

# ***PUKREILA AND AKSÜ: RE-IMAGINING NAGA PEOPLE'S HOSPITALITY AND PEACEMAKING***

Vashum, Yangkahao

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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper examines the Naga traditions of hospitality and peacemaking, focusing especially on two traditions: *Pukreila* and *Aksü*, in light of the contemporary north-east Indian context of booming tourism, issues of migrants, immigrants and refugees, and ethnic and communal conflict. While *Pukreila* signifies peacemaking through the initiative of a girl or woman marrying a man from another village, *Aksü* is a distinctive example of peacemaking and reconciliation effected through collective efforts. In their most broad use, both *Pukreila* and *Aksü* signify the breaking down of mistrust, hatred, and hostility, while affirming acceptance, forgiveness, peace and harmony between or among peoples. This paper is an attempt at reimagining the Naga people's traditions of hospitality and peacemaking in light of the conference theme, "Reimagining Asian Hospitality," and especially in light of the Naga people's history of struggle for freedom and reconciliation. The paper will further explore the life and teachings of Jesus on hospitality and peacemaking, and draw out their significance for re-imagining hospitality and peacemaking today.

## **Peacemaking and Reconciliation in Naga Traditions**

The Nagas are hospitable and peace-loving people. They have a rich tradition of hospitality and peacemaking. The village was and still is the constant for the Naga people; it was always the center of the community, around which all communal life revolved. In a socio-political sense, the village served as the kingdom and state of the Naga people, in that each village was independent and democratic. Being independent from each other meant it was critically important for each village to learn to maintain peaceful and friendly relationships with neighboring villages. At the same time, any infringement on, or interference in, the affairs or interests of another village would result in conflicts and possibly even war. The conflicts or rivalries generally took place on one or a combination of three distinct levels: inter-clan, inter-village, and inter-tribe. The Naga people were known for their bravery and for the art of war-making. At the same time, the Naga people were also known for their abilities in peacemaking and reconciliation, as well as their hospitality, welcoming spirit, and generosity.

A number of rich and profound traditions of peacemaking and reconciliation have been practiced and transmitted from generation to generation by each of the Naga tribes. Different tribes have different names for such forms of reconciliation. The Sumi tribe calls it *Alu Pekili*, which means reconciliation; the Chakhesang people know it as *Küchene*, meaning the feast of peacemaking. To this day, despite the strong influence of modern legal and judicial systems, most Naga tribes prefer to settle their conflicts and disputes according to customary laws and traditions.



The February 2, 2006 headline of the *Morung Express*, an online newspaper issued daily from Dimapur, Nagaland, read as follows: “Kidima peace model inspires Rio: customary law is best for dispute settlement” (<http://www.morungexpress.com>). This headline refers to the resolution of the “two-decades’ old confrontation over differences arising out of the usage of – Kedima and Kidima – by the villagers” of Kidima. The villagers decided unanimously in favor of using Kidima for all purposes. This is just one of many disputes settled in accordance with age-old peacemaking traditions, however.

The peacemaking traditions varied from tribe to tribe. While some tribes had an appointed mediator, many others worked through the collective leadership of the village council or the elders. The Angami, Ao, Tangkhul, Mao, Zeliangrong, Rengma, and Lotha tribes, as well as others, relied primarily on collective efforts for peacemaking, normally effected through their respective village council or elders. It is possible, even likely, that some of these tribes made use of both an individual mediator and the village council in the reconciliation process. A few tribes, such as the Konyak, Chakhesang, and Sumi, had their appointed mediators, known as *Lampu*,<sup>1</sup> *Demi*,<sup>2</sup> and *Chochomi*<sup>3</sup> respectively. A person of high integrity was chosen to act as the mediator in the Chakhesang and Sumi tribes, while for the Konyaks, the *Lampu* was a hereditary position. It should be noted that even in the case of the appointed mediator, he or she had to work under close supervision of the village council or chief. Most Naga peacemaking was thus carried out collectively through the efforts of the community.

The typical peacemaking tradition always included the exchange of gifts,<sup>4</sup> and of visits between the villages, and the sharing of community meals, which meant lots of eating, drinking and celebrating to mark the joyous occasion. The richness and depth of peacemaking can be gauged from the peace treaty pledge entered into between the Kezoma and Pfosemei villages, which reads as follows:

1. Whatever we’ve done upon one another before coming to know each other shall be forgiven.
2. Our friendship will not be broken and we shall not forsake one another until the heavens and the earth, the sun and the moon are no more.
3. On the day of your trouble, I will be of your help and on the day of my trouble, you will be of my help.
4. On the day people oppress you, I will stand behind you and on the day people oppress me, you will stand behind me.
5. If you violate the treaty we have made, all harm shall be fall upon you and if I violate them, all harm shall be fall upon me.
6. This treaty made shall not be altered. (Hokey 2001)

For the purposes of this discussion, I have chosen two traditions that demonstrate the Naga’s rich traditions of peacemaking: they are the traditions of *Pukreila* and *Aksü*. While the former is identified with the Tangkhul people, the latter comes from the Ao tribe, who also represent the mediator/council dichotomy. The *Pukreila* demonstrate peacemaking through the initiative of the

<sup>1</sup> According to Y. Chingang Konyak, there are two types of *Lampu*: General or village *Lampu* and *Khel* (locality) *Lampu*. Y. Chingang Konyak of Mon, interview by author, July 28, 2003, Kohima, tape recording.

<sup>2</sup> V. K. Nuh of Thesulomi village, interview by author, July 28, 2003, Kohima. Nuh is an authority on Chakhesang culture, history and traditions. He is 70 years old.

<sup>3</sup> Hekhevi Achumi of Dimapur, interview by author, July 21, 2003, Dimapur. Achumi is 61 years old and comes from a chief clan of Khumshimi village. He is an authority on Sumi culture, history and traditions.

<sup>4</sup> The most common, but also highly significant gifts exchanged, include the spear and dao. The dao is a traditional Naga sword that can be used for all practical purposes. The exchange of gifts means much more than a ceasefire. Both spear and dao are made of iron, generally known for its cool and serene quality. Spear and dao therefore signify serenity and tranquility, peace and equanimity.

mediator, which is in fact unique, because the *Pukreila* is a woman.<sup>5</sup> The *Aksü* is a distinctive example of peacemaking and reconciliation effected through collective efforts.

### ***Pukreila*, the Peacemaker**

In Tangkhul Naga society, a girl or woman married to a man from another village was called a *Pukreila*. (Shimray 1996, 2; Luikham 1961, 127; Elungkiebe 2001, 123-34). *Pukreila* is not the name of a person; instead it is a title conferred on a female married to a man from a village other than her own. This female is given a specific role to serve in the community: that of peacemaker. Since she is identified with the role of peacemaker, *Pukreila* is also the name of an office, that of mediation or peacemaking.

As noted above, Nagas were known for their war-making. However, war was always the last resort in any effort to secure justice. Justice for the Nagas was a relational term, and it cannot be understood outside the Naga cultural context. There were a variety of reasons for going to war. People went to war because of boundary encroachment, a woman being divorced unreasonably, denial of customary courtesy and right, or a village breaking the observance of *genna* etc. (Horam 1992, 91). Additionally, it was against the tribal value of land ownership to forcibly claim or encroach upon the land of another person or village. Such an action was treated as a serious crime. These are all related issues of justice and human equality.

Naga war-making was generally in the form of a declared war,<sup>6</sup> fought between two or more villages or tribes at an agreed-upon time in an agreed-upon location, and which included a neutral party, acceptable to the participants, who would oversee the battle. In the case of the Tangkhul Nagas, this neutral party was the Tangkhul Long, the ranking social-political organization of the tribe, who usually monitored the event (Ankang 1999, 168). When the defeated camp retreated or surrendered, the victorious group was not to pursue or attack from behind. In the event that none of the parties could command a victory, the *Pukreila* had the right to intervene and neutralize the fight. Holding the *Zeithing*, a traditional iron staff, she would step between the two enemies and shout “Enough!” “Enough!” The intervention of the *Pukreila* ultimately led to the end of the war and the settlement of the dispute. Under customary law, *Pukreila* enjoyed special protection from both the villages. The provision of the law said, “You shall not harm a *Pukreila*” (Shimray 1996, 3). Consequently, no one dared harm her; indeed, to harm a *Pukreila* was to dig one’s own grave.

### ***Aksü*: The Feast of Goodwill and Friendship**

As with other Nagas, the Ao people were known for a tradition of peacemaking called *Aksü*, which translated literally means “pig dead or killed” (Jamir 2005, 3). *Aksü* is generally observed as a feast meal of pork in celebration of the settlement reached between opposing groups. Additionally, *Aksü* also means reconciliation arrived at through exchange of pigs between the parties. According to Takatemjen (1998, 117), “The practice of *Aksü*, i.e., the giving of pigs as a present was both frequent and valued.” *Aksü* could be observed between friends, families, clans, and villages. The observance of *Aksü* between villages, known as *Yimden Aksü*, was considered the highest form of

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<sup>5</sup> Of course, the *Pukreila* had to act on behalf of the village under the watchful eyes of the people and the Tangkhul Long, which is the body at the apex of the Tangkhul civil organization. Therefore, this is also a case of collective efforts of peacemaking.

<sup>6</sup> Besides a declared war, which is known in Tangkhul Naga as *rairei pharei*, there were undeclared wars and wars with hostages. While a secret or undeclared war followed hide and attack tactics and was usually protracted, the war of hostages involved a person being taken and held in the village until a ransom was paid by the guilty party. The hostage could not be killed under any circumstance. Ako Shaiza of Ukhrul, interview by author, August 12, 2003, Ukhrul, tape recording. Shaiza, a former Tangkhul Long President, is an authority on Tangkhul culture and traditions. (Also Ankang 1999, 168 and Luikham 1961, 124-26).

*Aksü* and would be observed by the respective village councils on behalf of their people, to promote goodwill and diplomatic relations. (Takatemjen 1998, 117; Imchen 1993, 92). In its broadest use *Aksü* signifies the breaking down of mistrust, hatred, and hostility while affirming acceptance, forgiveness, peace and harmony between or among the villages; *Aksü* also serves to renew and reaffirm commitments for peaceful co-existence between or among villages, and the frequent exchange of gifts symbolizes these enduring relationships. Through such continuous observance of *Aksü*, the people feel that “the spirit of *Aksü* [is] everywhere” (Takatemjen 1998, 121). According to Takatemjen, the spirit of *Aksü* is comprised of the following:

- The spirit of *Aksü* is a spirit of friendship.
- The spirit of *Aksü* is a spirit of sharing.
- The spirit of *Aksü* is a spirit of forgiveness.
- The spirit of *Aksü* is a spirit of healing.
- The spirit of *Aksü* is a spirit of peace.
- The spirit of *Aksü* is a spirit of harmony.
- The spirit of *Aksü* is a spirit of recognition.
- The spirit of *Aksü* is a spirit of goodwill.
- The spirit of *Aksü* is a spirit of brotherhood.
- The spirit of *Aksü* is a spirit of neighborliness.
- The spirit of *Aksü* is a spirit of unity.
- The spirit of *Aksü* is a spirit of acceptance.
- The spirit of *Aksü* is a spirit of co-existence.
- The spirit of *Aksü* is a spirit of reconciliation. (Takatemjen 1998, 120-21)

## Jesus as the Host and Reconciler

The image of reconciler is often used to describe the significance of the salvific work of Jesus Christ. The Christian idea of reconciliation stems from, and is rooted in the death of Jesus Christ. Through death on the cross, all people are brought “at-one-ment” with God. New Testament writings are replete with this image of Jesus as the reconciler. In many of his letters to the new converts, Paul testifies to the redeeming work of Jesus Christ’s death and resurrection in God reconciling the world. Not only is the world reconciled to God, but the world is reconciled to itself. Paul writes, “In Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself” (2 Cor 5:19); and in the letter to the Ephesians, Paul refers to Jesus as our peace: “For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us” (Eph 2:14). Mercy Amba Oduyoye, an African woman and theologian, affirms that Christ is “the one who has broken down the barriers we have created between God and us as well as among us . . . thereby saving us from isolation and alienation, which is the lack of community that is the real experience of death” (Oduyoye and Amoah 1994, 44).

The work of reconciliation in the Hebrew Scripture is shown to take place in a ceremonial context; sacrifices are offered to atone for the wrongs of the individual and nation. One example is Israel’s annual Day of Atonement (Lev 23:26), during which “elaborate ceremonies were performed . . . designed to expiate the sins of the whole nation.” (Dillistone 1983, 50). In other words, reconciliation is primarily the restoration of broken relationships between God and the world and the restoration of relationships between and among humans.

Peacemaking and reconciliation in the Naga context is also understood in this sense of mending broken relationships. As Aküm Longchari rightly points out, “A paradigm of restorative justice was characteristic of traditional Naga jurisprudence where the central concern was to heal the wounds, address the imbalances, and restore the broken relation.” (Longchari 2019). The goal of peacemaking then, is to create a condition of *shalom* at the individual and corporate levels; where

every form of brokenness is mended, every wound is healed, and peace and harmony prevail at all levels and in all places.<sup>7</sup>

Jesus exemplified the art of peacemaking through his teaching and day-to-day interactions with people. He associated freely and identified with those persons society judged to be sinners, including women, tax collectors, lepers, and the poor. (Gutierrez 1988, 12-22; Schottroff and Stegemann 1986, 6-16). He shared food with them, and acknowledged their inherent dignity as fellow beings created by God. We are told that Jesus dined with a sinful woman in the house of a Pharisee (Lk 7: 36-50), and that he accepted the hospitality of sisters Mary and Martha (Lk 10:38-42). Luke notes that Jesus did not shun tax collectors, since he shared a meal with Levi (Lk 5:25-32), and extended an unconditional invitation to another tax collector named Zacchaeus (Lk 19:1-10). Though tax collectors were assumed to be wealthy, they were among the most despised individuals or groups in Roman-occupied Palestine. The Bible thus speaks of “God’s preference for the poor.” Gustavo Gutierrez explains:

Such then is the preferential option: the dismantling of anonymity to give a name and a face. In general, Jesus has opted for the poor; but also, concretely, he has opted for people like the hemorrhaging woman. . . . When we speak of preferential love, and the love of God, preferably for the poor, we are speaking of giving the loved ones an identity, of making them feel like people. (Gutierrez 1997, 75)

By identifying himself with the poor and the downtrodden, Jesus was breaking down existing social norms and recreating a community characterized by respect, acceptance, and interpersonal relationships.

## **Hospitality, Reconciliation and Table Fellowship**

Jesus was the master of peacemaking and this was illustrated in his relationships with people. He lived peace in his involvement with the poor, the downtrodden, and the outcast; indeed one could say peacemaking was his way of life. By sharing a table and food with the marginalized and forsaken, Jesus demonstrated his message that in God’s Kingdom everyone is welcome, irrespective of occupation, gender or status. His actions spoke loudly that those who were seen as somehow less than worthy in the patriarchal hierarchy of Roman-occupied society were in fact valuable and worthy in the eyes of God, and they could be freed by the love of Jesus. At the same time he was also showing people that service to the least among society is a prerequisite for the Kingdom. Joachim Jeremias makes a poignant observation on these activities of Jesus:

In the East, even today, to invite a man to a meal was an honor. It was an offer of peace, trust and brotherhood, and forgiveness: in short, sharing a table meant sharing life . . . . Jesus’ meals with the publicans and sinners, too, are not only events on a social level, not only an expression of his unusual humanity and social generosity and his sympathy with those who were despised, but had an even deeper significance. They are an expression of the mission and message of Jesus’ (Mk. 2 17) eschatological meals, anticipatory celebrations of the feast in the end-time (Lk. 13: 28f; Mt. 8:11-12). (Jeremias 1971, 115-16)

Jeremias concludes that, “The inclusion of sinners in the community of salvation, achieved in table-fellowship, is the most meaningful expression of the message of the redeeming love of God.” (Jeremias 1971, 116). As exemplified by the traditional Naga feast of *Aksü*, as well as Jesus sharing

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<sup>7</sup> *Shalom* is a Hebrew term for peace which means wholeness or well-being. Peace in this sense, implies not merely a cessation of armed conflict, but a state of well-being of a person or community physically, materially, spiritually, and socially.

meals with those of the least, table fellowship signifies acceptance and the spirit of sisterhood and brotherhood between and among people; it signifies cordiality, friendship, and goodwill. Both the feast of *Aksü* and the stories of Jesus sharing food with the least of society offer strong and tangible images that can inform and enliven our understanding of hospitality and peace-making today. These are powerful images that can guide and strengthen Nagas as they seek to re-establish mutual respect among themselves and can also serve to encourage the people's sense of self-worth. Table fellowship is meant to be joyous and a celebration of the positive relationships people share with one another. It is a demonstration of persons or people being at one with each other.

The traditional Naga feast of *Aksü* reminds us of the significance of sharing our meals during a time when Naga society is torn by disagreement and factionalism, a time when Naga society suffers from fratricidal violence and death. Further, the Naga world today is complicated by the onslaught of booming tourism,<sup>8</sup> and issues of illegal migrants/immigrants and refugees coming into our land. While people from outside the region are welcomed and treated as guests, there is a genuine underlying fear that the local people will be outnumbered by the others.<sup>9</sup> Today, in fact, the whole of Northeast India, comprising eight states, is living in fear and trembling, because the Indian government is treating the region as a dumping ground for refugees and migrants/immigrants. The latest and the most controversial issue relates to the present government's attempt to introduce and pass the Citizenship Amendment Bill (CAB) which will allow Indians (barring Muslims) settled outside of India to come and settle down anywhere they wish in the country. The main target, no doubt, is the north-eastern states. It is not easy to talk about hospitality and peace-making in a situation where life and death are at issue.

In Nagaland today, a theology of reconciliation would mean applying the biblical concept of reconciliation in addition to the spirit of *Aksü* (Takatemjen 1998, 127). It would mean following the example of Jesus Christ in letter and spirit and learning to lead a life that is informed by the spirit of *Aksü*. Jesus admonished his disciples to be doers of the word, rather than passive listeners, and said, "Blessed are the peace makers, for they will be called children of God" (Matt 5:9). The thrust of Jesus' message is very clear: "Go and do likewise." Be the agent of peace. Peace and peace-making is future oriented and demands an aggressive pursuit. Speaking in the context of American Indian struggle for liberation, Taiaiake Alfred, a leading Kanienkeha (Mohawk) scholar and activist, states:

Peace is hopeful, visionary, and forward-looking; it is not just the lack of violent conflict or rioting in the streets. . . . Reconceptualized for our struggle, peace is being Onkwehonwe, breaking with the disfiguring and meaningless norms of our present reality, and recreating ourselves in a holistic sense. This conception of peace requires a rejection of the state's multifaceted oppression of our peoples simultaneously with and through the assertion of regenerated Onkwehonwe identities. (Alfred 2005, 28).

The challenge in applying this admonition to the Naga context is that, individually and collectively, we must assume the role of a *Pukreila*. The *Pukreila* was a powerful agent of peace in the society; her words were respected by one and all.

Today, by following the tradition of *Pukreila*, Naga women are actively involved in the peace-making process. Women's organizations such as the Naga Mother's Association (NMA), and the

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<sup>8</sup> In recent years the governments of the day have been promoting northeast Indian regions as tourism destinations to the world by hosting and organizing annual festivals such as Hornbill festivals in Nagaland, Sangai and Shirui, and Lily festivals in Manipur, etc., which have impacted negatively on the local people in terms of prostitution and trafficking of women and children, promotion of drugs, alcohol and other intoxicating substances, a threat to the cultural identity of local and indigenous people, environmental and ecological degradation, human rights abuses, etc.

<sup>9</sup> The classic example is that the indigenous people in the state of Tripura have been reduced to a minority in their own land by outsiders; the tribal population was 31.8 percent according to the 2011 census.

Naga Women's Union of Manipur (NWUM) have taken a leading role, particularly in the ongoing negotiations between Naga national leaders and the Government of India. They are also actively working to forge unity between and among the various Naga political factions and insurgency movements. They have spoken out against the violence and killings perpetrated by both India and Nagas. Apart from their peace efforts, Naga women are working for social recovery and regeneration. They have taken initiatives to address the problems of drug and alcohol addiction among the youth, and they are providing essential care to persons afflicted with HIV/AIDS. These women are indeed the *Pukreilas* of our time.

While the *Pukreila* primarily symbolizes the role of women in peace-making, the call to be an agent of peace is for everyone, male and female, young and old. We are all called to be peace-makers wherever we may be; we can all be the *Pukreilas* of our time.

## **Liberation, Reconciliation, and Healing**

There cannot be true liberation without reconciliation, just as there cannot be true reconciliation without freedom; they are two sides of the same coin. Liberation will encompass all that constitutes a condition of *shalom*, where justice, peace, and harmony prevail. Jesus' declaration that he came into the world so that people might have life in fullness speaks of a liberated life, a life also reconciled in Christ.

Having said this, it must be pointed out that there is no easy way to reconciliation and freedom. The notion of forgive and forget does not work unless the persons who are responsible for the wrongs committed are ready to own up to their responsibility. There can be no genuine reconciliation and freedom without the recognition and acknowledgement by the perpetrators of wrongs committed. There can be no reconciliation without first coming to terms with the realities of the past. Confronting the past is never easy; it is an agonizing and painful process, but the healing that comes about through such a process is real and worthwhile. The perpetrators must not only recognize the wrongs committed, they must also claim their culpability and express sincerely their intention to improve their ways. In the Naga's search for freedom and healing, it is critical that India recognize and accept the wrongs she has inflicted during decades of aggression against and domination of the Naga people. The Nagas were under British India rule from 1881 until 1947. In 1947, the British transferred power to India against the wishes of the Nagas and since then the Nagas have been struggling for their freedom from India. In fact, the Nagas declared independence in 1947 one day ahead of India. Every year, the Nagas observe August 14 as independence day, in spite of the fact that to date, the Nagas are not politically free.

It is true that healing within and among the Naga people must be sought and dealt with by the Naga people themselves in ways consistent with their culture and values. However, given the fact that the Naga peoples' suffering and loss are linked directly to India's aggression and occupation, such healing must be accompanied by the healing of the Indians. Speaking in the context of American Indian people, Tinker argues convincingly:

While the internal healing of American Indian communities may be Indian business at one level, any real healing or liberation in the world of American Indians must be paralleled by healing in the world of euro-americans in order for the healing of Indian peoples to be sustained. (Tinker 2004, 5)

This is very true also in the case of the Naga people vis-à-vis decades of Indian colonization. In order for healing to take place, India must not only recognize the identity of the Nagas as a people with a unique history as a sovereign nation, but they must also take responsibility for the decades of suffering of the Naga people.

The 2001 recognition of the unique history of the Naga people, important as that is, cannot ameliorate the genocidal crimes committed against them for over fifty-eight years. It is critically

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important for the healing of both the Naga communities and Indians that India own up to its aggression rather than resort to the usual denials and subsequent intimidation.

A vital and affirming belief in Christ makes not only for a liberated life, it also provides for life in its fullest. The goal of liberation is to make possible the wholeness of life, but this wholeness is dependent on the Naga people being free from the reality of oppression they endure under India's occupation. Freedom must be experienced in the real physical world as well as in the spiritual life of the Naga people. The Naga people must be allowed to reclaim their past with a view to dreaming their own future. There is indeed power in naming and reclaiming; thus the healing process must begin with naming and reclaiming. Winona LaDuke asks:

How does a community heal itself from the ravages of the past? . . . I found an answer in the multifaceted process of recovering that which is "sacred." This complex and intergenerational process is essential to our vitality as indigenous peoples and ultimately as individuals. (LaDuke 2005, 11)

In a similar manner, Taiiiake Alfred, reminds indigenous communities of the importance of reclaiming their traditional values for their survival and future.

The only way we can survive is to recover our strength, our wisdom, and our solidarity by honoring and revitalizing the core of our traditional teachings. Only by heeding the voices of our ancestors can we restore our nations and put peace, power, and righteousness back into the hearts and minds of our people. (Alfred 1999, xii).

He concludes by saying, "The challenge for us is to commit ourselves to those teachings and to walk those indigenous paths" (236). Speaking in the context of the Naga people's search for healing and recovery, Longchari also notes the importance of reclaiming stories:

I believe to move forward, we must first begin to understand where we came from and where we are today! In order to do so, we must reclaim our heritage, reclaim our stories, erase the myths that have distorted our identity and begin addressing our history in a way that embraces the richness of our cultures and one that will liberate us from the parochial systems that continue to suffocate us. (Longchari 2019)

The healing process for the Naga people must begin with the naming and reclaiming of neglected stories and traditions. Reclaiming their history and regaining the vision to dream their own future are essential to any efforts to bring wholeness back to the Naga people.<sup>10</sup> Our examination of two peace-making traditions of the Naga people, the traditions of *Pukreila* and *Aksü*, are in direct contradiction to the colonizers' insistence that Nagas were and are war-mongering savages. In fact they were and are a peace-loving people who place great value on friendship and harmonious co-existence. These traditions of peace-making and reconciliation and the reconciling works of Jesus Christ can go a long way towards enriching our understanding and efforts at peace-making in our world today.

The Naga people deserve the freedom to determine the kind of future they want without any interference from outside forces. St. Paul says in Galatians, "For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery" (Gal 5:1). The freedom for which Christ has set us free includes the Naga people's freedom to reclaim their histories and the ability to dream their own future. The liberation and healing of the Naga nation must take place on

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<sup>10</sup> Essential to this effort will be the reinstatement of the traditional democratic system of requiring a consensus in political decision-making and implementation. Traditionally in Naga villages everyone has a voice in decisions that affect the community. This is still practiced today in most villages and represents an Indigenous version of what has been referred to as "deep democracy," as articulated by Khan (1998, 92-95 and 101-2).

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two fronts: reconciliation between and among the Naga people, and the reclamation of their stories and subsequent opportunity to dream their own future in a way that is consistent with their culture and values. It is fundamental that the Naga people unite themselves for the just cause of their struggle and keep alive in themselves the right to dream their own future.

Finally, the physical and psychological effects of the oppression, domination, and genocide inflicted on the Naga people by the British and India require a power that can only be provided through a Christological belief and understanding infused with the reconciling and healing potential of the combined values of the Naga tradition and the living Jesus.

*Vashum, Yangkahao*  
*Christian and Tribal Theology*  
*Eastern Theological College, India*

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