



## **AN OVERVIEW OF THE ASSAM-NAGALAND BORDER DISPUTE**

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### **ABSTRACT:**

The Northeast India comprising eight states after including Sikkim in 2003 always comes to the news due to political instability and insurgency problem in the region. The region basically a land locked area which connects the mainland of India through Siliguri corridor. Assam-Nagaland border dispute in the region have historical background. The dispute always creates a troubled situation including the activities of Bandh, burn houses, killing the villagers, migration of the people from their own villages, loot of the resources especially in the border areas. The people residing in Assam-Nagaland border are facing the problem since the creation of Nagaland as a separate state carved out from Assam in 1963. This study is an attempt to touch the various aspects of the Assam-Nagaland border dispute from the genesis of the problem.

**KEY WORDS:** Assam, Nagaland, Border, Dispute, Sector.

### **INTRODUCTION:**

Border can be generally described as a formal demarcation between two or more Subjective entities which can create both geographical as well as mental differences between places and its inhabitants. The conflict or troubled situation over borders or in border areas is not a new thing, it may be in an international border or border in a federal structure State, which is created for administrative purpose. History has already witnessed that conflicts over borders or border areas always have significant role in State making or State breaking process. In pre colonial period the boundaries of the states in India were not so well demarcated. During the colonial period also the states were always engaged with other in a conflict situation regarding their territorial demarcation. The colonial administrators, in India organized the country as per their governing strategies to exploit the resources and to ensure the subject that people Cannot raise any Voice against them. As a part of the colonial strategy the British administrators created a situation in which they were able to convince the Hill tribes of the north eastern region of India specially the Nagas that they wanted to save them from the plain tribes but the actual motive behind it was to debarred them from assimilating with the plain tribes and keep them away from the feeling of Nationalism. In post colonial era the newly independent India did not give much attention to the relations among people and focused only on territorial demarcation for a better administrative purpose having like a Top down approach.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE PAPER:

1. To study about the Assam-Nagaland relation from the historical viewpoint.
2. To study about the Assam-Nagaland border dispute and examine the reasons behind it.
3. To critically analyze the recent developments of the problem.

## METHODOLOGY:

The data for the research paper have been collected from both the primary and secondary sources. Several primary sources were collected from government documents and reports, and for secondary sources were collected from the books, Journals, Articles, Newspapers and Internet etc. The study is descriptive and analytical in Nature.

## ORIGIN OF THE DISPUTE AND ITS HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT:

If we go back to the history, the Assam-Nagaland relationship is marked by cooperation and Competition. The Nagas belong to the Mongolian racial group and lived in the hills area of undivided Assam from Doiyang to Burhidihing region. The Nagas first came in contact with the plains during the Ahom period, The Ahom administration came in contact with the people living in the Hills area such as Lotha, Koinak, Aao and Nokte tribe and also maintained a good relation with the "Wangso" Naga living in the Tirap district of Arunachal Pradesh. It has been proved in historical record that the names of Naga tribe such as Khamjongia, Namsongia, Bannferia, Bannsungia were given by the people living in the plains. During the reign of the Ahom king Pratap Singha the "POSA" system was introduced for the purpose to allow the Hill tribes to earn some taxes or foods from the particular areas of Ahom kingdom. Pratap Singha also allotted some "KHAT" to the Nagas and it was also found that Nagas in return of that also used to pay Certain tributes to Ahom king. But this situation was totally changed after the outbreak of Moamoria Rebellion in the last part of 18<sup>th</sup> Century and till the beginning of 19<sup>th</sup> Century. After the Rebellion, Because of loss of pride and prestige the Nagas stopped to pay tribute to Ahom kings. Therefore, the relation between Ahom rulers and Nagas changed dramatically and the Nagas attacked the Ahom kingdom during the reign of Kamaleswar Singha in the years 1807 and 1809 respectively.

Assam and Nagaland share a total of 512.1 kms including the Jorhat, Sivasagar, Golaghat, Karbi Angling and Dima Hasao districts of Assam. The Naga Hill district was created by British ruler in 1866 as a part of the Assam province after they took charge from the Yandaboo Treaty in 1826 and Naga hill district remain as part of Assam till 1957. Since 1979, for administrative purposed the entire border areas between Assam and Nagaland was divided into Six Sectors viz A, B, C, D, E and F.

As a separate state Nagaland was created in 1<sup>st</sup> December 1963 cutting down from the earlier Naga Hill District of Assam. Nagaland state Act defined its borders as per the demarcation of the British on 25<sup>th</sup> November 1925, which was unacceptable to the Nagas. Nagaland basically comprised the earlier Naga Hill District and the Naga tribal areas (later known as Tuensang Areas).

It has been observed that the dispute always came from the Naga people with the claim of restoration . For which an agreement as 16- point was submitted by “Naga Congress” in 1960 to the then Prime Minister of India . They included the “Restoration” of all Naga Territories that had been transferred out of Naga Hill District after 1826 . But the Government of Assam strictly denied this claim and stand with the demarcation created on 1<sup>st</sup> December 1963 . This started the border clashes in the border areas in 1965, 1968, 1969, 1979 and 1985 and again in 2014, 2015 . There is a blame game also started over the clashes in which Assam Government argued that the Nagaland encroached 80% of the reserved forest of Assam in Sivasagar, Jorhat, Golaghat and Karbi Anglong Districts which include approximately 59,159.77 hectares . On the other hand NSCN (IM) (National Socialist Council of Nagaland) wants the entire Assam tract South of the Guwahati – Dibrugarh Railway track in Sivasagar, Jorhat, Golaghat and Karbi Anglong to be included in the projected “Greater Nagalim” .

## CAUSES OF THE DISPUTE :

There are some root causes of the border dispute between Assam – Nagaland. These are –

1. Insurgency
2. Failure of the Government
3. Encroachment of Reserved Forest Land
4. Role of Neutral Forces
5. Break of Interim Agreement

### 1. Insurgency:

To some extent successful solution of the Assam-Nagaland border dispute depends on the successful resolving of the Naga Insurgency problem . The National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) wants to establish a “Greater Nagalim” including the Naga inhabited areas of Assam, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh and in addition some portions of Myanmar . The proposed “Greater Nagalim” will cover approximately 1,20,000 sq. km. in contrast to the present state of Nagaland that has an area of total 16,527 sq. km. .

### 2. Failure of the Government:

There is a blame game going on between the Government of Nagaland and Government of Assam. It has been noticed that whenever the Government of Assam starts the eviction operation in its Reserved Forest Areas, the Nagaland Government criticizes the Assam Government for letting loose a reign of terror among Naga Villagers .

### 3. Encroachment of Reserved Forest Land:

Dispute over encroachment of Reserved Forest Land is one of the major cause of Assam-Nagaland border crisis . A vast area of Geleki bordering Nagaland in Sivasagar District is encroached upon by Villagers from the state and also more than 80% of the land in Desoi Valley, Desoi and Tiru Hills reserve forest under the Mariani forest Range in Jorhat District is also under the occupation . The encroached areas are mainly in Mariani Revenue Circle areas, Teok Revenue Circle areas, Sonari

and Nazira Revenue Circle in Sivasagar and also in Golaghat and Sarupathar Revenue Circle in Golaghat District.

#### **4. Role of Neutral Forces:**

A Neutral Force was deployed in Assam-Nagaland border areas since 1971, Specially in Golaghat District areas . The Neutral Forces were deployed in the B sector under Golaghat District which has always remained the key point of disputes. But sometimes, the role of Neutral Forces cannot easily be acceptable for the inhabitants in the deployed areas.

#### **5. Break of Interim Agreement:**

Break of the Interim Agreement between Assam and Nagaland by both side is a major factor in border dispute. The Interim Agreement was signed in 1972 to maintain a good relation between the two parties and to sort out the problem. The Interim Agreement was signed after the recommendation of the K.V.K. Sundaram committee report.

#### **Continuity of the dispute till Present time:**

Since the creation of Nagaland the dispute over their territorial demarcation has developed and Nagaland regularly involved in some cross border activities with Neighboring states particularly with Assam in Golaghat and Jorhat District bordering areas. The dispute had grabbed world attention with the infamous Merapani incident in 1985. And in 2007 the all Assam Student union (AASU) threatened the rebel side that they would march into Nagaland. The 'AASU' called economic Blockade against Nagaland in July, 2017, when Geleki region of Sivasagar district incidented an aggressive behavior by Naga People and kill two residents and torched several houses. The Assam government has already filed original suit No. 02/1988 before the honorable Supreme Court for identification of boundary and resolving the boundary dispute. In 2014 Under Dhansiri Subdivision of Golaghat district an incident happened again. The root of the conflict and politics on it still prevalent since the first Naga assault came in on 29 December 1959 and government property at Uriamghat. There is always a tension on Ronkham areas of border in Jorhat district.

#### **STEPS TAKEN SO FAR:**

The Government of India formed a commission under the leadership of K.V.K. Sundaram in 1971 to observed the border dispute between Assam and Nagaland and give some recommendation on it . On the basis of the Sundaram report, four Interim Agreements were signed between Assam and Nagaland . First and second agreement were signed in March 1972 . It demarcated the border of Geleki reserve forest, Roads of Amguri – Tuli, Tiru Hill, Desoi Reserve Forest and from Teok river to Dikhow river . Again in May 1972, the third agreement was signed . It demarcated the border of Desoi Valley and Doiyang Reserve Forest with the consent from both sides . The border area covered from Desoi river to Kakodonga river crossing the Goraijan Lake . The fourth agreement was signed in May 1972 again . This would demarcated the border of Goraijan Lake under Kakodonga Forest and the border of Kakodonga river's bordering areas . The Prime Minister and Home Minister of India jointly wrote a letter on the border issue between Assam and Nagaland to the Chief

Minister of Nagaland on 25<sup>th</sup> January 1979 to resolve the problem and after that in 1985 and enquiry committee was formed under B.C. Mathur (later under S.K. Shastri) to examine the clash between two sides and committee submitted its full report in 1987 .

### **THE WAY OUT:**

1. It should be necessary to a successful resolving of the Naga insurgency problem .
2. Disarm the armed groups .
3. Increasing the number of Border outpost for more security of the bordering areas inhabitants .
4. It should be necessary to strengthen the Local administrative mechanisms to deal with any land regarding issue .
5. There is an Urgent need of land Record lists .

### **CONCLUSION:**

On the basis of the observation it is found that the Assam-Nagaland border disputes have long standing historical background. The Government, the Government of Nagaland and Government of Assam need to respect and support the historical and legal position. It is not proper to punish the present generation for some deeds done by the British for their own profit. It is essential to need mutual cooperation and respect from both side and people to people contact without any kind of hesitation or doubt.

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