

Understanding North East India

Cultural Diversities,
Insurgency and Identities

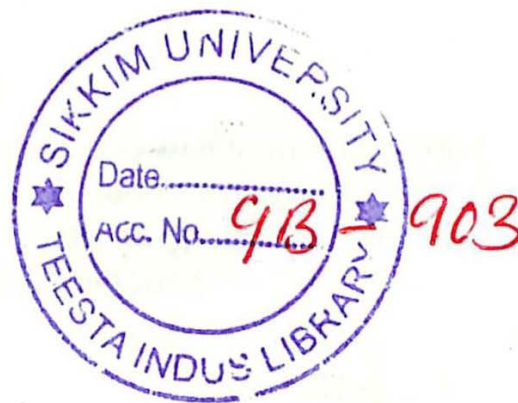
Edited by
Madhu Rajput



UNDERSTANDING NORTH EAST INDIA

Cultural Diversities, Insurgency
and Identities

MADHU RAJPUT



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FOREWORD

Madhu Rajput has done a very useful service to the society as a whole by publishing the collection of articles from renowned and eminent scholars and brought it in the form of a book "Understanding North East India." In fact, the book highlights various aspects which are not known to most of the people in the rest of the country. Any reader will easily get enlightened about the various aspects of different states, different tribes, their history, their origin, of the North Eastern region of our country.

The author has very skillfully divided the book into three Sections viz. History of North East, Insurgency and Society, Culture and Economy of North East India. Each Section deals extensively with the topics. For instance the Section dealing with History contains eight important articles such as Assimilation and Alienation of North East Indian States in Historical Perspective and Contemporary Situation, a Recent Perspective on the Prehistoric Cultures of North East India, Sino Indian Conflict of 1962 & Nehru, Arunachal Pradesh: A Matter of Dispute between India and China. Section II deals with

Insurgency in the North East. This Section is very important as the articles contained in this Section analyses the reasons for Insurgency, the mindset of the people of the North East, their alienation from the rest of the country, external influences on them, more importantly Inter Tribal conflicts in the North East India and the Problem of Social Exclusion. Understanding their ethnicity, identity crisis and the Ethnic Resurgence will help in finding a lasting solution to the insurgency prone North East. The third Section deals with the societies prevailing in the North East, their culture and their economy. The articles contained in this Section deal with the economic problems, cultural conflicts, the different tribes, their rich heritage, their pride etc.

I hail from the Garo Hills of Meghalaya and also belong to the Garo Tribe. The article Garos: A Study of Struggle and Accomplishments in this Section throws light about the topography, about the inhabitants, the history of Garos, social and religious institutions developed by the Garos, their matriarchal form of inheritance, about their customs, their beliefs, the efforts being made for bringing about the much needed transformation, with references from the books published by renowned authors viz. Tarunchandra Sinha's *Anthropological Survey of India* and Prof. B.B. Dutta's *Modernization of a Tradition the Garo Dimension*, Jhum A.G. Khan's *Cultivation and Societal Status: An Enquiry of Garo Tribe Women in Meghalaya* and Khan Ali Morshed's *Cheated out of their Own Land*.

I congratulate the author for the painstaking efforts she has made to throw light on the various issues confronting the people of North East such as alienation and the need to take effective steps to bring about national integration. It is a useful work which will help to understand North East from within.



(Purno A. Sangma)

PREFACE

In 1947, with independence a dream was born of a peaceful, self-reliant India and later in 1950 when we adopted our constitution, it marked the dawn of a new era where we set the goal of making our mark in this world, not to repeat our past mistakes and become a global force to reckon with but today sixty-two years later, it seems something has not gone according to the plan. There are still problems and discontent that threaten the integrity of the nation. To reach our full potential and implement the plans of the freedom fighters whom we owe our freedom to, we need to revise our strategy and remodel our act to get back on track to becoming a peaceful, prosperous, progressive India.

In our quest for harmony in a diverse nation we are still searching the answers to many questions, of which North East is one. North East is geographically bounded together except Sikkim; a region which shares a 2000 km long border with Bhutan, China, Myanmar and Bangladesh and is connected to the rest of India by a narrow corridor 20 km wide. Except the two valleys the Brahmaputra and the Barak where the bulk of the population lives, the rest is dotted with hills of various heights.

North East comprises of seven sisters and Sikkim has been added recently as the eighth state. The division of the country in 1947 followed by the great earthquake in 1950 and the Chinese invasion in 1962, and Naga, Mizo, Bodo, Manipuri, ULFA and other movements and insurgencies, some still ongoing, had an adverse effect on the development of the North East region.

The exquisite charm and mystic splendour of North Eastern region of India has beholden many hearts since time immemorial. Rich in cultural heritage and home to variegated flora and fauna, it is none less than a paradise on earth. No human being with a sensitive heart can remain untouched by ineffable aura and appeal that the region emits. However this region is known for its ethnic diversity and conflicts which is a challenge for policy makers and administrators alike.

North East is rich in resources but is sadly neglected. The problems that plague the region did not occur overnight; they built up for more than half a century. This kind of damage does not heal overnight it requires time and patience and most importantly a sincere effort. Before we figure out the effort we need to analyze and identify the problems first.

The people of North East have lived with terrorism whether domestic or external, since independence. Insurgency paralyses the government machinery and halts the progress of the state in general as funds, resources and efforts are redirected to counter the graver problem in hand and even the important issues like education, employment industries, food and environment take a back seat in the presence of this dark omen.

There are no winners in this war, sides are predestined to loose from the beginning and that is the people of the state. Both the government and the insurgents, who claim to have welfare of the people as agenda, fail to meet their goal in reality. Infact the insurgent groups have no moral code to follow now; they have degenerated into money minting machines and don't hesitate to target even women and children.

To put a full stop on this proxy war, people have to be included in the effort.

We need to open a dialogue among the government, insurgents and the people. The grievances of the people must

be heard and redressed. Then only we can hope to solve this problem.

We should keep in mind that India has always been a nation of "Unity in diversity". Even the insurgents are our people and their discontent-ful actions are a sure sign of a bigger problem lurking around the corner. Maybe we are missing the big picture here, it's just not domestic terrorism like everybody seems to label it and maybe some new approach is needed, to bring the reform. We need a fresh perspective which identifies the problems and suggest better solutions for peace. And once we achieve peace all the rest we so desperately strive for, will follow.

Dreams have to be changed in realities and people of North East who are tired of stagnation and aspire to see their region emerge peaceful, strong and marching on path of economic, social and cultural progress will have to develop a proper strategy somewhat like their neighbour Bhutan has found in their theory of Gross National Happiness. Good governance, preservation of culture and heritage, economic development and environmental protection may be the answer to the manifold problems inflicting this area.

This seminar on "Assimilation and Alienation of North East Indian States in Historical Perspective and Contemporary Situation", conducted by Department of Western History, University of Lucknow (U.P.), India, on 20-21 Nov 09 was one such gesture to identify and discuss the past, present and future of North East region. It was great encouragement for us that several scholars working at this region participated in this seminar. The deliberations in the two day seminar focused on the history, society, culture, economy and issue of insurgency in this region. It was discussed whether the North East Vision 2020 which is an effort to dream, think and plan for the future of this region is an answer to the problems facing the North East region.

The seminar was significant in building up a consensus on the issues concerning North East as the saying goes "Remember it is drops that fill up the ocean". No deed is small, and when every body chips in his share, I am more than sure

that North East will soar to new heights, it so rightfully deserve.

The proceedings of the two day seminar are now being published as a book which can be a useful as a research document. I hope that it will deepen the understanding of the region, so intricately a part of India. As the title suggests the book explores the process of assimilation of North East India, its journey towards development and the sense of alienation etched somewhere in the psyche that gives birth to turbulence that the region is subjected to.

Regrettably not all the papers presented could be published. We trust that their authors will understand the constraint of space under which we are working. The fact that they could not be published does not diminish in any way their importance or their contribution made in the seminar.

I hope that the formal papers and discussions that took place served the purpose of understanding the North East better; however some of the most valuable discussions took place outside formal sessions. These were not recorded but were a one to one dialogue with the scholars who had taken the pains to come from all over India sparing their precious time for us. The discussions have contributed in no small way to the success of seminar and to the development of close affinity.

The acceptance of my seminar proposal by ICSSR, New Delhi was not only a great encouragement but also opened a new learning chapter for me. I would like to express my deepest appreciation for aid and support given by ICSSR, New Delhi and North East Council, Shillong, Meghalaya.

Our Chief Guest His Excellency Shri Ranjit Shekhar Mooshahary not only took pains of coming all the way from Shillong but his presence was an inspiration for all those present. I would also like to thank the honorable Vice Chancellor of Lucknow University Prof. M. K. Mishra for agreeing to preside over the inaugural session and for the support and cooperation he gave us throughout the seminar. The guidance given by the head of the department Prof. P. K. Srivastava who was also the convener of the seminar and the team effort of the members of the organizing committee saw to the smooth conduct of the seminar. Space does not permit me to name all the individuals

who had played a vital role in the preparation and had so actively participated in the seminar. We trust that they know who they are and I look forward to working with them in the years to come.

I would only like to add that only awareness and discussion of any problem and a fresher perspective to the grievances of the people can bring about a solution and restore peace and development so that North East can rise to its optimum ability and pay its maximum contribution to the progress of nation.

This seminar would not have been possible without financial support of ICSSR, New Delhi, North East Hill Council, Shillong, State Bank of India and UCO Bank, Lucknow. I would also like to thank Mr. Afzal Ahmad advocate for his firing efforts during the Seminar and helping out to publish this work.

Finally I express my sincere gratitude to my publisher Shri M.P. Yadav for published this book in shortest possible time.

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INTRODUCTION

*Shri Ranjit Shekhar Mooshahari**
Governor of Meghalaya

Let me first make it very sure that I am here as a man from the North East, as a state owner in the development of North East and its integrity with the rest of India. What I am going to say does not reflect the views either of my government or my official capacity in any way. This is the view of an individual who has worked all over India but who was born and brought up and educated in the North East and who has tried to combine the best of the culture that is there in this plural society of a big country.

I am sure that many of you have gone to the North East and seen the places, people and the lifestyle but there are many of you who may not have seen or visited but heard from the people about this region.

Many times I ask the young people competing in

* Inaugural Speech as delivered on 20th November 2009 in Malviya Hall, University of Lucknow (U.P.), India, on the occasion of National Seminar on North East.

examinations like CAT to tell me the capital of North Eastern states but they don't know. This absence of knowledge is a contributory factor to the distance that exists between the mainland and the North East. But if you look at the history of the North East particularly in ancient Indian history you can see the gigantic civilization, in particular in the valley. Let me narrate the North East in three chapters—the ancient, the medieval and the modern. In ancient times the North East was known as Kamarupa. Most of you may know why the name Kamarupa came. This is a part of the great Indian story that when Sati, the consort of Lord Shiva died due to vexation of her father Daksha, Lord Shiva was so angry and unhappy that he carried the dead body of Sati on his head and wandered about the world. Lord Vishnu followed him and chopped the dead body of Sati with a discus into fifty one pieces which fell all over the places. Most important parts fell in the North East. That is why the place came to be known as Kamakhya and Sati came to be known as goddess Kamakhya; the goddess of desire. But lord Shiva did not stop his penance and continued to wander about. The other gods feared that Lord Shiva may get the universal power so they decided to divert his attention, to dilute his concentration and they sent the Indian cupid Kamadeva to make Lord Shiva fall in love with it. Kamadeva succeeded but so enraged was lord Shiva after knowing the truth that he ruined his dreams into ashes with his third eye, the eye between his two eyes. That is why Kamadeva was reduced to ashes and thus the place was known as Kamarupa. Incidentally Kamadeva was restored to life. It is a story which indicates the spiritual and mythological integration of North East with the rest of India.

If you read Mahabharata there are number of references to the North East in it. It is said that Lord Krishna was so struck by the beauty of Kamarupa princess Rukmini that he married her much against the wishes of her father. Her father wanted her to marry someone from Kamarupa itself. So Krishna lifted her, brought her along and married her. Not only this, his grandson Aniruddha was also mesmerized by the beauty of the princess of Tezpur Usha. She was also forcefully married

by Aniruddha. Aniruddha was captured by Usha's father and lord Krishna had to go to rescue him and bring him back along with Usha. So this shows the irresistible beauty of the women of the North East.

Even when Arjuna and Bhima were wandering during vanvasa Arjuna fell in love with the princess of Manipur Chitrangada and married her. Their son became the ruler of Manipur for a long time. Bhima, the mighty Bhima of Mahabharata met princess Hidimba, when he was in the hills of Assam and married her. Their son Ghatotkatch fought in the war of Mahabharata and caused a lot of destruction in Kaurava's forces. These are the stories that we have. But despite all these, in modern times people tend to know less and less about the North East. They are busy more with their technological development and political factors. Once there was a debate about Mizoram. Someone said that Mizoram must be father of Jagjivanram. This is the extent of ignorance that can prevail in the matters of North East.

Why is it that it is the most volatile territory on the earth? It is not only in India that North East is volatile; it is volatile through out the globe. Let me tell you a small story again why it is so. When god created India he had four boxes with him. There were people from North, South, West and North East. God said that there are four boxes, you can take any of them, open them and see what is there inside and you are going to be that. North Indians, as they are very smart people, got up first and picked up a box. They opened it, it was written- Beauty. That's why north Indians are so good looking. People from south opened another box and it was written-brain. People from west opened the third box, it was written-wealth. Then the people of North East picked up the last box. Inside was written-emotions. Without emotions you can not enjoy beauty, brain or wealth. You need emotion to enjoy life. That is why people of North East enjoy life despite all the devastations. And people are very emotional that is why they are volatile. Where people are emotional it is bound to be volatile. So this is the story that narrates, to an extent, the characteristics of people of North East.

It is a recorded history that Hiuen-Tsang visited

Kamakhya in 7th century. He was the contemporary of Harshavardhana in 606-648. While Hiuen-Tsang came to his kingdom, Harshavardhana was in Bengal. He received the pilgrim in Bengal and he was very impressed. From Bengal Hiuen-Tsang went to Kamarupa. Harshavardhana invited him to come to Kannauj for a religious discourse. At that time Hiuen-Tsang was with Bhaskara Varman in Kamarupa—Pragjyotishpur, the ancient name of Guwahati. After receiving invitation from Harshavardhana, Bhaskara Varman decided to march to Kannauj. It is said that Harshavardhana marched on the southern bank of the Ganges from Bengal and Bhaskara Varmana and Hiuen-Tsang marched on northern bank. Bhaskara Varman had 500 elephants in armor accompanying him. After ninety days of journey they reached Kannauj. There was a huge gathering of religious and spiritual people. That was the integration of the people of that period recorded by Hiuen-Tsang and in the books of history of Assam. So this is very surprising as to why the question of alienation has come now when there has been so much of integration and assimilation of people of two territories?

The next important period in the history of Kamarupa was the advent of warriors from Siam. Those days Thailand was known as Siam. Some tribes and a prince came in early 13th century. His force consisted of eight officers, 1800 foot soldiers, 300 cavalries and two elephants. They came, conquered, established themselves and ruled Assam for six hundred years till it became a part of the East India Company. They were probably Buddhist when they came but in over the years they became Hindus. The conquerors were overpowered by the absorbent nature of Hinduism. Hinduism had established deep roots in that period. Later on they came to be known as Ahoms. The name came because the rulers had moved in from the land of Siam. Ha-Sam: Ha means land and Sam means Siam. That was the original Ha Sam which later on became Assam.

Ahoms had an advance sense of history. They kept a record of everything. So from the 13th century the history of Assam is recorded in a very thorough manner. In their six hundred years of rule many things happened but the most important was the

influence of Hinduism on the royal family. The royal family and their subjects converted to Hinduism. But it did not extend to the hill areas of North East. Meghalaya, Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland were free from this development because these were very inaccessible areas and Hindu Brahmins did not feel safe to go to these places and take Hinduism to these areas.

Hindus worship Shakti. Even now there are sacrifices, much against the spirit of rational religion. In many parts of North East animal sacrifices take place. It is time now that we try to stop it.

Assam became a part of East India Company in early 19th century, precisely in 1826 but ten years down the century there was a decline of Ahom's rule in Assam. For ten years there was Burmese occupation and this was the one of the darkest period in the history of Assam. There was untold devastation and misery of the people because of perpetuation of cruelty and injustice in general. With the British came the exploitation of oil, tea and forest products. English literature and Christianity spread. They built rail which we still use in North East. With independence someone has remarked that the partition of Bengal made North East even more remote. Earlier the farthest capital of North East was Agartala and it was linked to Kolkata by road which was 300 km long. After the partition the distance became 1,700 km. North East became surrounded by five neighboring countries. India has international boundaries with six nations out of which five bound North Eastern territory while it is connected with only 10 per cent of the land of India. This is what partition did to North East and problem came after that.

After independence the hill areas realized that they were too remote to be part of India. First it was the Naga insurgents who said that they wanted independence. It was followed by Mizoram. When these insurgents manifested in very violent form, Indian forces had to take action against them and the alienation started from that point. At that time some people in India thought that insurgents in Nagaland were influenced by Christian missionaries as they were all Christians. Subsequently insurgency sprouted in Manipur and Assam but who were the

leaders of insurgents in Manipur and Assam? They were Hindus. They were as much Hindu as people in Lucknow or Mathura. Most of the insurgents in United Liberation Front of Ulfa and the other groups are Hindu exploiters.

These are contributory factors but the basic thing was that they wanted to preserve the identity of people. They wanted peace but not by assimilation with the bigger culture of India. Another factor that gave identity was a huge migration of people from across the border. They followed the theory of "Move to Open Space" since there are open spaces in Assam, Tripura and other North Eastern states. From across huge number of people came and displaced the local people. The difference between the displacement on the western border and that on the eastern border is that on the western border partition brought a war of displacement. Those who were Hindu and Sikhs came to India and those who were in minority religion groups went to Pakistan. It was a turn of a kind that was soon over. But in North East it continued for decades. It started in early 20th century and went on and brought about a great demographic distortion. People saw what happened to Tripura.

In Tripura people migrated in large numbers displacing the tribes who were majority at that time but are minority now. They are 32 per cent or even less than that. So people have become very sensitive to migration issue. The All Assam Student Union and the tribes feel that if this migration goes on, they will not be able to survive. So this was one of the factors that caused insurgency along with the discontent towards the government and outrage among the people. It went out of control and manifested in violence, destruction of the innocent people.

It has also been mentioned by the previous speakers that the treatment meted out to the North Eastern people when they are in other states, also breeds a sense of separation among them. Unfortunately it did not happen in the 18th century, it is happening just now. Once when I told my name to someone, he immediately connected it to Japan, then China and later to Thailand. When I told him that I was from Bodoland he did not know where Bodoland was. This is what happens and if it can

happen to me I can understand what the poor students must be feeling because it is not a compliment, it makes you feel a sense of not belonging. So we have to be sensitive in these matters at least those who are educated. But I am sure many of you also do not know where Bodoland is. It is a territory under the VIth Schedule of the constitution of India in Assam.

Assam has a number of administrative and autonomous units under the State Act under the VIth schedule of the constitution. In order to give expression to the aspirations of the people the government created a number of units so that they can prosper according to their own genius.

Insurgency groups today have no ideology. They have degenerated into money collecting groups without accountability. They no more enjoy any popular support and right now all the states in North East except Manipur and parts of Assam are very peaceful. The example that Mizoram and Meghalaya have set is that an insurgency inflicted territory can also become peaceful. Mizoram had the worst insurgency and Meghalaya had insurgency for ten years but today things have changed for better.

There are facilitators of integration. One of these facilitators is the mobility. Large number of people, particularly the young people is going out of North East in search of education and employment. Likewise large number of people from rest of India is visiting North East for industry, business and tourism. So improving communication is important. While this communication improvement is going on, I am sure that the governance improvement is a matter of time. Positively we will have better governance in North Eastern states.

Let's come to assimilation and alienation. We have seen the history of Assam from ancient times. I think in democracy assimilation is not the right thing, it is accommodation. The right word for integration is accommodation. We have to learn to accommodate unity in diversity. Unity in diversity does not mean uniformity in diversity, it means that the diversity must be protected; diversity must be united as it is. It is not that red color will overtake the black color and black will overtake other colors. All colors must constitute the mosaic of diversity.

We are carrying the burden of the past mistakes. Let us not repeat those mistakes and carry forward that burden into the future for every language and culture is drawn from various angles of this heart. As we have tested the drowning swim of civil war and segregation, let us now emerge from that dark chapter.

1

ASSIMILATION AND ALIENATION OF NORTH EAST INDIAN STATES IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE AND CONTEMPORARY SITUATION

Niru Hazarika

North East India comprises of eight states—Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura. At the time of independence of India the existing Manipur, Tripura and Sikkim were separate entities. Sikkim abolished its monarchy and became the 22nd Indian State on 16th May 1975. The rest of North East was Assam as one state. The northern and eastern boundaries of the region are natural barriers represented by Himalayan Mountains and Patkai hill ranges respectively. The Arakan Yoma of Myanmar and Chittagong and Tippera hills and Surma plains of Bangladesh lie in the south of the region. To the west of it lies West Bengal and Bangladesh. The notable point is that the major part of the region is surrounded by four foreign countries viz., China, Myanmar, Bangladesh and Bhutan. Therefore, the region assumes a great strategic importance.

Pre-British Period: Bishnuram Medhi, a prominent political leader and Chief Minister of Assam in his foreword on the book 'Discovery of Assam' gave an account of stages of growth and process of assimilation in this region. The Bodos, Kacharis and the Ahoms exercised sovereignty in Assam at different times under different names before the British. In those days people of the hill areas used to come down and carry on trade by establishing contact with the plains people and friendly relationship was maintained with them. One important factor should always be borne in mind that Assam was the meeting place of the Indo-Mongoloid and Indo-Aryan people in India. It is a fact that Assam was ruled for a long time by the Indo-Mongoloid or Mongoloid people most of whom are known today as plains tribal and that, as a result of a long contact of the Mongoloid people with Indo-Aryan, there grew up a peculiar blended culture and civilization in Assam which was adopted by the tribal people in the plains. Since then a process of mutual assimilation was being maintained here in Assam between the plains tribal people and other non-tribal indigenous Assamese people. Besides them a large number of Garos, Mikirs (Karbi) Rabhas, Miri (Mising), Lalungs (Tiwa) and other hill tribals who were already settled in the plains of Assam served as link between the hills and the plains.

Past history indicates a continuous attempt to harness the cooperation of the tribals in all enterprises whether of war or of peace or of economic development of the country. The tribals have freely adopted whatever they found good in our way of life, our language and culture. In the same way we have adopted many of their customs, institutions and practices. The Assamese people are composed of tribals and non-tribals and the Assamese language is a composite structure of words borrowed from Sanskrit, Persian and tribal languages. The tribals who lived in the plains maintained close friendship with the rest of the population. Even the Nagas were living in perfect harmony with the people of the plains. One may come to this conclusion from the following statement of Robinson, the author of the *Descriptive Account of Assam* (one of the earliest records in English):

"The circumstances of the Assam Government having always raised a revenue from the imported salt of the hills, and the dependence of the Nagas on the Assam markets for the exchange of salt for grain or other articles, has contributed to a mutual good understanding between the two peoples. The Naga hills have in consequence been always accessible to the people of the plains; whilst the Nagas have on their part been always permitted access to the markets on the frontier."

"In the Naga Hills there exist different sub-tribes speaking different dialects, and one sub-tribe cannot understand the dialect of the other sub-tribe. The Assamese language serves as a *lingua franca* in the entire autonomous Naga Hills and the people living therein exchange their ideas through the irregularly spoken Assamese language or broken Assamese language adopted by them.

Similar contacts were established by the Assamese with the Khasis, Garos, Bhutias Nishis, Mishis etc. and maintained until introduction of British rule." (*Medhi: 1964*) In this context mention may be made of Saint Sankaradeva, a religious leader and social reformer who accepted disciples from amongst the tribesmen and Muslims and placed them on equal footing. For example, Chandsai, a Muslim, Govinda, a Garo, Paramanand, a Mising, a Kaibartta were his disciples.

Now coming to the political background of the region one finds that pre-historic and proto-historic period of Assam is shrouded in mystery and very little is known about it. Assam was known as Pragjyotisha in ancient times and as Kamrupa in the early medieval times. Modern Assam was a part of the ancient land Pragjyotisha. While the first epigraphic reference to Kamrupa is given in the Allahabad Pillar Inscription of Samudragupta, an authentic account of the land is to be found in the accounts of Chinese pilgrim Hiuen-Tsang. He visited Kamrupa when it was a strong and prosperous Kingdom ruled by a Hindu King Bhaskara Varman.

The political history of Pragjyotisha-Kamrupa may be said to have begun with the foundation of Varman dynasty which ruled from the middle of the fourth to the middle of the seventh century A.D. The Salastanbha dynasty which supplanted the

Varman dynasty ruled from the middle of the seventh to the end of the tenth century A.D. The Pala dynasty ruled for about 150 years. In the thirteenth century a new Kingdom—*Kamatapura Kingdom* came into existence comprising a portion of the existing Kingdom. Besides these two Kingdoms, there were 12 Bhyuans who divided the remaining portion of the Brahmaputra Valley among themselves. In the meanwhile Ahoms penetrated into Assam. A new dynasty of Koch was established by Biswa Singha.

The Kochs waged relentless war against the Ahoms for territorial expansion. The invasion of Assam by the Ahoms is a decisive factor in its history. The Ahoms, a Shan tribe wandered into the Brahmaputra Valley from Burma about the year 1226 and established themselves firmly in Upper Assam. Thereafter they began the policy of conquest and annexation. By 1700 they conquered the territories once included in the Kingdom of Kamrupa.

But the decline of the Ahoms began with the Moamaria rising in 1769. The three successive rebellions of the Moamarias shook the foundation of the Ahom Kingdom. The Burmese for the first time interfered in the internal affairs of the Ahoms at the insistence of Chandrakanta who was at the logger heads with Purnanada Buragohain. Purnanada Buragohain did not forgive Chandrakanta for his traitorship. He deposed Chandrakanta and placed Purandar Singha on the throne. Chandrakanta did not keep quiet. He sought the help of the Burmese. The Burmese invaded Assam for the second time and restored the throne of Chandrakanta. But the Burmese suspected the loyalty of Chandrakanta and therefore invaded Assam for the third time. Chandrakanta fled to Goalpara and sought the help of the British. The British declared war against the Burmese and annexed the entire Brahmaputra Valley including Sadiya Frontier Tract.

British Period: On 24 February 1826 the Treaty of Yandaboo was concluded. By this Treaty the British acquired the control of whole of the Brahmaputra Valley. Thus Assam came under the control of the British. From 1826 to 1874 Assam was a Commissioner's Division under the Bengal Government. But it

was found that with so much diversity Assam occupied a geopolitically important position and possessed unexplored potentialities; therefore it should not be an appendage of Bengal. Sir John Lawrence therefore suggested that Assam should be constituted into a Chief Commissioner's Province. Sir John Campbell, the Lt. Governor of Bengal did not agree with the proposal. He tried to keep Bengal intact and at the same time desired to constitute Assam into a special Commissionership. He wrote, "When the strength and directness of power are required in any subordinate administration, it is best to place that administration under the supreme Government, so that it may, as directly as possible, enjoy the support and carry authority of the Governor General-in-Council. Assam and eastern districts seem to be eminently a case requiring such administration." The territories proposed to be included in the new administrative unit were the five districts of Assam, Kamrup, Nowgong, Darrang, Sibsagar and Lakhimpur, the Naga Hills, the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, the Garo Hills, Goalpara of Koch Behar Division and Cachar and Sylhet of the Decca Division with a total area of 54,000 sq. miles.

The people of Sylhet submitted a memorandum to the Governor General against the transfer of the district to Assam on the ground that they would be deprived of the Calcutta High Court and the rule by a Lt. Governor. However, on the assurance of the Government of India and the Bengal Government the Secretary of State for India agreed and allowed inclusion of Sylhet into Assam on 12 September 1874. (Rao & Hazarika: 1983)

Referring to the British administration in the region it may be noted that some of the British policies also caused adverse affect on the social life in the region. For example, the British introduced "Inner Line system." The Inner Line may be considered as one of the sources of tension in the region. It was a source of tension between the administration and the people and between the hills and the plains. The Inner Line Regulation was created by the British under certain specific circumstances. In 1872-73 it was found that there was an urgent need and absolute necessity for bringing under more stringent control, the commercial relations of the British subjects with the Frontier

Tribes. In Lakhimpur, specially the activities of the speculators in unvolcanized rubber had led to serious complications. Therefore, the Government came to the conclusion that it was necessary to take special powers and lay down rules for regulating the relationship between the plains and hills. Accordingly, a Regulation was framed by the Governor General-in-Council to give effect to this policy. This Regulation gave power to the Lt. Governor of Bengal to prescribe the line to be drawn. This line was called Inner Line in the tribal areas. Beyond this line no British subject and certain classes of foreigners could enter without a pass. The Pass might impose such conditions or limitations as might be necessary, upon the person to whom it was issued. Beyond this line the tribals were left to manage their own affairs with only such interference on the part of the Frontier Officers in the political capacity, as might be considered advisable.

The people of the plains were not happy with this act of the British and complained that it was a device adopted by the British to alienate the tribals from the people of the plains and thereby promote their Imperial policies. In fact, the Inner Line aimed at two things—to protect the people of the plains from the raid and plunder of the tribals and in the same way to protect innocent tribals from the exploitation by the plains. Further, Inner Line was not established in all the hill areas. For example, it was established in Mizo and Naga hills not in the Khasi hills. Whatever may be the intention of the British it is found that the Inner Line Regulation generated separatist tendency in the tribals.

Another source of tension was formation of the "Line System" in the plains—rather the control of immigration. The main immigrants were tea garden laborers, Nepali graziers and settlers from East Bengal. In the beginning the immigrants from East Bengal were confined to the border district of Goalpara. They were concerned with the Char areas in the district. Later on, the immigrants sought land in other places in the Valley. Nowgong and Kamrup districts were the main areas for settlement of the immigrants. Gradually Darrang and North Lakhimpur sub-divisions were also under the wave of

immigration. By 1916 the problem of immigration became serious. Therefore, the district officers drew Lines in Barpeta and Nowgong. Thus the Lines were drawn at the discretion of the district officers. The Government did not interfere with the discretion of the Deputy Commissioners. A colonization officer was also appointed in Nowgong to regulate the immigrants. (*White Paper on Constitutional Reforms, Dec. 1931, proposal 61, see also JPC report 1933-34, p. 16*).

At the beginning there was plenty of land for settlement. But as this was gradually absorbed by the immigrants, the new immigrants started buying land from the Assamese people by offering tempting prices. Further, the immigrants were industrious and magnificent cultivators. They had succeeded in bringing under cultivation the land which the Assamese world did not look at. The Line system restricted the settlement of the immigrants in certain areas. The main intention of the Line system was to protect the indigenous Assamese and prevent conflict between the Mymensingias and the poor indigenous people like Kacharis and Tiwas.

Dismemberment of Assam: The year 1947 is the watershed in the political history of Assam. When India was in the threshold of Independence some areas demanded cessation from Assam. One of them was Sylhet. Since 1874 Sylhet wanted to be separated from Assam and join Bengal. On 3 June 1947 Mountbatten announced that Sylhet should be amalgamated with the Muslim part of Bengal as it was a Muslim dominated area after a referendum (Shiva Rao: 1967). Accordingly a referendum was held and Sylhet joined East Pakistan. With the departure of Sylhet, Assam lost a substantial portion of its territory.

Almost immediately after the loss of Sylhet another piece of territory was taken away by Bhutan. It may be remembered that in 1866 after the conclusion of Bhutan war, the British annexed the Eastern Duars and attached it to Goalpara in the Cooch Behar Division of Bengal. In 1874 Goalpara and Eastern Duars were transferred to the Chief Commissionership of Assam. After India became Independent, the Bhutan Government demanded return of the duars to its sovereignty

as they were essentially Bhutanese areas. The Assam Legislative Assembly and Parliament transferred these duars. (ALAP 1951)

In 1954 there were various demands for reorganization of Assam. The APCC, the CPI, the Tripura State Congress Committee and the Government of Assam were broadly in favor of status quo. The Government of Assam would, however, welcome the merger if possible of Cooch Behar, Manipur and Tripura and closer connection with NEFA which was constitutionally a part of Assam. The hill districts of Assam demanded a Hill State. This demand contemplated the unification of all the hill districts mentioned in 'Part A' of the Sixth Schedule including the Naga Hill district. The NNC sought independence from India and to remain aloof from the proposed Hill State. Then there was a demand for the formation of Kamatapur State, consisting of Goalpara, Garo Hills, Cooch Behar, Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri. The next demand was Purbachal State consisting of the area round Cachar.

The State Reorganization Commission did not accept any of these demands (*Report of the SRC 1955, para 679-723*). Ultimately, the recommendations of the SRC did not affect Assam. There was no addition or subtraction of its territory. But the recommendations of the SRC were not acceptable to the hill people. The Nagas continued to demand for independence from India. The other hill areas also continued to press for separation from Assam. The moderates among Nagas gave up the demand for independence but wanted amalgamation of all the areas inhabited by the Nagas, contiguous to one another and to constitute one political unit. In partial fulfillment of the demand, the Tuensang Frontier Division of NEFA was added to the Naga Hills district on 1 December 1957.

On 1 August 1960 Prime Minister of India announced in the Parliament that the Government of India has decided to make Nagaland a State, 16th State of India. During that time the language controversy in Assam drew the attention of almost all the sections of the people in the State.

Meanwhile the Government of Assam passed the Official Language Act announcing Assamese as the official language

which aggravated the situation in Assam. In 1962, the State of Nagaland Act was passed by the Parliament and the State was inaugurated by the President of India on 01 December 1963. The people of other hill districts were encouraged by it and continued their agitation for Autonomy and ultimately the States of Meghalaya, Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh were created by dismantling the State of Assam.

Illegal Immigration: The illegal immigration took a serious turn in 1979. The Charan Singh Ministry rocked by defections resigned and recommended the dissolution of Lok Sabha and midterm elections to Lok Sabha. Election was to be held in January 1980. The All Assam Students' Union and All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad demanded the postponement of election in Assam. The demand was made on the ground that the electoral rolls contained a large number of foreign nationals and it would affect the political world of the state. The All Assam Students' Union also expressed the fear of losing the identity of the people of Assam. The illegal immigration poses a serious threat to the security of the country. The AASU launched a movement against illegal foreign nationals for about six years. It received unprecedented support from all sections of the people of Assam. This movement caused a turning point to the political history of the State. For the first time in the history of Assam a regional political party, Asom Gana Parishad came to power and majority of the members of the Cabinet were ex-AASU leaders. But this change of political scenario also could not solve the problem of immigration into Assam.

Lt. General (Retd) S.K.Sinha, Governor of Assam studied the problem very deeply and submitted a report on illegal migration into Assam to the President of India, K.R. Narayan. In his letter addressed to the President of India the Governor says,

"Large scale illegal migration from East Bengal/Bangladesh over several decades has been altering the demographic complexion of this State. It poses a grave threat both for the identity of the Assamese people and to our national security. Successive Governments at the Centre and in the State have not adequately met this challenge.

As Governor of Assam, I felt it is my duty, both to the nation and the State I have sworn to serve, to place before you this report on the dangers arising from the continuing silent demographic invasion. I have also formulated my recommendations for dealing with this issue of vital importance. I earnestly hope that this matter will receive due consideration and suitable action taken to avert the grave danger that has been building up for some time."

Sinha's request to the President of India through the report was the outcome of wide discussion on the issue with almost all shades of opinion in the State which included politicians, leaders of the minority community, journalists, lawyers, government officials, both serving and retired, social workers and so on. He also discussed the issue with the Indian High Commissioner at Dhaka. His extensive tour to the border areas of Assam with Bangladesh and visits to Border Security Force and study on literature and statistics on the issue also helped to submit the report. He indicated the dangerous consequences of illegal migration as, "The dangerous consequences of large scale illegal migration from Bangladesh, both for the people of Assam and more for the nation as a whole, need to be emphatically stressed. No misconceived and mistaken notion of secularism should be allowed to come in the way of doing so. As a result of population movement from Bangladesh, the specter looms large of the indigenous people of Assam being reduced to a minority in their home State. Their cultural survival will be in jeopardy, their political control will be weakened and their employment opportunities will be undermined....."

IMDT Act: At the height of the movement against illegal immigration into Assam and immediately after the massacre in Nalae and large scale violence during movement in the perspective elections to be held in 1983 the Parliament passed the Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunals) Act 1983 (IMDT Act) on 25th December, 1983. It was an Act to provide for the establishment of Tribunals for the determination of, in a fair manner, of the question whether a person is an illegal migrant, to enable the Central Government to expel illegal migrants from India. But the Act invited conflicting viewpoints.

Some sections of the people, particularly minorities belied that most of the so called illegal migrants were Bengali speaking Muslims and the issue was unnecessarily blown out of proportion. They fear that in the garb of deporting foreigners, the Indian Muslims would be harassed. Thus they were against the continuation of the IMDT Act. On the other hand majority community of Assam and some political parties were gravely concerned about the large influx of illegal migrants and want their ingress stopped. They also wanted that the highly discriminated IMDT Act should be repealed. Ultimately, the Act was repealed by the Supreme Court of India. In this context what is desirable is that the policy of the Government, on any such sensitive and conflicting issues, must be above controversy and mutually acceptable solution to such burning problems. (Sinha : 1998)

ETHNIC PLURALISM

Assam

The total population of Assam in 2001 Census has been 26,655,528 out of them 3,308,570 persons are Scheduled Tribes (STs), constituting 12.4 percent of the total population of the State. Among STs Bodo represents nearly half of the total ST population of the State (40.9 percent), Mising (17.8 percent), Karbi (10.7 percent), Rabha (8.4 percent), Kachari (7.1 percent), Tiwa (5.2 percent) are the other major STs. Besides them, Dimasa constitutes 3.4 percent and Deori 1.2 percent of the total ST population of the State. The ST population in Assam is predominantly rural with 95.3 percent rural and 4.7 percent urban population. North Cachar Hills and Karbi Anglong Hill districts of Assam are predominantly tribal housing two important STs of the State—the Dimasa and the Karbi. As per 2001 Census, the North Cachar Hills has got the highest 68.3 percent ST population, followed by Karbi Anglong (55.7 percent). (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Assam>) The State of Assam shelters sixteen Scheduled Castes and in the

Autonomous districts there are fourteen main Scheduled Tribes and thirty seven sub-tribes. In the rest of Assam excluding the autonomous districts there exist nine Scheduled Tribes. (*The Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Orders (Amendment) Act, 1976 (No. 109 of 1976, dated 18th September 1976)*)

Arunachal Pradesh

Arunachal Pradesh can roughly be divided into several semi distinct cultural areas on the basis of identity, language, religion and material culture—the Tibetic area bordering Bhutan in the west, the Tani area at the centre of the State, the Mishimi area to the east of that, the Tai/ Singpho/Tangsa area to the far west and the “Naga”—like area to the immediate south. In between there are a few transition zones, such as the Aka/Hrsuo/ Miji/ Sherdukpen area which provides a “buffer” of sorts between the Tibetic Buddhist tribes and animist, hill-tribal Tani.

Within each of these cultural spheres one finds populations of related tribes speaking related languages and sharing similar traditions. In the Tibetic area one finds large number of Monpa people with several sub-tribes speaking closely related languages, and also large number of Tibetan refugees. The Tani area shelters Nishi tribe, which has recently come to be used by the people to encompass Bangni, Tangin and even Hill Miri. Apatanis also live with the Nishis maintaining separate identity of its own. The central area accommodates Galo with major sub-tribes Lare and Pugo. In the east one finds Adi with many sub-tribes including Padam, Pasi, Minyong and Bokar. Milang, while falling within the general Adi sphere, are also in many ways distinct. In the east Idu, Miju and Digaru constitute the Mishimi cultural-linguistic area. The south/east is inhabited by the Tai Khamti and they exhibit considerable convergence with the Singpho and Tangsa tribes of the same area. Interestingly all these groups are also found in Burma. The Nocte and Wancho exhibit cultural and possibly also linguistic affinities to the tribes in Nagaland, which they border, in addition to a large number of migrants from different parts of India and Bangladesh. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arunachal>

Pradesh. Arunachal Pradesh shelters 16 Scheduled Castes and 12 Scheduled Tribes. *The Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Orders (Amendment) Act, 1976 (No. 109 of 1976, dated 18th September 1987)*.

Manipur

Manipur accommodates 7 Scheduled Castes (Dhupi, Dhobi, Lois, Muchi, Ravidas, Namasudra, Patni, Sutradhar, Yaithibi) and 29 Scheduled Tribes (Aimol, Anal, Angami, Chiru, Chothe, Gangte, Hmar, Kabui, Kacha Naga, Koirao, Koirang, Kom, Langang, Mao, Maram, Maring, Mizo, Monsang, Moyon, Paite, Purum, Ralte, Sema, Simte, Sahte, Tangkhul, Thadon, Vaidon, Zou). The hills are mainly inhabited by Nagas, Kukis and small tribal communities and the valley mainly by the Meities and Bhamons. *The Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Orders (Amendment) Act, 1976 (No.108 of 1976, dated 18th September 1976)*.

Meghalaya

The strength of population in Meghalaya according to 2001 Census is 2,175,000. The tribal people constitute the majority of Mghalaya's population. The Khasis are the largest group, followed by the Garos. Other groups include Koch and Hajong, Dimasa, Hmar, Kuki, Lakhar, Karbi, Rabha and Nepali.

Khasi is one of the chief languages of Meghalaya. Many words in the Khasi language are supposed to have been borrowed from Indo-Aryan languages such as Bengali and Assamese. Garo language has close affinity with the Bodo Language. (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Meghalaya>) The State shelters 16 Scheduled Castes (Bansphor, Bhuinmali, Brital Bania, Dhupi, Dugla, Dholi, Hira, Jalkeot, Jhalo, Malo, Jhaomalo, Kaibartta, Jaliya, Lalbegi, Mahara, Mehta Bhaangi, Much, Rishi, Namasudra, Patni, Sutradhar) and 14 Scheduled Tribes (Chakma, Ddimasa, Kachari, Garo, Hajong, Hmar, Khasi, Jaintia, Synteg, Pnar, War, Bhoi, Lyngngam, Kuki, Lakher, Man, Mizo, Mikir, Naga, Pawi, Synteg), with 37 sub-Tribes. *(The Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Orders (Amendment) Act, 1976 (No.108 of 1976, dated 18th September 1976)*

Mizoram

Mizoram became the 23rd State of India on 20 February 1987. Its population at the 2001 Census stood as 888,573. Mizos are divided into numerous tribes, the largest of which possibly be Lushais and it comprises 2/3rd of the State's population. Other Mizo tribes include Hmar, Mara, Paite, Lai and Ralte. The Riang, a sub tribe of Tripura and the Chakma of Arakanese origin, are a non-Mizo tribe living in Mizoram. (*The Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Orders (Amendment) Act, 1976 (No. 109 of 1976, dated 18th September 1987)*)

The Mizo community is an amalgam of several indigenous tribes who had their own unique lifestyle and distinctive dialects. The Duhlian dialect, also known as Lusei among the local people was the most popular language in Mizoram. This traditional Lusei language was interspersed with traces of other dialects like Mara, Lai and Hmar and their collective medley led to the formation of Mizo language. Subsequently the Christian missionaries developed the Mizo script. This was a significant milestone that marked the development of a colloquial dialect to a formal script. (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mizoram>).

Nagaland

Nagaland is one of the smallest state with a population of nearly two million. The tribes of Nagaland are Angami, Ao, Chang, Khiamniungan, Konyak, Lotha, Phom, Pochury, Rengma, Sangtam, Sumi, Yimchungru and Zeliang of which the Konyaks, Angamis, Aos, Lothas and Sumis are the largest Naga tribe.

Almost all the tribes of Nagaland have their own language. Nagas speak 60 different dialects belonging to the Sino-Tibetan family of languages. The traditional languages do not have script of their own. The Christian missionaries used Roman script for these languages. Nagamese, a creole language form of Indo-Aryan Assamese and local dialects is the most widely spoken market language. Every tribe has its own mother tongue but communicates with other tribes in Nagamese. <http://>

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nagaland. In Nagaland 5 Scheduled Tribes live with several sub-tribes of Naga.

Sikkim

Sikkim is the least populous State in India with a population of 540,493 and second smallest area after Goa covering only 7,096 kilometers. Majority of Sikkim's residents are of Nepali ethnic national origin that arrived in the 19th century. The native Sikkimese consists of the Bhutias, who migrated from the Khan District of Tibet in the 14th century and the Lepcha who are believed to have migrated from the East.

Nepali is the lingua franca of Sikkim. Bhutia and Lepcha are also common. English and Hindi are also spoken and understood in the State. Other languages include Dzongkha, Groma, Gurung, Limbu, Magar, Majhi, Majhwar, Nepal Bhasa, Rai, Sikkimese, Sherpa, Sunuwar, Tamang, Thulung, Tibetan and Yakha. (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sikkim>)

Tripura

In Tripura 32 Scheduled Castes (Bagdi, Bhuimali, Bhunar, Muchi, Dandasi, Dhenuar, Dhoba, Dum, Ghasi, Gour, Gur, Jalia Kaibarta; Kahar, Kalindi, Kan, Kan, Kanda, Kanugh, Keot, Khadit, Kharia, Koch, Koir, Kol, Kotal, Mahisyadas, Mali Mehtor, Musahar, Namasudra, Patni) and 19 Scheduled Tribes (Bhil, Bhutia,, Chamal, Chakma, Garoo, Halam, Jamatia, Khasia, Kuki, Lepcha, Lushai, Mag, Munda, Noatia, Orang, Riang, Santal, Tripuri, Uchai), including 17 sub-tribes live. (*The Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Orders (Amendment) Act, 1976 (No. 109 of 1976, dated 18th September 1976)*)

The discord among different groups defined by their ethnic identity or race claiming redrawing of the politico-administrative map of the region is a very sensitive question particularly in today's Assam. The socio-cultural pluralism is manifested in the existing society prominently. Disappearance of the British rule from North East India on 15th August 1947 could not make the nation out of danger caused by the socio-cultural pluralism. This question on North East India appeared

very significantly in the Constituent Assembly Debates leading to the formation of a sub-Committee under the chairmanship of Gopinath Bordoloi on 27th February 1947. On its recommendation the Sixth Schedule was incorporated into the Constitution of India which provided mainly administrative autonomy to the hill people of the region to preserve their unique culture or to maintain the multi-color culture of the nation as a whole. Most probably it was the best politico-administrative strategy to be adopted by the country searching for "unity in diversity" without destroying the multi-color culture of the nation. Interestingly enough within sixty years of independence of India different social groups have started searching for "Diversity in Unity."

Gopinath Bordoloi occupies a special place in the heart of the people and the political history of Assam. He laid the foundation of the new Assam (undivided Assam). The concept of new Assam was an integrated state comprising all the hills districts in which all sections of the colorful population irrespective of religion, language, ethnicity, hills and plains would live in harmony and peace. With this idea in view, he initiated a move for bringing the tribals, both of plains and hills to the main stream of national life.

Immediately after the creation of Nagaland as State of India, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi made an announcement on 13th January 1967 that Assam would be further reorganized on the basis of federal structure. It encouraged even the plains tribals of Assam to conceive the idea of a separate State for them.

The All Bodo Students' Union was founded on 15th February 1967 at Kokrajhar. On 27th in the same month the tribal leaders from all corners of Kokrajhar met at Edinbari under the chairmanship of Modaram Brahma, an eminent educationist and a social worker. All the grievances of the tribals were discussed thoroughly in the meeting. The Bodos compared their position as regards the constitutional safeguard with that of the Scheduled Tribes in the hills of Assam and the Scheduled Tribes living in other parts of the country and found that the plains tribals of Assam enjoy minimum constitutional safeguard in comparison to Scheduled Tribes in other States of India, who

enjoy the benefits of Fifth Schedule. They demanded a separate State of Bodoland in the north bank of the river Brahmaputra.

Bodoland Autonomous Council was created under the Bodoland Autonomous Council Act of Assam 1993. But the Bodos were not satisfied with terms and conditions of the Act and started agitation for creation of a Council under the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India. Ultimately, the Bodoland Territorial Council was created on the basis of a Memorandum of Settlement, signed on 10th February 2003 at New Delhi, by Hgrama Mahilary, Chairman of the Bodo Liberation Tigers on behalf of BLT and other Government officials in the presence of L.K. Advani, Deputy Prime Minister of India and Tarun Gogoi, Chief Minister of Assam.

The State of Assam faced another challenge when the Backward Classes started demanding ST status to them. During the rule of Congress Ministry under the leadership of Hiteswar Saikia as Chief Minister the process of granting ST status to them began. Just before the election to Parliament the President of India promulgated an Ordinance on 27th January 1996 for granting the ST status to the Koch Rajbanshi Community. In the Monsoon session in 1996 a Bill was introduced in Parliament to replace the Ordinance. But it faced a strong resistance from a section of MPs. Ultimately, the Bill was sent to a Select Committee headed by Amar Roy Pradhan. In Assam the tribal communities with unprecedented solidarity opposed the Bill. With the pressure of the Government of Assam and political parties Select Committee granted the ST status not only to the Koch Rajbanshi but also to Other Backward Classes (OBC) people in Assam viz, Tai Ahoms, Chutias, Morans, Motok, Tea and ex-tea Garden labor. While the matter was under consideration the Government of Assam provided the benefit to the Koch Rajbanshis. The Tribal Students' Federation of Assam filed a PIL in the Gauhati High Court challenging the Ordinance.

In this connection we may go back to the dawn of independence of India and find that the tribals in Assam were divided in two categories—Scheduled Tribes (Plains) and Scheduled Tribes (Hills). Geographical consideration was the

basic factor for this division. With this division the problem was not ended, because the Khasi, Naga, Mizo, Karbi, Garo, Dimasa etc are found in the hills as well as in the plains of Assam. Similarly, Tiwa, Bodo, Deori, Sonowal, Kachari etc are available in the hills also, though they are the Plains tribals. While categorizing the Khasi, Karbi, Naga, Garo, Dimasa etc living in the hills as the ST (Hills) and the Bodo, Rabha, Deori, Sonowal etc as plains tribals, their counterparts living in the plains and the hills are excluded from the process of scheduling. What would be their status? The Government is silent in this regard. The administration might have thought the process of assimilation would be an answer to this question. But it did not happen. Though the process of assimilation began, it took a reverse turn with the political development of the region.

Reference may also be made to the Select Committee of MPs to make recommendations on the salient features of the law to extend the provisions of the Part IX of the Constitution to the Fifth Scheduled areas which held its first meeting on 15th July 1994. In the meeting it constituted a sub-Committee consisting of K. Pradhani, MP, M. Kamson, MP, Bandi Oran, Vice-Chairman of SC/ST Commission, Dr. Bhupinder Singh, Expert, Dr. B.D. Sharma, Expert, Sushma Singh, Joint Secretary in the Ministry of Rural Development, Convener, Daleep Singh Bhuria, Chairman. After investigating the problem, the Committee expressed its views on the problem as, "The Constitution presently provides Fifth Schedule for all over the country and Sixth Schedule for some tribal areas of the States of Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Tripura in the North East region. The major features of the Fifth Schedule are a Tribes Advisory Council, Governor's power to adapt laws passed by Parliament and State Legislatures and making regulations for the Scheduled Areas having force of law and extension of the executive power of the Union Government to the giving directions to a State for administration of Scheduled Areas. The Sixth Schedule deals with constitution of autonomous district council and autonomous regions specifying for them legislative, judicial, executive, developmental and financial powers and functions..... It is noteworthy that some tribal areas in the

country are covered neither by the Fifth Schedule nor by the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution. For instance the hill areas of Manipur comprising of 90 per cent of the total geographical area of the State is predominantly tribal in demographic character. In Assam the tribal areas have been left out of Fifth and Sixth Schedules to the Constitution. The tribals of the north plains of Brahmaputra have been unable to take the advantage of either the Fifth Schedule or the Sixth Schedule....." (Committee of MPs and Experts: 1995)

One important factor to be taken into account, in the case of Assam is that almost each village has its uniqueness. For instance, there exist forest village inhabiting mainly the tribal population, ex-tea garden villages in which people having roots in Orissa, Bihar, Chennai, Uttar Pradesh etc.

Another concept of administration tagged with the ethnic based Autonomous Councils created to Bodo, Rabha, Tiwa, Mising, Deorietc is "Satellite Area" Under this concept an Autonomous Council will consist of Satellite Areas of the Village Councils. It will be created in a village having more than fifty percent tribal population in the concerned tribal dominated area with a population of 6000 to 8000.

The background in which the "Satellite Area" concept originated was the demographic pattern of the State of Assam. The tribal population is scattered throughout Assam. For instance, Bodos are found in Kokrajhar, Dhubri, Goalpara, Barpeta, Nalbari, Darrang, Sonitpur, Kamrup, Nagaon, Morigaon, Dibrugarh, Karbi Angling etc. Similar is the case with all the plains tribals. Under this situation the concept of "Satellite Area" may face challenges. The conflict may arise between the Core Area and the Satellite Area relationship. When the demands come from all the Satellite areas for representation in the Apex Body, will it be able to satisfy all the areas? Further the members of the same community living in different areas may face different problems which can best be solved locally with the cooperation of the neighbors. One has to realize that these problems may be solved locally irrespective of the demographic pattern of the area.

Closely connected to the ethnic pluralism is the Sixth

Schedule to the Constitution of India. It has become a source of tension in the State of Assam today. In the Constituent Assembly the members who wanted to uplift the nation on modern foundation of law, individual's merit, secular education etc could not ignore the question of socio-cultural pluralism in North East India. Even the British rulers had to give special attention to this question. As one of the architects of the Constitution, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar said, "As far as the ultimate goal is concerned, I think none of us need have any apprehension. None of us need have any doubt. Our difficulty is not with regard to the ultimate, our difficulty is how to make heterogeneous mass that we have today to take the decisions in common and march on the way which leads us to unity." Any effort toward analysis of the situation in North East cannot be divorced from this explicit expression of Dr. Ambedkar (Shiv Rao: 1967)

Now let us look back to the Constituent Assembly Debates leading to the formation of the sub-Committee. The Cabinet Mission in its statement of 16th May 1946 stressed that the tribal and Excluded areas required a special care of the Constituent Assembly. The Constituent Assembly also realized that the Advisory Committee should be requested to appoint a sub-Committee to study the problems of those areas. Accordingly a sub-Committee was constituted on North East Frontier (Assam) Tribal and Excluded Areas with Gopinath Bordoloi as its Chairman. The other members were J.J.M. Nichols Roy, Rupnath Brahma and A.V. Thakkar. Later on Aliba Imti was co-opted as member to the sub-Committee.

The members of the sub-Committee visited all the district headquarters of the hills and interacted with the officials, village headmen, influential personalities, organizations etc to understand the situation in the hills of the region. They found that the concept of autonomy was expressed by different people differently living in different hills or in the same hill by different groups. For example the District Conference of Lushai hills (Now Mizoram) meant full autonomy leaving the issue of defense to the Government of India. The Naga National Council suggested that they would remain under the guardianship of

the Government of India for a period of ten years and after that they would decide their own faith. The Khasi and Garo communities wanted to stay with Assam for the administration of those subjects for which they did not have competence and for the rest they demanded financial and administrative autonomy.

The sub-Committee placed its report before the Constituent Assembly and on the floor of the House a threadbare discussion took place on the Sixth Schedule which was recommended by the sub-Committee. The hill leaders were given an opportunity to participate in the discussion both from within and outside the Constituent Assembly. Everybody felt the need of making India a comfortable home for each and every social group for which each one would contribute to their capacity for the progress of the country. Thus the autonomy, integration and development may be considered as the basic philosophy behind the creation of the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India. (Shiva Rao: 1967).

But just at the last part of the 20th century the Sixth Schedule has become a source of tension in the region. The plains tribals of Assam started demanding ethnic autonomy within the framework of the Sixth Schedule. It has already been granted to the Bodos. The problem has not yet been solved.

Insurgency

Insurgency issue occupies a prominent place in the socio-political history of the North East States. At least 18 separate Islamist militant groups, besides ULFA and NDFB, have so far been identified by security agencies in the State of Assam. The Muslim United Liberation Front of Assam (MULFA), Muslim Liberation Tigers of Assam (MULTA), Peoples United Liberation Front (PULF), Students' Islamic Movement of India (SIMI), Adam Sena, Jihad Council etc are significant. The Muslim United Liberation Front of Assam is an umbrella organization floated by a number of separate outfits to carry out their activities in a concerted manner. Most of these groups are based in Dhubri, Goalpara, Barpeta districts of Lower Assam, Nagaon, Morigaon districts of Central Assam and

Cachar, Karimganj and Hailakandi districts of Barak valley, besides the Char areas in the Brahmaputra River.

Similarly in Manipur also a rebellion has been raging since 1964, although the violent phase of movement markedly increased in 1978. They demanded a separate sovereign state. The main factors for this demand were lack of development of the region, plundering of local resources etc. The Rebels also complained that they had the feeling of alienation from the Indian society. There are presently 34 groups including non-violent ones that demanded independence from India. In 1999, many of these groups coalesced into an alliance organization called, "Manipur People's Liberation Front." Of these three most prominent are United National Liberation Front (UNLF), Peoples Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak (PREPAK) and People's Liberation Army (PLA). The Indian News Organization, Rediff contends: "as of today Manipur is the worst case scenario in the North East as far as militancy is concerned. Apart from the fact that there are more militant groups in the state than anywhere else- at least seven prominent groups operate in Manipur" (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manipu>).

Siliguri in North Bengal, the gateway of the North East state, is fast becoming a heaven for ISI agents. It shares borders with three countries—Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal. Its cosmopolitan culture has created a congenial environment for the people with different culture to stay comfortably. The arrest of thirteen persons suspected to be on the ISI payrolls for quite sometime, reveals how the subversive organization has hatched a plan for spreading its network in the North Eastern states to carry out their activities. (*Deccan Herald* 3 January 1999)

India shares 1,525 km land border and maritime border of 200 km long with Myanmar. The people living at the Indo-Myanmar border have a strong socio-cultural affinity, which is the legacy of the historical process of intermingling among the people of the border area. The ULFA cadres are reportedly involved in drug trafficking and they are using the sale proceeds for purchase of arms and ammunition. The Kachin Independent Army (KIA) and Burmese Communist Party (BCP), the Arakan Liberation Party (ALP) and other such attempts have all

developed nexus with NSCN and ULFA for drug trafficking across the border.

While looking to the involvement of the foreign countries it must be admitted that insurgency activities depend to a great extent on the foreign help and guidance mainly for two reasons—training and organization of Camps. Further transfer of arms and light weapons and other relevant materials for carrying out their activities the militants depend on the foreign countries.

The Sixth National level meeting between the officials of (Ministry of Home Affairs) India and Myanmar devoted much of its time discussing cross-border terrorism in the North East. Apart from the question of promoting of border trade, they also agreed to check movement of militants and the narcotic smuggling across the Indo-Myanmar border. The two sides also discussed the possibility of exploring the ways of joint operations against the militants operating out of Myanmar resulting "Operation Golden" and it affected ULFA to a great extent. (*The Assam Tribune*, 29 Sept. 1999).

According to a report of the Home Ministry of India on insurgents in the North East India, Thailand has a flourishing clandestine arms bazaar located in the Pagoda Pass area opposite Karen state in Myanmar, and along the Ranong coast adjoining Tenasserim division along the country's coastline.

While unfolding the genesis of North East insurgents' relations with Thailand's arms dealers the report says that the NSCN was the first group from the region to establish its presence in the country in 1987. Several ULFA activists are also known to have visited Thailand for negotiating the purchase of arms and communication equipment. According to an official source, it was ironic that due to lack of good weapons and sophisticated communication aids with Government agencies, the militants were being able to smuggle their deadly arsenal into India. (*The Assam Tribune*, 4 July 1999).

The movement of arms to the region from different foreign countries must be controlled. Most of the arms used by the militants are foreign made arms. Here mention may be made of the recent efforts made by UNO through Arms Trade Treaty

(ATT). The summary may be quoted as, 'on 6 December 2006, 153 member States of the UN General Assembly reached a landmark decision, voting overwhelmingly in favor of taking first step towards a legally-binding Arms Trade Treaty to ensure comprehensive and effective regulation of international transfer of conventional arms.'

While looking to the sustenance of insurgency in the region it may be said that in addition to the economic problems, the success stories of independent and small kingdoms during pre-British period and heroic deeds of Maniram Dewan, Pioli Phukan, Lachit Borphukan, Kanaklata Baruah and several others including the contributions of Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Subhash Chandra Bose etc may also work as the spurce of inspiration to the insurgents because different people may justify this kind of activities or deeds differently. Further there may be misconception or misinterpretation of these deeds. The nexus between the political leaders and the militants, high militarization, certain laws like Armed Forces Special Power Act 1958, the Assam Disturbed Act 1955, the Nagaland Security Act 1962 etc, provocative remarks of the political leaders, killing and harassment of the family members of the insurgents, use of SULA as the source of information and also as means of counter-insurgency operation etc. may be considered as the contributory factors to it. It is also noticed that wrong handling of the problem of insurgency by the administration leads to sustenance of the problem. In most cases the problem manifested in the surface is the main determinant for the nature of counter insurgency strategy which is based on incomplete picture and inadequate information. Experience shows that every problem gets complicated with the inclusion of other related issues like ethnicity, language and political and money power.

As regards the impact of Counter Insurgency operation one cannot deny its positive impact. It has caused destruction of insurgent camps both within and outside the region. It has also made neighboring countries aware of the consequences of the problem. Several hard core militants have surrendered and engaged in self-employment schemes.

Is democracy a solution to the problem of insurgency in North East India? When army operation fails one has to think of adopting democratic or humane oriented device to solve the problem. Nobody can deny that the ingredients of democracy are fundamental variables to cure this ailment in the society. The democracy is by the people and it is also for the people. Abraham Lincoln had great faith on this philosophy of democracy. Today also we have realized that "Rule by the people" concept cannot be divorced from the concept of "Rule for the people." Closely related to it is another fact that progress of the human civilization depends on creative quality of men which flourishes in a democratic environment. This environment should not be allowed to be affected by the progress of science and technology or the process of modernization. In democracy the use of coercion should always be the last resort in settling disputes of any problem. Without public support or involvement it is not possible. Here one must know how to make distinction between forced support, spontaneous support and manipulative support. Democracy cannot exist on unexplained tradition. It survives in the free and fair thought and expression of views. (Mayo; 1960)

Conclusion

Socio-cultural diversity may favor division leading to the emergence of the problem of assimilation and alienation. Assimilation depends on persuasion, not on coercion because persuasion is based on convincingness. It has permanent value in the human society. Interestingly, India is well known for its humanism oriented culture throughout the world, but it is degenerating fast. Let us make our own people belonging to different professions, communities or otherwise aware of the significance of it. It is urgently needed in the global village.

The concepts of Decentralization, Autonomy and Responsibility require a fresh look in the contemporary situation. With the emergence of administrative State the question of decentralization in administration has become a very significant issue specially in India. Though the principle of democratic decentralization was insisted upon at the initial stage

of India's administration immediately after independence based on Gandhi's idea of "Village Swaraj" it was the most neglected sector till Rajiv Gandhi, then Prime Minister of India made an effort on this line. He realized the importance of it. The centre should make effort to acquire from the grass root level democracy, while giving emphasis on the centralization in administration. The Bhuria Committee, 1995 also stated that there has to be substantial and meaningful decentralization. On account of absence of effective democratic decentralization to even the district levels, demands and agitations for separate States in the country have taken root in Jharkhand, Bodoland, Uttarakhand etc. Iniquitous policies and actions and economic imbalances have led to resentments among the deprived regions. (Committee of MPs: 1995).

Autonomy without responsibility and Responsibility without Autonomy has no meaning. Recent tendency of most of institutions is to divorce responsibility while insisting on autonomy. This is noticed in the case of Assam very prominently. While granting autonomy to the grass root level institutions due care has to be taken in this area.

The politics of modern State is heavily constrained by money power. North East India is also not an exception. Public decisions and behavior are controlled by money power. The youths must be motivated through education or other socializing processes to acquire intellectual power also. We may think of Territorial Autonomy instead of Ethnic Autonomy because Ethnic Autonomy is an unending process.

North East occupies a unique position as regards social culture. It is not only a very rich social resource but also a strong integrating force. Each community can enjoy, preserve and demonstrate its culture without affecting the culture of other communities. On the other hand it provides scope to other communities to learn and enjoy the culture of others. This is how assimilation may take place.

As regards the feeling of alienation administration must initiate the process of removing the feeling. The efficient and committed service of the civil servants is appreciated and needed by all sections of the people. Human Rights education

in the educational institutions is also the need of the hour.

Further the concept of democracy does not confine to the election process only. It is a very wide concept giving stress on human values and dignity. The Preamble to the Constitution of India always reminds us of these values. It is for the leaders of the country to contribute whole heartedly to construct a path on which all of us can walk comfortably to the destination of the nation so that India becomes strong.

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