G.B. this time.' As such, he 'told them to see that they got it next time there was a change.' See ASA, APD, BP-B, Pro. No. 974-998, March 1924, Tour Diary of J.H. Hutton, DC, Naga Hills, 10 December 1925.

[71] MSRL, Cabin 39, File No. 11, Tour Diary of Captain H.W.G. Cole, DC, Naga Hills, 22 October 1897.

fathers had served as interpreters.[72] The Sema interpreter was quite effective that he elicited a remark from Hutton:

> The ordinary dobashi cannot in any circumstances earn a pension at present except by doing 30 years' service, which is almost impossible and has never been done by any dobashi except Khupu who is 9 years in superior service.[73]

Apart from this interpreter, there were others that distinguish themselves. Taking over the charge of the district from H.C. Barnes in 1917, Hutton admitted that 'the distance of the Mokokchung subdivision from headquarters [Kohima] made it necessary … to make some arrangement for the good order of the subdivision and the disposal of the miscellaneous cases without causing undue delay.' He deputed 'Wong, the Tamlu dobashi, responsible for the behaviour of the trans-Dikhu [River] area'. Wong used to send reports 'on what he was doing … by post from Wakching'. At Mokokchung, Hutton 'gave the highest powers … under the Naga Hills Administration Rules to the Head Interpreter, Ongli-Ngaku, a Chang, and to Etsizao, a Lhota dobashi.' The arrangement worked well: 'With the exception of the trans-Dikhu area the subdivision was practically run by these two men, and well run. They disposed of almost all cases, including two village affrays and a riot which might have become really serious if not promptly dealt with, with justice and despatch'. 'Without men as trustworthy as these three, it would have been difficult,' wrote Hutton, 'even with my fairly intimate knowledge of local affairs, to run the subdivision from Kohima'.[74] As a result, Hutton proposed two things: one, that these three interpreters be given 'personal allowances'; and two, that there was a drastic need for an improvement of the conditions of interpreters in his district in comparison with the Lushai Hills district and Manipur state.

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[72] A report noted: 'Imnamiren Ao is son of Chingnunglamba, late Head Interpreter, Office of the Sub-divisional Officer, Mokokchung …. Khupu Sema is the son of Sekhuna Sema, late Interpreter, Naga Hills.' See NAI, Foreign and Political Department, Branch Internal, Pro. No. 76, February 1918, the Secretary of State to the COA, 10 December 1917.

[73] ASA, Political Department, Political Branch, (henceforth PD, BP), Pro. No. 235-43, March 1918, J.H. Hutton, Officiating DC, to W.J. Reid, CSVHD, 24 November 1917.

[74] *Ibid*.

Manipur State		**Lushai Hills**		**Naga Hills**	
Post and (Numbers)	Monthly Pay in Rupees	Post and (Numbers)	Monthly Pay in Rupees	Post and (Numbers)	Monthly Pay in Rupees
Lam-Subadar	25-1-30	Circle Interpreters (4)	25/-	Head Interpreters (2)	15/-
Lambus	10/- or less	Circle Interpreters (5)	20/-	Dobashis	10 to15/-
Interpreters	10/- or less	Circle Interpreters (9)	15/-		
		Political Chaprassis (3)	12/-		
		Circle and Office Chaprassis (26)	10/-		

Table 2: Pay of state employees around 1918.[75]

However, acknowledging the obstacles posed by the ongoing World War I, Hutton asked the local government for a 'sympathetic consideration' once it concluded. 'The interpreter and dobashis in this district have work of much responsibility, work which would in the plains be normally entrusted to Sub Deputy Collectors or officers having magisterial powers,' pleaded Hutton. They also underwent 'incessant and severe travelling which makes it difficult for them to last enough to earn pensions.' As in most cases they 'retired incapacitated long before their pension is earned,' the eligibility for pension should be 'reduced to 25 years and 20 on a medical certificate.'[76] Consequently, a reorganisation took effect from 1 September 1918.

Kohima		**Mokokchung Subdivision**	
Post and (Numbers)	Monthly Pay in Rupees	Post and (Numbers)	Monthly Pay in Rupees

[75] *Ibid.*
[76] *Ibid.*

Head Interpreter (1)	25/-	Head Interpreter (1)	25/-
Angami Interpreter (1)	20/-	Sema Interpreter (1)	20/-
Sema Intepreter (1)	20/-	Lhota (1)	20/-
Lhota or Rengma (1)	20/-	Ao (1)	20/-
Kacha Naga or Kuki (1)	20/-	Konyak, Chang or Sangtam (1)	20/-
Rengma or Lhota (1)	15/-	Chang, Sangtam, Phom or Konyak (2)	15/-
Kuki or Kacha (1)	15/-	Interpreters of other communities (2)	15/-
Interpreters of other communities (2)	15/-	Dobashis (12)	9/-
Dobashis (27)	10/-		
Peons (27)	9/-		

Table 3: Reorganisation of government staffs in the Naga Hills.[77]

There was a marked increase in the pay of those designated 'Head Interpreter' and 'Interpreters', but not so for the lower rung post '*Dobashis*'. Apparently disappointed, Hutton remarked that 'the fixing of the pay of that grade at Rs. 10/- has left the majority of them just where they were before. It has also created a much sharper line between those who are appointed to interpreter posts and those who are not'. The disappointment was further compounded by another order of the COA. Hutton had to oblige. Temporary appointment to the interpreter posts was filled with men who had 'been to France wherever suitable'.[78] This was out of the many Nagas which comprised the Labour Corps sent to France during World War I. Hutton noted that 'the men came back greatly impressed with the might of the Sarkar.'[79] But he did not like their appointment 'as it

[77] ASA, Financial Department, Branch Finance (henceforth FID, BF), Pro. No. 155-59, November 1918, FID, BF, No. 67507, to the CSVHD, 13 September 1918.
[78] ASA, FID, BF, Pro. No. 155-59, November 1918, DC, Naga Hills, to W.J. Reid, CSVHD, 25 September 1918.
[79] Raised under Government's order dated 9 March 1917, out of 2,000 men, Semas comprised half while Lhotas 400, Rengmas 200, 'Changs and other Trans-Frontier Tribes' 200 and Aos 200. These men make up the number 21 (Naga Hills) and 22

entailed the passing over tried men of long service many of whom are elderly and could hardly have been expected to volunteer for Service with the Labour Corps.'[80] So much differing opinion existed even within a local administration. The practice of employing the relatively young men was not well received by Hutton who preferred the tried and tested old men whose loyalty was already ensured. Perhaps he asserted this considering the effectiveness of men such as Wong, Etsizao and Ongli-Ngaku. Indeed, Ongli-Ngaku, for instance, proved his worth again. During a tour in 1923 Hutton wrote that 'both Yonghong and Angfang [villages] had been told by some *tripoteur* friend of theirs and ours that we were going to blight their crops.' The tour party could not discover the one who 'hoped to stir up trouble that would end in cheap heads for him from a burnt and scattered village. Ongli… re-assured them with the promise of a bumper crop as the result of our visit. As he said to Mills, any fool could see that the millet was promising extremely well.'[81]

Despite the importance of intermediaries, their identity and history cannot be properly established through colonial records save for few instances. In certain cases, their names were acknowledged. At most, they appeared only as anonymous informants, brief references and numbers. Yet, there was no doubt that they played a key role in governance.

IV
In the Name of the State

In the aftermath of the occupation of Kohima, a report noted:

(Manipur) Corps. There was another 'Naga Labour Corps numbered 35 and another numbered 38 which both arrived home in about June 1918.' See Robert Reid, *History of the Frontier Areas Bordering on Assam, 1883-1941*, Delhi: Eastern Publishing House, 1942, pp. 162-3.

[80] ASA, FID, BF, Pro. No. 155-59, November 1918, DC, Naga Hills, to W.J. Reid, CSVD, 25 September 1918.

[81] J.H. Hutton, *Diaries of Two Tours in the Unadministered Area east of the Naga Hills*, New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 1995 [1924], p. 28.

> Some Nagas of Kohima crossed the Doyang [River], and pretended to levy tribute from three villages on the other side of the border in the British name: they were made to refund their collections and were heavily fined.[82]

Such incident indicated that even commoners used the name of the state in ways British officials had not expected. Over the years, state employees would found more ingenious ways. Much as they were indispensable to the state, they proved problematic. They were not mere 'collaborators'. In April 1893, Captain Woods was on halt at Mokokchung subdivision where he 'enquired into some charges brought against five Ao *dobashas*'. The men had accompanied him across the Dikhu River last December. 'These *dobashas* were charged with having extorted money from the coolies, and also from some villages through which I passed', wrote Woods. 'The *dobashas* acknowledged having received some small sums of money from some villages, but said that the gaonburas gave them the money willingly and that it is customary to do so. The gaonburas of the Miri villages corroborated this'. Woods 'had to let them off.' But he 'cut their names'. Before the tour started, he had 'particularly warned them … that they were to be careful and do nothing which might give us [the state] a bad name across the Dikhu.'[83] A similar incident of what can perhaps be called an abuse of authority was noted three years later at Nowgong. A.W. Davis, DC, learnt that 'the rest-house chaukidar, a Naga, has, on the strength of receiving pay from Government, been actively interfering in village affairs and setting himself up as a rival to the *gaonbura*.' Davis had to 'explained … to him that a chaukidar holds no exalter position, and that he is to consider himself a slave (*alar*) attached to the bungalow, where his duties are to keep the place clean and act as hewer of wood and drawer of water for travellers.' The DC also learnt from the appointed headman that 'the whole of the village wish to become *bariks*, village elders'. So he 'collected some 50 out of the 80 or 90 so-called *bariks* (*ao tatar*), and explained to them that the mere empty title of *barik* would not exempt them from

[82] NAI, FD, A-General-E, Pro. No. 17, October 1883, Extract from the Proceedings of the Chief Commissioner of Assam in the Judicial Department, No. 1145, Shillong, 7 July 1883.
[83] MSRL, Cabin 39, F. No. 11, Tour Diary of Captain A.E. Woods, Officiating DC, Naga Hills, 25-26 April 1893.

coolie work.'[84] Three years later at Susu village Captain Woods caught another case of 'complaints on all sides against a *dobasha* of the name of Hudhon.' This man was 'an Assamese Christian, and originally was with the missionaries as a teacher.' Woods wrote that 'he is a very great scoundrel and will have to be turned out of the district.' A few years ago, the DC 'had to turn out another *ex*-Christian teacher named Gudholi for a similar reason, *viz*., appointing himself as a sort of Honorary Magistrate, etc.'[85] The relapsed Christian teacher, Gudholi/Gudhola, was also an Assamese who was first deputed by the American Baptist missionary, E.W. Clark, in 1872 to learn the Ao language for mission work. Years of living with the Aos and command of their language seemed to have worked in favour of Gudhola to establish himself prominently. These incidents indicated that the name of the state was often used for means divergent to what officials expected.

On the surface of everyday practices, headmen and interpreters professed their loyalty as Hutton noted over two consecutive days in January 1926. At Chipfozuma village, 'the dobashi who lives there had a framed photograph of the King Emperor hanging conspicuously in his verandah.' The next day Hutton reached another village and in the afternoon he was treated to a dance performance which 'ended with a speech by the gaonburas exhorting all the men and women of the village to be virtuous, law-abiding and obedient subjects of Government.'[86] But shielded from the official gaze, intermediaries tried their hands at deception. During a tour, Mills 'counted Tukunasami [village] on the way and dealt faithfully with the gaonbura for trying to conceal houses.' He added that he would have been more severe had the headman was 'mentally capable of counting above thirty.'[87] Whether the headman was trying to pocket some of the house tax – or reduced it for the welfare of his village – was open to

[84] MSRL, Cabin 39, File No. 11, Tour Diary of A.W. Davis, DC, Naga Hills, 20 October 1896.
[85] MSRL, Cabin 39, File No. 11, Tour Diary of Captain A.E. Woods, DC, Naga Hills, 11 August 1899.
[86] ASA, APD, BP, Pro. No. 710-12, Tour Diary of J.H. Hutton, DC, Naga Hills, 25-26 January 1926.
[87] ASA, APD, BP, Pro. No. 1780-811, March 1926, Tour Diary of J.P. Mills, DC, 23 February 1926.

interpretation. Sometimes, headmen colluded with interpreters to tamper with village authority. At Lappori, a Sema village, 'Nipa an ex-gaonbura and Thohopa, a sort of kotaki' had 'palmed off' Hutton and put 'as gaonbura in Nipa's place his younger son Ratsetho, a blackguard, instead of the elder Zulasi who is popular in the village but probably not so clever.' Hutton 'took steps to oust Ratsetho and install Zulasi.' Hutton put the whole blame on Thohopa, 'untrustworthy but beloved of Angami dobashis because they [i.e., the Semas] can talk to him.'[88] Such complicity between headmen, interpreters and other local employees abounded. In one instance, Hutton had to issue a stern caution to one Yekahe who 'wishes to open a shop at Phekrokejima near the hospital compound.' The site was given but with a warning not 'to obtain coolies at Government rates by irregular methods (such as asking the Sub Assistant Surgeon to indent, or requesting the road muharrrir to supply, or arranging with the gaonburas that they shall be obtained as if for a Government purpose) on pain of confiscation of his shop'.[89] These conditions inadvertently revealed the arrangements that existed among those in the employment of the state.

But it was interpreters who were the real wielders of authority. Some were so powerful that Tahimo, an ex-interpreter, ran the affairs of a particular village whose headmen seemed 'non-entities'.[90] Others were blatant in their defiance of British authorities. Hutton encountered one such incident and noted that the 'Sema dobashis, being dissatisfied with an order of the S.D.O.'s resigned en bloc'. Resort to such theatrics perhaps portrayed that the interpreters had some say over the state of affairs even if Hutton called the strategy 'a piece of bluff … which they will not get away with.'[91] Meanwhile, some interpreters of Kiphire village started a 'reprehensible practice … of inviting transfrontier men to come and accept their hospitality and their

[88] ASA, APD, BP-B, Pro. No. 1886-914, March 1928, Tour Diary of J.H. Hutton, DC, 12 February 1927.
[89] ASA, APD, BP-B, Pro. No. 1886-914, March 1928, Tour Diary of J.H. Hutton, DC, 8 February 1927.
[90] Tour Diary of Keith Cantlie, 5 December 1919 http://himalaya.socanth.cam.ac.uk/collections/naga/record/r74011.html accessed on 11 June 2015.
[91] ASA, APD, BP-B, Pro. No. 1886-914, March 1928, Tour Diary of J.H. Hutton, DC, 18-21 February 1927.

particular protection'. After the guests left, through phony cases the interpreters immediately made 'capital out of their protection … and eating fines "in the name of" their recent entertainments.' Hutton who got to know of this trend vowed to 'pass orders in Kohima to check this evil.'[92] Not only was the name of the state used for devious means, interpreters invented a tradition all their own.

The different interpretation of colonial rule aside, interpreters had a huge influence on the local populace too. Consider this account by Hutton in 1925:

> Horses before the British occupation were unknown in the interior of the Ao country. Recently, however, there has been a boom in ponies, for shortly after I left Mokokchung in 1917 the head interpreter there bought himself a pony to ride, and his example caught on quickly.[93]

Simplistic it might be but this vignette revealed the larger picture of locals emulating these men. They were highly regarded. After all, interpreters were, as Mills put it, 'very carefully picked men and the posts are much sought after, for though the pay is not high, the prestige is great.'[94]

V
Mediating Modernity: 'Interpreters' of Changes

In July 1928, Hutton wrote to higher authorities for 'a grant of Rs. 2000/- or failing that Rs. 1500/- for the entertainment of the Simon Commission and of His Excellency the Viceroy both of whom are scheduled to visit the Naga Hills next January.' Tasked with overseeing the smooth passage of the British envoy, he also noted that if 'their entertainment is to be properly done it will mean calling in various tribal representatives from different parts of the district who will expect to have their expense paid and to be fatly entertained on beef and beer while in Kohima and for the Commission some will have

[92] ASA, APD, BP, Pro. No. 722-44, Tour Diary of J.H. Hutton, DC, 27 July 1926.
[93] J.H. Hutton, 'Introduction' in W.C. Smith, *The Ao Naga Tribe of Assam: A Study in Ethnology and Sociology*, London: MacMillan and Co. Ltd., 1925, p. xvi.
[94] Mills, *The Ao Nagas*, p. 406.

to go to Dimapur.'[95] For colonial officials, such visits called for rigorous planning. A 'tribal' society had to be properly showcased complete with all the usual indicators – dances, costumes and other cultural aspects – for those visiting white audiences. For local elites, it was as much an opportunity for voicing grievances as availing the perks that came with the job.

As the Simon Commission converged on the Naga Hills, an association called the Naga Club submitted a memorandum dated 10 January 1929. According to the anthropologist-administrator Verrier Elwin's recollection, the Naga Club was founded at Kohima and Mokokchung in 1918. 'The Club ran a Co-operative store in Mokokchung, one of the first to be opened in the hills,' wrote Elwin in 1961, 'which still exists as the Ao Trading Co-operative Store.' It was composed 'mainly of Government officials and leading headmen of the villages who used to come in for meetings at which social and administrative problems were discussed.'[96] The twenty signatories of the memorandum were mostly government functionaries with interpreters comprising half of it.[97]

The memorandum embodied an interesting case of local elites appropriating the signs and language of the British. Because of their involvement with the colonial office – filing or typing out reports – the petitioners knew well how to frame their concerns in the contemporary forms of addressing. At the outset, they stated that they were their people's 'voice'. They appeared to have clearly understood the altered political scenario, intricacies of the colonial structure and chain of command. They understood the Commission as the representative of the British government which arrived in India 'to enquire into the working of the system of' government and 'the growth of education'. They begged that the Naga Hills be kept 'directly under' the British

[95] ASA, APD, BP, F No. 611-19, December 1928, Pro. No. 612, Hutton, Kohima, to Hezlett, 4 July 1928.
[96] Verrier Elwin, *Nagaland*, Shillong: Research Department, Adviser's Secretariat, 1961, p. 49.
[97] http://www.npmhr.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=57:naga-memorandum-to-simon-commission&catid=26:naga-peace-process&Itemid=91 accessed on 20 May 2013. All quotations that followed are from this particular document until the next quote with reference.

and ‘withdrawn from the Reformed Scheme and placed outside the Reforms’. The hill-plain dichotomy was next harped upon. They insisted that the Nagas were independent since time immemorial which was broken only by British occupation in 1880. However, they admitted that the Nagas ‘have no unity among’ themselves and it was only the British who were holding them ‘together’. The large gap in education and the linguistic-cultural differences between the Nagas and those of the lowlands was next highlighted. They moved on to the disadvantages of the proposed schemes which might result in the loss of land, ‘new and heavy taxes’ to be shelled out, the uncertain future and fear of ‘the introduction of foreign laws and customs’ which might ‘supersede’ their ‘customary laws’. A plea was made that the British would ‘continue to safeguard’ the rights of the Nagas ‘against all encroachment from other people … more advanced’. In case the British decided to withdraw, the Nagas ‘should not be thrust to the mercy of other people’ but to be left ‘alone’ to determine themselves ‘as in ancient times.’ They concluded by claiming that the Club represented not only the ‘Angamis, Kacha Nagas, Kukis, Semas, Lothas and Rengmas, but also other regions of Nagaland.’

The Club was instructive of the emerging social networking among educated Nagas. Their memorandum can be read as an interesting case of cultural objectification, and the ways in which indigenous groups engaged with, spoke about and modified certain beliefs and practices as signifiers of their identity. At one level, such representation could be plausibly distinct from their lived experience: in a sense, a well-orchestrated representation of culture. At another level, the memorandum was also instructive of a group’s first claims for a homeland. When this memorandum was submitted, the leader of the Club apparently told the Commission: ‘You are the only people who have ever conquered us and, when you go we should be as we were’.[98] The representatives of the Nagas were grappling with the altered socio-political climate.

Such awareness alluded to the vast changes occurring in the Naga Hills and what the creation of colonial intermediaries entailed. For such a consciousness to emerged, there were other factors and

[98] Elwin, *Nagaland*, p. 49.

processes at work which were beyond the scope of this paper: the advent of print culture, Christian missions, conversion, education, World War I and II just to name a few. But as fairly evident, by the twentieth century local intermediaries – and interpreters in particular – had assumed an important position in their own society and dictating the pace of changes. They were, as Mills put it, 'the Corps d'elite of the Naga Hills'.[99] Perhaps lobbying from officials such as Hutton and Mills helped. The aspirations of the Naga Club came to fruition. By the Indian Constitution Act of 1935, the Naga Hills was administered as 'Excluded Areas'.[100] Assam's 'Tribal Areas' were further divided according to their political evolution: 'Independent Territories', 'Unadministered Tribal Areas' and 'Administered Tribal Areas'.[101] The British had the ultimate authority over these territories. The distinction was necessary to mark out firmly 'pacified' areas from less 'controlled' ones. The Naga Hills district was further administered under the 'North-East Frontier Agency' by October 1943.[102] Even so, colonial 'pacification' in the hill tracts was something of a myth as despite formal annexation some areas remained virtually untouched by British authority.

But the creation of such territories and legal-political exceptions operative there was made use of. In 1946, Zapu Phizo, an Angami Naga who in later years was instrumental in the formation of the Naga

[99] NAI, External Affairs Department, External Affairs Branch, (hereafter EAD), File No. 401(73)-X, 1938, Serial No. 13, J.P. Mills, SECGOA, Shillong, to the SECGOI, EAD, Shimla, 7 September 1938.

[100] 'Excluded Areas' was an official phrase drawn from the Indian Constitution Act of 1935. Under the direct administration of the Governor of Assam, the elected ministry had no jurisdiction over it. See Robert Reid, 'The Excluded Areas of Assam', *The Geographical Journal*, Vol. 103:1/2, January-February, 1944, p. 18.

[101] 'Independent territories' were within British 'political sphere' but 'left to themselves unless or until their behaviour to neighbouring tribes called for punitive measures'. Considered too remote, these areas might even be left out of actual political control and subjected only to occasional visits. In 'Unadministered Tribal Areas', there was 'loose political control' and periodical visits by the POs. In 'Administered Tribal Areas', suitable British regulations and enactments were applied from time to time. Its inhabitants were regarded as British subjects. See NAI, EAD, File No. 116-X/35 (Secret), 1935.

[102] NAI, EAD, GOI, Central Asian Branch, File No. 26 – C.A. (Secret), 1945, Report on the Assam Tribal Areas for the year ending 30 June 1945 by J.P. Mills, Adviser to the Governor of Assam for Tribal Areas.

National Council, wrote to the Interim Government. His plea was that the government should postpone the lift on the ban restricting entry of people to 'tribal areas' as it was 'psychologically dangerous'.[103] He was apprehensive about questions admitted in the Assam Legislative Assembly at the end of World War II on the continued application of the Inner Line system or Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation (V of 1873). A similar protest was made by a tribal council which was formed n April 1945 allegedly under the supervision of the then British DC, C.R. Pawsey. The council claimed the support of many Naga communities and expressed its anxiety and opposition over 'proposals for repealing' the Inner Line and Chin Hill Regulations. If the government did otherwise, the council 'resolved that the Nagas shall reserve to themselves the right to allow or disallow outsiders into their land.'[104] This resolution, Zapu Phizo's telegram and the Naga Club's memorandum were all indicative of the strategical ways in which local elites engaged with changing situations. This select few constantly engaged with the terms of colonial rule, sometimes interpreting it differently. They also availed the language, resources and symbols which colonial modernity had to offer. They further regarded themselves as pioneers and proponents of what direction their society should head towards.

Conclusion

With the demolition of the military power of the Angami Nagas after their uprising in 1879-80, the colonial state embarked on a swift systematic project of neutralising them. Disciplinary and supervisory procedures were initiated. So was also inaugurated an era of taxation, record keeping and constant tours to make the presence of the state felt. An administrative arrangement was put into practice reliant on the services of select locals. Indigenous intermediaries provided an excellent vantage point to look at the everyday practices which shaped a frontier regime and local societies.

[103] NAI, EAD, File No. 71-NEF, 1946, Sr. No. 3, Telegram from Zapu Phizo to Jawaharlal Nehru, 22 November 1946.
[104] NAI, EAD, File No. 71-NEF, 1946, Sr. No. 7, P.F. Adams, SECGOA, to the Secretary, Advisory Committee for Tribal Areas, New Delhi, 7 May 1947.

The intention of the paper has been to provide flesh to the skeletal sounding 'British administration' flexed frequently for explaining changes in the Naga Hills. Local agencies, not British officials, were crucial for the maintenance of the colonial order. The latter was abundantly aided by the former in enforcing the state directives. 'The Government was British in name but everything about it was Naga',[105] wrote the wife of W.G. Archer, the last British SDO at Mokokchung, which seemed an apt observation on the state of the administrative arrangement. In the colonial scheme of things, local intermediaries figured prominently. Remarkably, they also used the name of the state for means divergent to what British officials had not anticipated and ideally wanted. They are the men in the middle not only between the state and local populace but also our analytical categories coloniser/colonised. This being so, a case could be made that they were hardly colonial subjects at all. A select few had availed the opportunities provided by colonial rule and had become local elites. This aspect illustrated the different experience of colonialism by different people. This in turn negated notion of egalitarianism or homogeneity usually ascribed to 'tribal' societies. An undifferentiated Nagas became problematic. Research agenda would do well to be attentive to internal hierarchy in existence among hill communities which altered with local-global upheavals.

[105] Mildred Archer, 'Journey to Nagaland: An account of six months spent in the Naga Hills in 1947, Mokokchung, 18 July 1947', http://himalaya.socanth.cam.ac.uk/collections/naga/record/r67022.html accessed on 29 May 2015.