



Niketu Iralu: Son of Nagaland, Brother to the World!



(12 July 1935 – 18 August 2026)

For about five decades, while so many of his family, friends, villagers and fellow tribesmen were fighting for the cause of Naga independence in the jungles, Niketu chose a different path. He lived amidst the heat and dust of the plains of India, sharing the daily lives and struggles of ordinary Indians and telling them, patiently and with love, the story of his people and of the Northeast.

What captured the imagination of so many of us who came to know him over those years was the sheer force of his personality — what he showed us of the culture of his people through the way he lived and his rare ability to inspire every person he met to become the change they wished to see in the world.

Here was a man who was completely non-judgmental, who listened carefully, thought deeply of others and carried a great sense of humour. He was warm and affectionate, able to relate to any age group and become one with them, whoever and wherever they were.

To spend fifty years of his life far from the comfort and beauty of his homeland, eating unfamiliar food and dealing with people as difficult as we so often are, could not have been easy. Yet he became one of us — a trusted friend, a role model, a mentor. His humility showed itself in the smallest things. While travelling all over India by road with a group of international friends from Initiatives of Change, Niketu would be the first to get off the bus at every rest stop and quietly clean the public toilets for his companions, before anyone else had even thought to.

Niketu was, we observed, a proud son of Nagaland, and at the same time a brother and a father figure to the world.



Niketu & Christine Iralu at their home in Nagaland



He never took sides. Peace was his purpose in everything he did, small or great. Yet his message often carried a challenge: to turn the searchlight inward first, to see where we ourselves have wronged others, and to listen and face up to truths about ourselves that we would rather not hear.

This same conviction shaped his life's work. Through Niketu and the many friends he brought from the Northeast to Asia Plateau, the Initiatives of Change conference centre in Panchgani, we followed closely the struggles of the Naga people and other groups of the region. He believed that dialogue built on respectful listening and honesty about where we ourselves have gone wrong — in search of solutions that are right for everyone — was the only way forward, whether between the Northeast and the rest of India or among the many diverse communities within the Northeast itself. It was, he often reminded us, the only way to avoid hurtling into the "black hole" he so frequently warned us about. For this, we remain indebted to him: he helped us see how, as human beings, we can grow both intellectually and morally.

Niketu travelled to so many continents and made friends in so many countries, many of whom are already writing in to say how much he will be missed and how much they learned from him. He was, among others, a specially cherished friend of the indigenous chiefs of Canada.

He loved to sing, and three songs, above all, stayed with him. The first was the Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi, whose words so perfectly captured Niketu's life and mission. The second was "The Telephone Song," about the telephone within one's heart — the voice of the soul that we must listen to at all times. He lived this out fully. His wife, Christine used to tell us that Niketu would often be up at four in the morning, sitting quietly in his office, listening for the thoughts that came to him — thinking of the people in his life, noting down the key points for the speeches he had to give — and writing it all down. The third song, "Kehvira," was one we learned to sing with him, about the longing for his homeland while in exile. Long before many of us had even visited Nagaland or the Northeast, we too came to feel that same yearning — for the towering green mountains and forests, the bright stars of a clear night sky and for that small community of people who had become such a cherished part of how we imagine the Northeast.

Today, with his passing, we cannot imagine what our world will be like without the presence of Niketu. Yet we will find comfort and peace sitting by his grave at Kerünyü-Ki, in the presence of Christine, Vipulie, Kelasino, and all the extended family and friends we have in Nagaland and the Northeast, who have so lovingly welcomed us here. Niketu Iralu's legacy lives on — through all of you and through us.



Niketu & Christine with son Vipulie and daughter Kelasino