INTRODUCTION

A picturesque land, full of green hills and beautiful scenery, Nagaland, the home of the Nagas is situated in the North Eastern border of India. Nagaland is bounded in the north by Arunachal Pradesh, in the south by Manipur, in the west by Assam and in the east by Myanmar.

Nagaland became the 16th full-fledged Indian state on 1st of December 1963. Upto 1961, this area was known as the Naga Hills and Tuensang Area (NHTA).

Nagaland is the abode of 32 known Naga tribes and many other sub-tribes. Some of the well known Naga tribes are: Angami, Ao, Rengma, Konyak, Sangtam, Chakesang, Chang,
Tangkhul, Zeliang, Lotha, Mao, Jeru, Jothe, Sema, Yimchunger, Kuki, Pothury, Kabui, Maram, Maring, Anal, Phom, Uchonphok, Makaoro, Kharam, Nockte, Lamkang, Namshik, Khiamniungan etc.

1.1 Position of Naga Languages

Grierson made the first attempt in classifying the Naga languages. He (1903) classifies the Naga group of languages into three sub-groups, viz., Western sub-group, Central sub-group and Eastern sub-group. The Western sub-group comprises Angami, Sema, Rengma, and Chakesang languages; the Central sub-group includes Ao, Lotha and Phom languages while the Eastern sub-group is made up of, among others, Chang and Konyak languages. He further said that the Naga languages form a sub-group of the Tibeto-Burman family of languages.

Marrison's (1967) classification was based on typological features. He classified the Naga languages into five sub-groups. They are Angami group, Khoirao group, Ao group, Konyak group and Tangsa group.

Though the Naga languages form a sub-group within the Tibeto-Burman family of languages which come under the much disputed Sino-Tibetan language family, the Naga languages are mutually unintelligible. As Grierson (1903) said, "the Naga group
comprises of a long series of dialects which mutually differ much from each other”. It is said that in Nagaland language changes abruptly from one village to the next barely some few kilometres away, thus, creating a total break down of the communicative channel. The Nagas have a legend to explain this Babel. It is said that the tribes once built a very high tower with the intention of reaching the sky. When the God saw this, he made the men speak different languages so that they could not coordinate their activities. This led to utter confusion and the project had to be abandoned.

According to Sumi Krishna (1991)

...in India, the assertion of regional identities was closely linked with a single dominant language but Nagaland was one of the first states in India to be drawn on ethnic rather than linguistic lines.

Historically, the multiplicity of Naga languages is explained by the living conditions in the past, when villages were isolated and there was little of friendly inter-communion between them. Every era, therefore, evolved its own vehicle of expression.

1.2 Cultural and Historical Background

“Naga” is a general term used to denote the tribal people living in Nagaland. The origin of the word “Naga” is, however,
shrouded in mystery. There are several theories regarding the meaning and history of the word “Naga”.

J H Hutton (1921) thought that the word “Naga” is derived from the word “Nagna” meaning mountaineer, mountainous or inaccessible place. Later on, he accepted Yule’s derivation from the Hindustani word “Nanga” – naked.

Peal (1896) said that the word “Naga” simply means “people”. He further said that the term occurs in the “Buranjis” – the Ahom Chronicles, and its correct form should be “Noga” and not “Naga” which is derived from the root “Nog” or “Nok”, both meaning “people” in the language of some Eastern Naga tribes.

Gait (1963) also supports the above mentioned theory and said that the word “Naga” is derived from “Nok” which means “folk” or “people” in some Indian tribal dialects.

Like the etymology of the word “Naga”, the history of the original abode of the Nagas is also shrouded in mystery. Horam (1975) said that though the Nagas belong to the Indo-Mongoloid tribe, they are not typical Mongols; the Caucasian element is present among them in a remarkable degree. He further said that the Nagas have come from the Eastern part of the world and there is a dim relationship between the Nagas and the natives of
Borneo in that the two have a common traditional way of head-hunting. Horam further points out that

...no Naga tribe is of pure blood. Each tribe has combined elements due to immigration from three directions: north-east, north-west and south, the people having been pushed up from the plains of Assam and Burma...There is a mixture of Tai blood from the east also... Population from southern Burma wedged in among the migrating tribes and that Nagas are a result of the age-old contact between the Mongols and the Caucasian people.

According to Dr S K Chatterjee, these Indo-Mongoloids, are none else than the "Kiratas" frequently mentioned in the old Sanskrit literature. The reference of the "Kiratas" are found in the Yajur Veda, the Atharva Veda, the Mahabharata and the Ramayana where the Kiratas are the hillmen living in the Eastern Himalayas.

The Nagas themselves have different stories to tell about their origin. Prakash Singh (1972) reported that

...the Angamis, Semas, Rengmas and the Lothas subscribe to the Kheza-Kenoma legend. It is said that the village had a large stone slab having magical properties. Paddy spread on it to be dried doubled in quantity by the evening. The three sons of the couple who owned the stone used it by rotation. One day there was a quarrel between the sons as to whose turn it was. The couple, fearing bloodshed, set fire to the stone which as a result cracked. It is believed that the spirit in the stone went to heaven and the stone lost its miraculous properties. The three sons thereafter left Kheza-kenoma, went in different directions and became the forefathers of the Angami, Sema and the Lotha tribes.
Interestingly, all the known Naga tribes point to Meikhel as their place of origin. This Meikhel is a small village between the Mao and Maram areas and is situated ten miles south-east of the present town of Kohima, the state capital. According to Horam (1975), the Nagas at first lived in stone caves or in the womb of the earth. Keeping in view the above discussion, it is very difficult to tell whether the Naga tribes came together to their present homeland or whether they came in quick succession, or whether they came from different directions. But one fact is clear, i.e., the Nagas are affected by the waves of the Indonesian culture-complex to a greater or lesser extent because the Caucasian people had migrated and spread to the farthest end of South East Asia and the outlying islands of the Pacific. This is probably the explanation of the apparently strange fact that the Nagas bear a close resemblance to the people right down to the Philippines.

1.3 Geographical and Demographic Distribution

The Nagas are found mainly in the state of Nagaland. Though the bulk of the Nagas live in Nagaland only, they are also found in the neighbouring states. Some of the Naga tribes are found in Manipur, Tirap Frontline in the NEFA (now
Arunachal Pradesh), parts of Cachar Hills of Assam and also on the western border of Burma. According to Horam (1975), the Nagas living in Burma are Haimi, Htangan, Rangpan, Somra and Tsaplaw.

1.4 Demographic Characteristics

Though the Nagas speak different languages and can not understand each other at all, a kind of cultural affinity is to found among all the Nagas. W C Smith (1925) identifies thirteen characteristics which are common to the Naga tribes living in Nagaland. They are:

1. Head-hunting,
2. Common sleeping houses for unmarried men,
3. Dwelling houses built on posts or piles,
4. Disposal of the dead on raised platforms,
5. A sort of trial marriages; or great freedom of intercourse between the sexes before marriage,
6. Betal chewing,
7. Aversion to milk as an article of diet,
8. Tattooing by pricking,
9. Absence of any powerful political organization,
10. The double cylinder vertical forge,
(11) The simple loom for weaving cloth,
(12) A large quadrangular or hexagonal shield, and
(13) Residence in hilly regions and a crude form of agriculture.

Smith also notes that these characteristics do not appear uniformly in the various Naga tribes. Most of the Naga groups who have come into close contact with the advanced group of people, have adopted new customs.

The Naga tribes are a conglomeration of clans with no clan having any superiority over the other clan. Every clan is believed to have originated from a single family. Two or more such clans form a village. Thus, clans belonging to the same tribe may be spread over hundreds of villages. The clan or kinship is a continuation of the family unit on the paternal side. The principle of primogeniture is followed in regard to the succession of the clan headmanship.

The joint family system is not favoured by the Nagas. No doubt, it is practised but when there is no alternative. The general practice is that as soon as a son marries, he becomes the head of his family and he goes and sets up a home of his own.
Naga women play a vital role in the family. She looks after the children, weaves cloth for the entire family (may not be true in case of modern Naga lady), passes the art of weaving on to her daughters, stores food for a rainy day, brews rice beer, cooks the food etc. Mills said that her position is no whit inferior to that of man. The Naga woman has a high and secure position in the society and the family centres round her.

Sex composition of India’s population both during 1961 and 1971 as well as during 1981 shows an excess of males over the females. Nagas are also not an exception in this regard.

1991 census of India

Total population of Nagas : 1,21,5,573
Number of males : 6,43,273
Number of females : 5,72,300

1.5 Multilingualism

Though the Naga languages belong to the Tibeto-Burman family, all the Naga languages are mutually unintelligible and language changes from village to village in Nagaland, “and in earlier days men and women in the same household sometimes had to use different forms of speech”, says Elwin Verrier (1961). What is most interesting as well as baffling is that none of the
Naga tribes want to learn the language of the other tribe as a means of inter-lingual communication. But this refusal to learn the language of the other Naga tribe does not mean that the Nagas are monolingual.

The uneducated Nagas use Nagamese language, the Assamese based pidgin while dealing with the people of other tribe as well as with the non-Nagas. In this regard K S Singh (1994) said that "...in most cases, our informants...spoke to us in broken Assamese (Nagamese)...

The educated Nagas use English and broken Hindi in urban area and Nagamese in rural areas apart from their respective mother tongue. The urban and educated Nagas consider that the use of English makes them superior in comparison with other fellow Nagas who can not speak it.

The Naga community has achieved a tremendous spirit of mobility, the openness to change and transform itself continuously. The most important factor for this is their conversion to Christianity. The Nagas believe that they have achieved economic stability, religious freedom and quality education only because of the spread of Christianity. Christianity have been characterised by the establishment of high quality schools throughout the state of Nagaland. The missionaries have established schools even in the most inaccessible areas of
Nagaland and that is why the literacy rate is growing by leaps and bounds in Nagaland. According to the 1991 census records, the percentage of literacy in Nagaland is 51.09% and sex wise it is:

- Male percentage : 56.05
- Female percentage : 45.52

Through education, the Nagas have made great change in their economic conditions and have attained economic and social security. The spread of education also necessitated the use of English, Hindi and of course Nagamese along with their respective mother tongue.

From the above discussion, it becomes clear that the educated Nagas are multilingual in the true sense of the word. They know at least three languages – English, the concerned mother tongue and Nagamese, apart from the capacity to speak Hindi to some extent. Similarly, the uneducated Nagas are bilinguals – they know at least two languages – the mother tongue and Nagamese.

In fact, it can be said that in Nagaland there is not a single Naga who is monolingual. Monolingual is a non-entity amongst the Nagas of Nagaland. The Nagas are exposed to two languages from their birth – the mother tongue and Nagamese and they pick up both the languages from their childhood.
1.6 Organisation of the Study

The present work is organised in ten chapters, excluding the Bibliography. The chapters are Introduction, Review of Literature, Development of Nagamese, Phonology and Morphophonemics, Morphology, Syntax, Vocabulary the Simplification matrix, Pidgin Characteristics in Nagamese and Conclusion.

The introduction chapter contains a brief discussion in the position of the Naga languages, the cultural and historical background of the Nagas, their geographical and demographical distribution and characteristics etc.

The second chapter on literature review presents a review of selected books on Naga ethnography because a number of works have been written on the Nagas. It also contains a review of grammatical works done so far on Nagamese.

The third chapter traces the development of Nagamese from the pre-Ahom era to the present time. It is found out that the Nagas were in constant touch with the people of Assam for various reasons like trade, migration, services etc. Nagamese evolved as a common lingua-franca due to this kind of contact situations between the plainsmen and the Nagas.
The chapter on Phonology and Morphophonemics establishes the six vowels which occur initially, medially and finally. Seven diphthongs are also available in Nagamese. It occurs in word final and medial position and its occurrence in word initial position is very restricted. There are twenty eight consonantal phonemes in Nagamese and almost all the consonants can occur initially, medially and finally. Nagamese makes use of consonant clusters in the initial and final position only and consonant sequences are available in the medial position. Nagamese does not have tone. Few cases of external and internal sandhi are found in Nagamese.

The morphology chapter discusses in detail the various grammatical categories like noun, pronoun, gender, number, case etc. It is found out that though gender is not grammatically marked in Nagamese, it has borrowed the system from Hindi to mark the feminine gender in some human and animal nouns like

/chokra:/ son /chokri/ daughter
/murga:/ cock /murgi/ hen

To express the plurality, Nagamese uses only one plural marker /kha:n/ which is suffixed to all the nouns and pronouns. To form words, Nagamese makes use of all the known techniques such as compounding, derivation, reduplication etc.
The sixth chapter on syntax briefly deals with the grammar of Nagamese. Various constituents like noun phrase, verb phrase, adjective phrase, adverb phrase etc. are discussed here. It also contains different types of clauses, sentences including various kinds of interrogative sentences in Nagamese.

The vocabulary chapter contains a detailed analysis of the words used in the Nagamese language. It is found out that a lot of borrowed words from Hindi, English and Bengali have entered the Nagamese lexical inventory. The words have entered the Nagamese language because of several factors. Hindi words have made their way into Nagamese because the business in Nagaland is controlled by the Hindi speaking groups. English is the official language of Nagaland so Nagamese has taken a lot of words from English. There is quite a sizeable number of Bengali speakers and hence, Bengali has also donated few words to Nagamese. So, apart from Assamese words, we find Hindi, English and Bengali lexicons in Nagamese. The motivation for lexical borrowing comes from the fact that Nagamese is used extensively in Nagaland for almost every known purpose.

The eighth chapter tries to find out whether Nagamese is really a simplified version of Assamese or not. It is found out
that in phonology and morphology, a lot of simplifications have taken place. In the case of consonant clusters in phonology, Nagamese has simplified the combination process by having less number of consonant clusters. The most drastic change and simplification is found in morphology. The Nagamese morphology is, in fact, a simplified version of Assamese morphology. For example, one plural marker is used in Nagamese in place of several; Nagamese has dropped the Assamese polite form of 2nd person /tumi/ and combined the two third person Assamese forms /hi/ and /ta:i/ into one by retaining /ta:i/ and using it to refer to both male and female.

Chapter nine contains a brief survey of the pidgin theories and discusses five major theories of origin of pidgin and its application in Nagamese. It is found out that Foreigner talk/Baby talk theory of pidgin origin is perfectly applicable in Nagamese because a same kind of relationship existed between the Nagas and the Assamese. Apart from it, this chapter also contains a discussion on pidgin characteristics which are shared by Nagamese. On the basis of these, it is surmised that Nagamese is indeed a pidgin, not a broken variety of Assamese language as popularly believed by many.