Sashimeren Aier as I knew him -

Natwar Thakkar

The article was written to be included in a volume to be published shortly to commemorate the memory of late Shri Sashimeren Aier. We are reproducing it here as he has been rightly described as the architect of Nagaland state. But he was much more than that. Firstly, he was one of the finest human beings I had the good fortune to know and meet. He was also a great admirer of many characteristics of Naga way of life. But he was also a staunch integrationist. He firmly believed that the Naga aspirations can be fulfilled without any hindrance even by remaining a part of Indian Union. He suffered from misunderstanding and even wrath of some but worked painstakingly to carve out Nagaland state. Once the state became a reality, he worked tirelessly for its progress in all respects.

As the article reveals, the Nagaland Gandhi Ashram had a special relationship with him. This is another reason behind reproducing the article here.

Late Mr. Aier was the first Naga to obtain a Post Graduate Degree. He was also a storehouse of information about Naga customs, manners, traditions, folklore and inimitable humorous stories of the Ao Naga tribal lore.

Ishani bows to the memory of this great Naga who also took pride in being a member Indian humanity.

— Editor

Strange are the ways of Destiny! Born in a coastal town in the western part of India, my aspirations led me to adopt a home on the Eastern frontier in a mountain top village of Nagaland. I was born and brought up at a time when Mahatma Gandhi was in our midst and was leading the nation on the path of Non–violent struggle. Even though I was very young then, the impact of Mahatma Gandhi’s teachings and his life created in me a strong desire to follow him and dedicate my life to the service of our countrymen. This craving finally led me to the Naga Hills in the year 1955 to stay in the midst of Nagas and lead a life of a voluntary social worker. The person who functioned as my guardian and as my friend, philosopher and guide in Nagaland was Shri Sashimeren Aier. This relationship, which began in 1955, continued for 42 years till Aier breathed his last in 1997.

As one looks around in Nagaland today one fails to find anyone like late Sashimeren. His was a unique style and a unique personality. Gifted with finest qualities of head and heart, his natural instinct was to be of service to anyone in need of help. He had a special kind of presence and mannerism. Even a stranger used to get attracted to him spontaneously. In return, Sashiemren would always respond with a warm–hearted cordiality. A person of medium height, fair complexion, curly hair, face wearing a smile, tastefully dressed, walking with brisk stride, unfailingly greeting everyone who crossed his way is the image of Sashiemren that is permanently etched on my mind. An image of a person who had temperament of a prince, but one who mixed freely with commoner without any distinction. Any one could approach him and he or she will evoke courteous dealing. On being asked for any help from him, his natural instinct was to seriously explore ways to provide the required help. This quality made him highly popular with everyone, weather in villages or amongst the educated and influential.

Mr. Sashimeren was proud of his Naga heritage. To serve Nagas and to lead them to the path of glory and prosperity was his burning passion. He was conscious of the need to retain best in the traditional way of life of the Nagas, but at the same time he would like to see that the Nagas keep pace with the rest of the world in all walks of life.
When I came in contact with Shri Sashimeren, he was already a class 1 official in the Central Government Gazetted service. He was then holding the important post of Regional Assistant Commissioner (RAC) for Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes (SC & ST) at Shillong with a vast jurisdiction. His jurisdiction consisted of the present day North Eastern region and the state of West Bengal. He was part of the office of the Commissioner for SC & ST, which was located in the capital of India at Delhi.

The post of the Commissioner SC & ST was created by a special provision in the Indian Constitution. It was a highly prestigious post. The commissioner functioned as an autonomous entity. He was required to present an annual report directly to the Parliament on the status of the Scheduled Castes and Tribes and on the status of the implementation of different privileges and benefits granted to them by the Constitution. His regional assistant commissioners were his eyes and ears. They, in their turn, had to maintain a close rapport with the state Government and its functionaries. Sashimeren was highly successful in achieving this objective because of his amiable nature. I distinctly remember that his Commissioner, late L M. Shrikant, greatly liked him. Shri Aier was also able to earn special admiration and blessings from the then Governor of Assam, late Jairamdas Daulatram.

One of the mandates of the Commissioner for SC & ST was to look after the welfare and the needs of the Voluntary Social organizations engaged in the service of SC & ST. The Commissioner, Mr. Shrikant, had the background of being a senior Social Worker groomed by late Thakkar Bapa, a contemporary of Mahatma Gandhi. Shri Shrikant was also instrumental in motivating me to adopt Naga Hills as the field of my operation as a Gandhian social worker.

Shri Shrikant naturally entrusted his R.A.C., Sashimeren Aier to find a suitable location in Nagaland for me to establish a service Centre. Mr. Aier started his work in right earnest by contacting villages and village elders. His search ended at the village of Chuchuyimlang as the elders of the village welcomed the idea of having a Gandhian Centre of social service in their village and further agreed to donate the required land free of cost. This is the origin of Nagaland Gandhi Ashram. It was initially known as Gandhi Ashram Chuchuyimlang but in due course it acquired the name of Nagaland Gandhi Ashram (NGA). The story of relationship between NGA and Shri Sashimeren is long. But I have to stop here in view of the limitations of space.

Any write-up on Sashimeren will be incomplete without mentioning the greatest achievement of his life: the creation of Nagaland as the full-fledged 16th state of Indian Union. His was the Lion’s share in this achievement. Many other eminent Nagas also played important role, but he worked the hardest. I have to satisfy myself with this brief mention only for want of space and time.

Finally, a word about Sashimeren as the head of his family. He was truly a family man. He not only loved his children greatly, but he also looked after them with great care; he used to carry them around on his back in Naga style in the courtyard of his house, wash them, dress them, sing Hymns with them and pray with them. He was also blessed with an ideal companion of life in the person of Mrs. Metongla. She was his strong support and strength. She was and continues to be the cementing force of the Family.

Sashimeren rightly deserves a prominent place in the history of the Nagas. He is a shining example for the Naga youth to follow. In fact, his life is a source of inspiration for the youth all over the country.

I salute the memory of Shri Aier who was like an elder brother to me.
Sermon on the Mount

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.
Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.
Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, For they shall be filled.
Blessed are the merciful, For they shall obtain mercy.
Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.
Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.
Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew, Chapter: 5 - 3 to 10