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Alok Kumar Kanungo · Prashant Kumar Singh

Chronicles of Colonialism

Navigating the Naga Hills

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Alok Kumar Kanungo 
Indian Institute of Technology Gandhinagar
Gandhinagar, Gujarat, India

Prashant Kumar Singh
Indian Institute of Technology Gandhinagar
Gandhinagar, Gujarat, India

ISSN 1861-6623
SpringerBriefs in Archaeology
ISBN 978-981-97-2305-8
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-97-2306-5>

ISSN 2192-4910 (electronic)
ISBN 978-981-97-2306-5 (eBook)

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Foreword

Colonial ethnographic accounts on north-east India constitute an important aspect in the history of anthropology in India. In this regard, I have great pleasure in placing before the scholarly world a monograph *Chronicles of Colonialism: Navigating the Naga Hills* written by Dr. Alok Kumar Kanungo and Dr. Prashant Kumar Singh. Dealing with the archival history as recorded by the British administrators and anthropologists on the Nagas during the colonial period, it is a seminal text as it deconstructs the use of anthropology for colonization in the north-east India from a post-colonial perspective by venturing to look into the nature of texts themselves and their conditions of production; why and how they had been written the way they had been written. The authors rightly perceive that the Nagas represent a generic name and are not a homogenous group. A speck of Romanticism appears to be inherent since the authors, through their colonial ethnographic journey, still feel, what they call, 'the sense of fragrance of that lost world'. Having known the first author Dr. Kanungo from his student days, first as a teacher and now as a colleague, I am aware of his long-lasting obsession with the Nagas and his attempts to map their socio-cultural history from different perspectives. Dr. Kanungo with his vast experience of working with the Nagas and Dr. Singh, well-grounded in anthropological theory, has come together to write on one of the least discussed aspects of the over-analysed Naga communities; that is to make a case for the evaluation of the description and representation of the Nagas in the archival records left by the Britishers.

The present volume is also a sequel to an earlier book by Dr. Kanungo on *German Anthropologists on the Naga Hills*. Here Dr. Kanungo and Dr. Singh apply their critical gaze to unpack the instrumental, stereotypical and strategic character of colonial texts pertaining to the so-called 'tribes' in the Naga hills of north-east India. While the first book was on the documentation of the artefacts of the Nagas stored in different museums in the world, about their ownership and modes of collection as well as much obscure work of German anthropologists, this book takes the bull by its horns by making a case for the reexamination of more mainstream and much cited British literature about the communities living in the Naga hills. I sincerely hope that such

provocation in interrogating the 'sacrosanct' authority of the colonial texts in understanding Indian society and people would pave the way for a wider discussion as well as dissection of the colonial texts.

I wish both the authors all success in life.

December 2023

Prof. Kishore K. Basa
Director General
Archaeological Survey of India
Gandhinagar, India

Acknowledgements

The first author started visiting the Naga hills towards the end of the last century and has developed an association with the knowledge keepers of these hills through his long visits that overflowed the academic boundaries. After working on the Naga cultural objects in various museums across the UK and Europe in the early 21st century, he revisited the publications (of the colonial period) on the Nagas and found the approach of authors of the colonial time period fall into three categories; one is anthropological and museum oriented, another administrative-anthropological approach and third, missionary interest. All three needed independent evaluations as there were substantial changes in the standpoints, which were reflected in the contemporary texts. Thus the first manuscript of the trilogy came as *German Anthropologists on the Naga Hills* in 2016. The second author joined as Indian Institute of Technology Gandhinagar (IITGN)-supported Postdoctoral Fellow with the first author to work on a Ministry of Education funded project on Sustainable Heritage. He, being a young anthropological theoretician, took interest in critical evaluation of anthropological works in the Naga hills. Thus this second book of the trilogy on the Nagas is being published as *Chronicles of Colonialism: Navigating the Naga Hills*.

Nagas are probably the most studied communities in the Indian subcontinent. The publications on varied topics on the Nagas and the Naga hills are dominated by the British scholars. It is natural as they occupied the land for more than a century. Some of the fundamental works on the area and the communities came during that period. While we acknowledge all administrators who risked their lives and contributed immensely in understanding the then virgin anthropological land, we record the fact that there was a larger motif of display of ruler in the form of not only colonization of the land but culture and cultural artefacts.

The present work synthesizes the British scholars' writings on the Nagas in pre-independent India, who invariably came to Naga hills as administrators or anthropologists supported by the administrator(s). Themes that received primary attention are: (1) material culture, (2) locations and areas visited by the researchers and 'tribal' affiliations of those places, (3) migration and inter-regional connections [e.g. to the Pacific (Polynesia, Melanesia etc.) and Burma] and (4) trade.

The authors acknowledge the Scheme for Promotion of Academic and Research Collaboration (SPARC), (project number SPARC/2018-2019/P1274/SL), MoE, Government of India, and the academic and research environment of IIT Gandhinagar. The book is completed on the 15th year of establishment of IITGN. First author acknowledges the support of UK Visiting Fellowship, Nehru Trust for the Indian Collections at the Victoria and Albert Museum, and British Academy Visiting Fellowship; Deccan College Post-Graduate and Research Institute library, Pune, British Library, London, and Society for the Preservation and Promotion of Naga Heritage, Frankfurt; the guidance of Profs. Ian Glover, Fiona Kerlogue, Toni Hubber, Peter van Ham and Michel Oppitz; the help of Drs. David Tetso, Tiatoshi Jamir, Ditamulü Vasa and Alino Sumi; the archival support of Dr. Trupti More; and the ethnographic discussions with Prof. Shahida Ansari.