

The cover features a composite image. The top half shows a young man in a headband holding a rifle, looking intensely at the camera. The background is dark with some yellow and red light streaks. The bottom half shows a large crowd of people, many wearing yellow headbands, with their hands raised in a gesture of protest or solidarity. The overall color palette is dominated by red, yellow, and black.

SAJAL NAG

# CONTESTING MARGINALITY

tnicity, Insurgency and Subnationalism in North-East India

MANOHAR

Over the years, north-east India has become synonymous with secessionism, insurgency, violence and turbulence. Gateway for the migratory waves from South-East and East Asia, the region is inhabited by a number of tribal communities—some relatively advanced while others proto-historic. The years under the British caused upheaval in their socio-cultural life. They experienced momentous changes in every aspect of their life from food to faith, dress to discourses. But the 'abrupt' withdrawal of the British compelled these 'apolitical' people to be drawn into bourgeois political system. Neither sure of their true identity, nor the nation state they would like to belong to; confused by the prevalent nationalist discourses and frightened by the prospect of being submerged by a numerical majority, they faced a massive existential crisis.

The present study is about this crisis and how such a crisis led these communities to organize and equip themselves, debate and decide their future course of action and confront the colonial and post-colonial Indian States and the process through which this confrontation led to the growth of secessionism and insurgency. This book details the entire process from the pre-British period to date during which the movement itself underwent several crises and metamorphoses and as a result some struggles crumbled while others still carry on the revolt.

Although a number of bestsellers are available on the subject, this is the first serious academic work written by a professional historian.

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in North-East India

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2002

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## Preface

One of the criticisms about my first book (*Roots of Ethnic Conflict: Nationality Questions in North-East India*) has been that though it claims to tackle the nationality question in north-east India its focus is only on the Brahmaputra and Barak Valley. The criticism was indeed valid and I immediately decided on a sequel to the book. Since Brahmaputra and Barak Valley constituted the plains of the north-east, I planned to take up the hill areas in the next project. I chose Mizoram, Manipur and Nagaland as the nationality question in these areas had led to massive secessionist and insurgency movements. The proposal materialized when I joined the Centre for Social Studies (CSS) in Surat which agreed to sponsor the project. Prof. Sudhir Chandra who was the Director of the Centre then not only gave me the 'go ahead' but also sanctioned an additional contingency grant to meet the expenses of the project. The Indian Council of Historical Research also helped me with a contingency grant. My immense gratitude to both these institutions and Prof. Sudhir Chandra and Prof. Ghanshyam Shah (who succeeded him) in particular for encouraging and supporting me throughout the period. In fact, I was apprehensive about starting the project at the Centre which is far away from the north-east where my sources were. But CSS proved to be an ideal place to pursue the study. The wonderful faculty helped me by making my stay comfortable, familiarized me with the current debates and discourses on the subject, offered critical intervention in the Seminar I presented. I must acknowledge my debt particularly to Prof. S.P. Punalekar, Dr. Biswaroop Das, Prof. Lancy Lobo, Dr. Surindar Singh Jodhaka, Dr. Arjun Patel, Dr. Satyakam Joshi and Kiran Desai. I had a very fruitful interaction with Dr. Dilip Simeon who came as a Visiting Fellow at a later stage of my tenure at the Centre. His interest in the developments in north-east India enabled me to have frequent discussions with him on the subject. My friends, K.S. Raman and Esha helped me in many ways. Without the help of Sheikh Bhai, Dayanandan, Ashok, Hina Ben and above all late Mrs. Mac, this work would not have been completed.

I am also thankful to the Director and Staff of the Archives/Record

room of Manipur, Assam and Mizoram. I am particularly thankful to Krishna Kant, an MA student of Manipur University then, who helped me locate some of the literature published by the banned underground outfits and introduced me to some of its leaders whom I interviewed. I am grateful to N. Lokendra Singh and Kshetri Rajendra Singh for permitting me to use their then unpublished doctoral dissertations. My thanks are due to Lalthangmuana of the Mizoram State Archives who helped me translate documents from Mizo to English and also to Dr. David Reid Syiemlieh and Dr. I.L. Iyer of the North-Eastern Hill University, and Y.K. Shimray of the National Insurance who helped me with research materials.

Lastly I would like to express my gratitude to my parents, my wife Mala and little daughter Tuntuni whose support has made the work possible.

A word or two about the book. I have refrained from interpreting statements, either written or oral, of the underground leaders or organizations due to its sensitive nature. I preferred to reproduce them in full for the reader to interpret them. This accounts for the use of large number of long quotations in the book.

Needless to say I am responsible for errors of facts or understanding.

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# Abbreviations

AICC	All India Congress Committee
AIGL	All India Gorkha League
AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
AISPC	All India State Peoples Conference
ANPPC	All Naga Peoples Peace Conference
ANVC	Achik National Volunteers Council
ATTF	All Tripura Tigers Force
BSF	Border Security Force/Bodo Security Force
CPI	Communist Party of India
CPI (M)	Communist Party of India (Marxist)
CPI (ML)	Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist)
CONSOCOM	Consolidation Committee
CNP	Council of Naga People
CWC	Congress Working Committee
DIG	Deputy Inspector General (of Police)
DIF	Democratic Independent Front
DMK	Dravida Munnetra Kazagham
DNSF	Dimasa National Security Force
DHD	Dima Halom Daoga
EITU	Eastern India Tribal Union
HALC	Hynniewtrep Achik Liberation Council
HLU	Hill Leaders Union
HPC	Hmar Peoples Convention
IBRF	Indo Burma Revolutionary Front
IGP	Inspector General of Police
INA	Indian National Army
INC	Indian National Congress
IBM	Indo Burma Movement
JKLF	Jammu & Kashmir Liberation Front
KLA	Kashmir Liberation Front
KNA	Kuki National Assembly
KNA	Kuki National Army
KSPA	Khasi States Peoples Association
KCP	Kangleipak Communist Party

KNV	Karbi National Volunteers
KYKL	Kanglei Yowl Kanna Lup
MU	Mizo Union
MNFF	Mizo National Famine Front
MNF	Mizo National Front
MNA	Mizo National Army
NNC	Naga National Council
NNO	Naga National Organisation
NMM	Nikhil Manipuri Mahasabha
NNCB	Naga National Council of Burma
NEFA	North Eastern Frontier Agency
NYM	Naga Youth Movement
NWC	Naga Womens Convention
NPC	Naga Peace Council
NLFT	National Liberation Front of Twipra
NDFB	National Democratic Front of Bodoland
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
NPMHR	Naga Peoples Movement for Human Rights
NSCN	National Socialist Council of Nagaland
NSCN (IM)	National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Nagalim) ISAC SWU – Th.Muivah
NSCN (K)	National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Khaplang)
PHTRA	The Plains and Hills Tribes and Races Association
PANMYL	Pan Manipuri Youth League
PMM	Pan Mongoloid Movement
PLA	Peoples Liberation Army (of Manipur)
PREPAK	Peoples Liberation Army of Kangleipak
RGM	Revolutionary Government of Manipur
RJC	Revolutionary Joint Committee
TNV	Tripura National Volunteers
UNO	United Nations Organisation
UNPO	Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organisation
UNLF	United National Liberation Front (of Manipur)
ULFA	United Liberation Front of Assam
UMFO	United Mizo Freedom Organisation
UPSC	Union Public Service Commission
UDF	United Democratic Front
UNLFOSS	United Liberation Front of Seven Sisters
YLA	Young Lushai Association
YMCA	Young Mens Christian Association
YMA	Young Mizo Association



## Prologue

In the summer of 1989 I, as a college teacher, attended a workshop on the Indian National Movement sponsored by the Indian Council of Historical Research at the North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong. The monotonous and mundane atmosphere of the gathering suddenly livened up when one of my Mizo colleagues interrupted one of the lectures and said that the entire workshop was all about the anti-British movements that took place in Indian mainland. It did not include the century-long fight of the Nagas or Mizos against the British. He threw another shocker when he said that as far as he and his people were concerned the Mizo National Front (MNF) movement was their national movement and freedom struggle, which should be included in the curriculum. The resource-person, an eminent historian, replied that though he sympathized with his stand on the subject, since the Government of India wouldn't permit he was not in a position to include the so-called Mizo national movement in the syllabi. Moreover, as far as the historian and the Government of India were concerned the MNF movement was a secessionist movement—an insurgency.

### INTERACTION OF DISCOURSES

Although the matter ended there and the course was concluded smoothly, the interaction, between my Mizo colleague and the speaker was profoundly reflective. It revealed a discourse pattern. The positions taken by the two individuals were representative of the two parties involved: the Indian State and its representatives on the one hand, and aggrieved communities on the other. The present work is about this discourse—this confrontation. What is considered as the nationalist movement and freedom struggle by the struggling Nagas, Mizos or the Meitheis is explained away in terms of 'secessionism' and 'insurgency' by the Indian State. One is reminded of a similar discourse between the colonial state and the Indian nationalists in

pre-independence India wherein the latter declared themselves a 'nation' while the former denied the existence of any Indian nation. This dynamic force of history makes this discourse important. It would be futile to go into the details of the usual pattern of arguments: whether Nagaland or Mizoram really belongs to India or whether the movements were nationalist in character or not because history has proved time and again that national boundaries are not sacrosanct nor is the permanence of nation states guaranteed. Yesterday's terrorists are today's martyrs. Similarly if the Mizo 'secessionism' was a fact, the cessation of this movement is also a fact. The Mizo 'insurgents' of yesterday are not less Indian today than any other Indian. It is this aspect of the unpredictable fluidity of history, so profoundly proved by the events in Eastern as well as Central Europe in the eighties and nineties of the twentieth century, that makes history so immensely mystical and lively. Our object is to study this facet of the Naga, Mizo and Meithei movements vis-a-vis the Indian State from a contemporary historical perspective without bothering about predicting its future course.

But what needs to be emphasized here is that the so-called 'secessionism' is not unique to north-east India, or India as is believed.<sup>1</sup> In fact most of the post-colonial states and even the so-called modern nation states in Europe, Africa and America have faced such crises.

#### SEPARATISM AND SECESSIONISM IN INDIA

A separatist movement was visible in India as early as 1906. In fact, barely two decades after the foundation of the Indian National Congress as the representative political organization of all sections of Indians, a counter political organization was born in the form of the Muslim League (1906), which was followed by the emergence of the All India Hindu Mahasabha (1915) and Akali Dal (1920) representing Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs respectively. These developments posed a serious threat to the concept of Indian nation itself as all three components of it, e.g. the Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs claimed to be separate nations by themselves. Initially these demands for separate nationhood were brushed aside as 'insignificant' but its real strength was visible in the 1940s, when Muslims demanded Pakistan, Sikhs demanded Sikhistan and the Hindus wanted hegemony in Hindustan. The situation worsened at the imminence of British withdrawal from India. There was a move to carve out of India an independent United Bengal, Paktunistan in North Western Frontier Province, and Gorkhasthan in the Darjeeling District of Bengal. The

Princely States of Bhopal, Hyderabad, Travancore-Cochin, Junagadh, Manipur, the tribal areas of Naga Hills, Mizo Hills and Khasi Hills in north-east India desired independence and self-rule. While Pakistan was conceded, some of the other separatist-turned-secessionist moves were suppressed and 'integration' was achieved. One of the areas where the 'integrationist' attempt had failed was in the Naga Hills. The Nagas declared themselves independent on 14 August 1947. Soon after, the Meitheis decried the merger and demanded independence from India. A number of insurgent organizations beginning with the United National Liberation Front to the People's Liberation Army were active in the north-east. The merger of Kashmir with India was also decried by certain sections. The newly created Pakistan found that without Kashmir their state was 'moth-eaten' and invaded and occupied part of Kashmir. Since then secessionist demands continued to be voiced all along the 1950s. In 1953 Sheikh Abdullah himself was arrested on charges of 'subversion'. There were underground activities headed by Jammu & Kashmir Liberation Front and Kashmir Liberation Army whose objective was to get 'Kashmir liberated from Indian occupation'. The 1980s saw a revival of secessionism in Punjab following the dismissal of the Akalis from office (1980). The movement started with a demand for autonomy on the basis of Anandpur Sahib Resolution and ended with the demand for independence and establishment of Khalistan. The insurgency and terrorism unleashed in Punjab since then, was unprecedented.

The Dravida Munnetra Kazaghham (DMK) also raised a banner of revolt against the hegemony of the casteist-Hindi belt.<sup>2</sup> Following the attempt to introduce Hindi as the national language and the dismissal of the DMK Government in Tamil Nadu in 1976, the DMK activists campaigned for severance of ties with India and establishment of an independent Dravidastan in south India.

In March 1966, the Mizos under the leadership of the MNF followed suit and revolted. The Tripura National Volunteer began their secessionist campaign in June 1980 and the United Liberation Front of Assam in 1981. Among these only Mizoram seemed to have quietened after the Accord with the Centre in 1986 and settled down to peace for the time being.

#### OTHER POST-COLONIAL SOCIETIES

These secessionist tendencies are similar to those in other post-colonial states where separatist movements have been endemic too. The creation of Pakistan out of India was not the final division. Soon

East Pakistan (Bangladesh) seceded from it and the Sindhis have been fighting a battle of separation from the Punjabi dominated Pakistan. Bangladesh too has not been free from separatism, with the Chakmas as the insurgency group. There is a violent Tamil Secessionist Movement in Sri Lanka. In the African continent the Ibos have been fighting to secede from Nigeria. The Yoruba and Housa-Fulani are the other aggrieved communities in Nigeria; there is a Buganda challenge in Uganda. The Moros are fighting in the Philippines, and so are the Chins in Myanmar, the Bangalas in Zaire, Kurds in Iraq and the Meos in Thailand. There is a Muslim insurgency in Lebanon, and that of Black and Anayanza and Sudan. Besides, there is also the long drawn struggle of the Tibetans against China, the Palestinians against Israel. Even the old nation states are no exception to this. The Irish battle against British colonialism is perhaps one of the oldest. The Scots and Welsh are equally vociferous about autonomy. There are also movements such as the Basque Nationalist Movement in Spain, the Quebec Movement in Canada, and the separatist movements of the Shans in Myanmar and Eritreans in Ethiopia. The artificial creation of multinational states through conquests, agreements, negotiations and superpower manipulation has also failed against the resurgence of ethnic aspirations. The multinationalism of Russia has already fallen to pieces and has not solved the conflict between the Armenians and Azerbaijanis, the Serbs, Croats and the Muslims of Bosnia Herzegovina—all erstwhile constituents of the Yuogoslav nation—and has virtually turned into a civil war. The Czechs and Slovaks have split Czechoslovakia into two nations. This is not the end of separatist movements, there are more in the pipeline. The Kikuyu dominance in Kenya, and that of the Javanese in Indonesia, have faced serious challenges. The cracks in the relationship between the Zulus, Sotho and Xhosa in Africa is increasingly manifesting itself. The contradictory interests of the African National Congress and the Zulu-Inkata party has already jeopardized the South African nationalist unity. The unification of Germany has only reinforced the growth of Neo-Nazism and contempt for Asians. In India itself there is a Hindu resurgence while the Naga and Meithei struggle continue to challenge the might of the Indian State.

While there are scholarly studies abroad on these 'Secessionist' or Insurgency Movements, in India it is only the journalists who have been interested in the subject. Consequently, students of nationalism, secessionism and insurgency have very little material at hand that can be taken seriously.

## HISTORIOGRAPHICAL RESPONSIBILITY

North-east India faces not just political, economic and cultural marginalization but even historiographical marginalization. A study on British India has pointed out that secessionism thrived in the areas which were late in becoming a part of the British Empire in India. Even the specific areas have been mentioned, but not the north-east, though it fits the argument.<sup>3</sup> If as an authority this scholar is forgiven considering his European nationality, our national and so-called 'history from below' also excluded the north-east, in narrating certain crucial phases of Indian history like the State Peoples' movement in Manipur or Mizo People's movement to merge with India in opposition to a section of its leaders.<sup>4</sup> As for the studies on secessionism they follow a pattern which is typical to north-east India. It is the historiographical pedigree that has set the pattern and is unquestioningly followed. Worse, this historiography, which was shaped by the colonial school, has only reinforced the arguments of the insurgents themselves. While the rest of India has moved ahead to reach the concept and ideology of peoples' history, north-east Indian historiography is still chained to its colonial framework set by Edward Gait's *History of Assam* (1905).

The secessionists justify their movements by saying that the Naga Hills, Mizo Hills, Manipur or even Assam were never a part of India till the British conquered them. The students of the history of north-east India are taught that each was an independent political unit in the pre-colonial period, and that it had maintained its 'splendid isolation'.<sup>5</sup> It is never discussed as to what was 'splendid' about this isolation, nor is it explained that the 'independence of Assam' in the pre-colonial times was not an isolated phenomenon. The entire medieval world, including India was characterized by such regionalism where autonomous units thrived. Nation, and nation states are only a modern phenomenon. Multiplicity of regional kingdoms and feudal chiefdoms, fragmentation of empire, appearance and disappearance of regional powers, regionalism and insularity in vision and political action are characteristic of the medieval times. It is a significant failure of the regional historiography to highlight the fact that Assam could not have been an exception to these medieval characteristics. Similarly tribals and subalterns are treated equally shabbily by some of the 'doyens' of this historiography. For example, a three-volume work on the Anglo-Tribal relationship in north-east India has been titled *Problems of the Hill Tribes: North East Frontier*.<sup>6</sup>

The laboriously collected data from India and abroad presented in these volumes depict the 'tribals' as the 'problem' which justified their being conquered by the British. No attempt has been made to appreciate the heroic resistance offered by small tribal groups like the Nagas or Lushais against a modern military power like the British. Instead the emphasis is on how the tribes created problems for the British by committing raids, plunders and kidnapping in British territory. The grip of colonial historiography is so evident in this work that instead of presenting the tribal side of the picture, British policy has been projected—dividing its course into phases such as peace-mission, punitive expedition, and non-intervention, period of indecision, forward policy, etc. No attempt has been made in this study to use folk history, oral historiography in the absence of documentary evidence to present the tribal point of view. A comparison of these early historical works with the original official imperialist documents of Alexander Mackenzie,<sup>7</sup> Pemberton,<sup>8</sup> Butler, Mills,<sup>9</sup> Woodthorpe,<sup>10</sup> Needham<sup>11</sup> or Robert Reid<sup>12</sup> will perhaps not reveal much difference between the two. Such was the stronghold of colonial historiography of the northeast. It is striking that it didn't loosen its grip over historians. For example, since S.K. Bhuyan published his study, *Anglo-Assamese Relations* there has been an enormous interest in studying British relationship with various tribes of the north-east. As a result of S.K. Bhuyan's<sup>13</sup> study the following historians among others, worked in the tribals of this region: H.K. Barpujari on Anglo-Tribal relations, S.K. Barpujari on Anglo-Naga relations,<sup>14</sup> J.B. Bhattacharjee on Anglo-Garo relations,<sup>15</sup> S. Chatterjee on Anglo-Lushai relations,<sup>16</sup> Helen Giri<sup>17</sup> and Hamlet Bareh on Anglo-Khasi relation,<sup>18</sup> Laxmi Devi on Ahom-tribal relation,<sup>19</sup> and Milton Sangma on Anglo-Garo<sup>20</sup> relations. Even as late as 1989, research works on the north-east maintained the stance that the tribals of this region lived in complete political isolation. A critic discovered a strange insularity in the historiography of north-east India in the sense that it never tried to view its history against the background of developments in India as a whole.<sup>21</sup> He also found that there is a discernible lack of interest or information about north-east India outside the north-east.<sup>22</sup> So much so that an Indian History Congress volume categorized a paper on the northeast as 'non-Indian'.<sup>23</sup> It has also been pointed out that the British had no intention of conquering these tribes as it would not gain much economically by such a conquest<sup>24</sup> as these hills were 'not a land of flowing milk and honey, no glittering outcrops to raise thoughts of

mineral wealth, no telling indications of reservoirs of endless oil'.<sup>25</sup> Such a view overlooks the fact that imperialism is its own justification. There need not always be an 'economic' motive for a conquest. The following is a representative example from a history written in the imperialist tradition.

At least in 1866, it was resolved to take possession of the Angami country and reclaim its inhabitants from savagery. . . . The object in view was to protect the low land from the incursions of the Nagas. It was not desired to extend British rule into the interior, but when a footing in the hills had once been obtained, further territorial expansion became almost inevitable.<sup>26</sup>

There was a more direct version too.

It should be first premised that for the annexation of their territory, the Nagas themselves are responsible. The cost of administration of the district is out of all proportion to the revenue that is obtained, and we only occupied the hills after a bitter experience, extending over many years, which clearly showed that annexation was the only way of preventing raids upon our villages. . . . It was impossible for any civilized power to acquiesce in the perpetual harrying of its border folk.<sup>27</sup>

The naivette of the regional historiography of north-east India is reflected in the contention that the annexation of the Naga or Mizo Hills was a historical accident. It only carries forward the colonial argument that the British had no intentions of conquering these hills which were not only devoid of any natural resources but proved to be a liability to the them; it is only the 'barbarism' of the tribes which forced their conquest. Colonialism had not only conquered India, it had conquered Indian minds too. While the mainstream historiography had been able to by and large decolonize itself, the regional counterpart could not yet do so. The absence of motives, plans, strategies, benefits in the conquest of Naga-Mizo Hills was seen as a legitimization of the colonial argument. It not only refuses to acknowledge the reality of 'conquests' but undermines the nature and strength of imperialism itself. The story of the conquest of the Naga/Mizo tribes lasting about a century, which imperialism described as 'one long sickening story of open insults and defiance, bold outrages and cold blooded murders on the one side and long-suffering forbearance, forgiveness, concession and unlooked favours on the other',<sup>28</sup> goes a long way to prove this.

In fact, an appropriate phrase to describe this historiographical

situation would be missing 'the wood for the trees'. The fact that the hills were occupied and devastated was overlooked and the emphasis was on whether the British had any motive for the conquest or not. Did the British ever publicize or profess their intentions at any stage of their conquering spree in India? Similarly, imperialist concepts such as non-intervention, non-interference and non-regularizations were uncritically accepted without inquiring into their epistemological background or imperial legitimization.<sup>29</sup> It is said that the Inner Line Regulation Act was a device to safeguard the identity of the tribals, though their identity was never discussed in the Inner Line Regulation document.<sup>30</sup> The primary motive, as shown later, was to restrict the European planters from occupying and converting tribal lands into tea plantations and secondly to stop Indian merchants from encroaching on the trades that were the monopoly of the tribals like collection of rubber, ivory, tribal salt and other forest products.<sup>31</sup> These studies themselves have revealed that despite the claims of non-interference, the British did interfere with the life of the tribals. It is also said that the roots of the insurgency movements in north-east India lay in the fact that these tribes never participated in the nationalist movement and were isolated from the mainstream of Indian life. By doing so, this historiography only succeeded in reinforcing the ideas that colonial administrators had drilled into the minds of the tribals instead of examining or countering it.

There was this false propagation by the colonialists that to be considered a part of India one had to be either Hindu or Muslim or at least be influenced by them. It was never pointed out that the spread of Hindu culture in South-East Asia did not make them part of India. At the same time the advent of Islam has not only turned a large chunk of Indian population into Muslims but also rejuvenated Indian culture and civilization. So was the case with Christianity which arrived in India as early as AD 52, much before it did in some of the Christian States themselves and enriched Indian heritage. It is not true that Christianity came only with colonialism. In fact if the Nagas or Lushais had escaped these influences, it only proves the diversity and strength of Indian civilization. What is also to be remembered is that Hinduism spread in most far-flung areas of India not only because the monarchs of these regional kingdoms embraced it personally but adopted it as the State religion to legitimize their rule. Assam, Manipur and Tripura are classic examples of it. The tribals under discussion were yet to develop any such kingship, which could facilitate such Hinduization.



What is also a striking failure of the regional historiography was to point out that British rhetoric about the tribals of north-east India being non-Indian was a phenomenon of the 1940s, except for the two memoranda submitted to the Simon Commission in 1928 again by British Officials themselves. After the declaration of British withdrawal in the face of growing hostility from Indians, there was an increasing apprehension in the minds of the tribals about their future amidst people who, they were told were aliens. With the Plan Balkan on, the British perhaps wanted to retain as much of India as possible under their suzerainty as colonies. The 'tamed' tribals were an easy target. Picking up on the legitimate fears of the tribals, some of these imperialist administrators mooted a plan of creating a Crown-Colony Protectorate or a Trust Territory comprising the tribal areas which would be a British colony. Robert Reid, the Assam Governor (1937-42), L.S. Amery the Secretary of State for India and Myanmar, and Reginald Coupland, an Oxford professor were some of those involved in this conspiracy. They were inspired by the thesis put forward by J.H. Hutton, N.E. Parry and A.G. McCall. It is in the light of this 'Crown-Colony' that the British viewed these tribes being different from other Indians and described them as non-Indian although until then they themselves had ruled the tribals as part of India. But the Labour Government in Britain which has inherited an economy devastated by the war, did not entertain the proposals of a Crown-Colony and wanted to be rid of India as early as possible. So not only did the Crown-Colony plan fizzle out, even the declared date of British withdrawal (June 1948) was advanced to August 1947. If the 'secessionists' today appropriate the rhetoric of the imperialists and put forward the same arguments, it is not that they are historical facts, but because they were never countered by nationalist historiography. The nationalists directed their attention elsewhere thereby imposing another false historiographical consciousness on the people. Jawaharlal Nehru, for example, popularized the idea that the tribals were anti-Indian because 'they (the tribals) never experienced the sensation of being in a country called India and they were hardly influenced by the struggle for freedom or other movements in India. Their chief experience of outsiders was that of British officers and Christian missionaries who generally tried to make them anti-Indian.'<sup>32</sup>

The refusal to accord the Naga and Mizo anti-colonial movements—a bloody war which lasted little less than a century the status of being a part of the Indian freedom struggle was not only reflective of the 'elitist bias' of the Indian nationalist historiography but also

resulted in alienating the tribals. It is high time that the understanding of Indian freedom struggle underwent some changes in the north-east Indian historiography. And that Indian freedom struggle does not merely consist of the Gandhian movements. The Khasi war against the British (1829-33), the Jaintia rebellion (1860-2) or the Naga-Lushai (1832-98) fights against the British conquerors were as anti-colonial as the Gandhian movements. In fact, when the elites of the country were organizing the first session of the Indian National Congress the Nagas and Lushais were still fighting a life and death war against the mighty British Empire.

Regional history has a specialized role in raising the consciousness of its people. But in the process it should not become 'regionalist'. K.M. Panikkar's caution is most appropriate for regional historians in this context:

I would make one appeal to Indian Historians and that is, not lend themselves to the heresy of elevating regional glories as a result of their specialisation with certain period or certain areas. Every region of India has contributed to the evolution of the Indian people, every group added to our common heritage. Every part of India has its heroic period and forgetting this the historians have contributed to the false pride resulting from the glorified self-image of our different areas. This is the most dangerous development which one has especially to guard against.<sup>33</sup>

## NOTES

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## The Backdrop

Although it is customary to provide a general background of the area under study for the readers' benefit, India's north-east is one periphery which really needs a detailed introduction for the mainlanders. This is illustrated by the reaction of my friend on his first visit to the north-east as he exclaimed, 'it seems to be altogether a different world'. This introduction is also essential as a backdrop in understanding the developments in the late colonial and post-colonial period which we shall be examining in this study.

### THE NAGA, MIZO AND MEITHEIS

Nagaland, Mizoram and Manipur are the three major units of north-east India and are among the tiniest states in the Indian Union inhabited by the Nagas, Mizos and the Meitheis respectively. According to the 1991 Census these three communities: the Nagas, Mizos, and the Meitheis who were supposed to have challenged the might of the gigantic Indian State only had a population of 12,15,573, 6,86,217 and 18,26,914 respectively. Nagaland and Manipur form the eastern-most boundary of India sharing their frontier with Myanmar while Mizoram shares its frontier with both Myanmar and Bangladesh. The present state of Nagaland with an area of 6,366 sq. km, is situated on a chain of mountains extending from the Chittagong Hill tracts to the Patkai ranges and joined by the north-eastern offshoot of the Himalayas. Adjoining a part of the Chin Hills and Arakan-Yoma mountain range, Nagaland comprises three massive mountain ranges running parallel to each other from north to south—the Barail, the Naga and the Patkai with an altitude ranging between 660 metres and 4,220 metres above sea-level. Nagaland has Assam as its neighbour on the north-west, Manipur on the south, Myanmar on the east and Arunachal Pradesh on the north-east. Mizoram shares 70 per cent of its frontier with two foreign countries on three sides, Myanmar and Bangladesh. Only portion on its west is joined by Tripura and on its

north is the Barak Valley of Assam—the only road-link with the rest of India. Mizoram's territory covers an area of 21,087 sq. km. Manipur also has Myanmar on its eastern and southern borders while on the west it is bound by Assam and Nagaland on the north. Out of the 22,327 sq. km of its total area only 1,012 sq. km constitute the plain valley area, the rest of the area consists of the surrounding rugged hills. The people of all the three states are of the Indo-Mongoloid stock with variations. Although the inhabitants of Nagaland state are known as the Nagas—it is a generic name given by the plains people to them. In other words Nagas are not single tribe, there are at least thirteen tribes within Nagaland (excluding Arunachal Pradesh) who are known by their distinctive tribal names. Some of the major tribes are Ao, Angami, Sema, Chakesang, Rengma, Lotha, Chang, Konyak, Tangsa, Tangkhul, Mao, and Zeliangrong—(combining the Zemi, Liangmai and Rongmei groups). Similarly, though the inhabitants of Mizoram are Mizos to outsiders, the word Mizo does not denote one single tribe. It is a generic term given to a conglomeration of tribes, e.g. the Lushai, Pawis (Poi), Lakher, Paite, Ralte, Hmars and Chakmas. The state of Manipur is inhabited by the Naga-Kuki tribes in the hills while the plains are inhabited by the Meitheis. The Meitheis are more or less a homogeneous ethnic group with no division in ethnic terms within itself. But the hills' people belong to distinctive tribes. While many of them belong to Naga tribes/sub-tribes others claim affiliation to the Mizo group. Despite the massive diversity and heterogeneity the common feature that these tribal and ethnic groups share is their Indo-Mongoloid origin as against the Indo-Aryans of the rest of India. This made them distinguishable physical types to begin with, which is evident from the description of these people in Sanskrit literature in blanket terms as *kirats*, *asuras*, *danavas*, *kuvachas* and *mlecchas*. The Aryan perception of these groups can be seen from what is recorded in the *Padmapurana*. "The *mlecchas* as barbarians are accustomed to eat everything. They are idiotic and kill cows and Brahamans. These other *mlecchas-kuvachas* have their birth place in the hills. Their language is of *pishacha* character. They have no (good) social practices."<sup>1</sup> Thus linguistic, physiological and geographical factors were also considered to distinguish the non-Aryans from the Aryans. Although other Indo-Mongoloid tribals of the area like the Bodos, Koches, Kacharis, Chutiyas, Ahoms, Tripuris, Meitheis all gradually came into the fold of the Sanskritization and Hinduization process afoot all over India, the Nagas were not touched by this wave due to their geographical distance and strict exclusivity and so were the

Mizos who were relative late comers in the region. The Tibeto-Burmese speaking Mongolian race—loosely termed as Nagas—were a neolithic people and had come from Myanmar. They also with other allied tribes like the Karen, Kachin, Singpho, Chin, and Shan had settled in Myanmar after migrating from western China. It was the Mao, Angami, Sema, Rengma, Rongmei, and Lothas who migrated in course of the first five waves of migrations to the south Manipur-Nagaland regions. The second wave of migrations comprised the Aos Changs, Sangthams and Tangkhuls. Even when the British made their appearance on the Scene there was a marked movement of people from the Chin-Lushai Hills towards the plains of India. The exodus was believed to have begun as early as AD 1283 with the Tai invasion of Myanmar. The Mizos settled in the Kabaw Valley of Myanmar were forced to flee. The Tai invasion not only compelled the Mizos to flee Myanmar but also fragmented them into smaller groups. They wandered about in the Chin Hills looking for a place to settle down during the fourteenth century and from this point they went up further west to the Manipur Valley in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. In the seventeenth century they settled in the Tian Valley from and moved over during the same period to present-day Mizoram. These late migrants to the region were surrounded by the Aryan population settled in the plains which constituted an outlet for the tribes to collect scarce items of requirement as well as to prove their might. Interestingly, like the Aryans, these tribals too viewed the plains people contemptuously whom they considered weak, uncivilized and look alike. In fact, many of these groups had their own names for the plains people, the Mizos called them *vais*, the Khasis *dkhar*, the Garos *achang*, the Meitheis *mayang*, the Minyangs *ayeng*, the Gallongs *nipak*, and the Ao Nagas *thumar*. The antipathy between these tribes in the north-eastern hills and the people of the plains was mutual, each looking down on the other but the two were hopelessly dependent on each other.

#### PRE-COLONIAL ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL LIFE

The integration of the distinct tribal economy of the Nagas and the Mizos into the orbit of the greater colonial economy formed the basis of the advent of a modern economy in the region and that of modern identity formation. Prior to the appearance of such a system, the Mizos and the Nagas generally operated in what can be described as a primitive economy with certain variations. Their mode of

production displays a primitive form of collectivism both in production and consumption due to the underdeveloped state of productive forces. Both the tribes were still essentially food gatherers. Theoretically, the primitive mode of production is marked by the following characters (a) the organization of labour partly on an individual basis (the small family) and partly on a collective basis (large family, the clan, the village). The essential means of production being land, it was collectively owned by the clan and all its members were allowed to cultivate it according to the rules of assignment of plots of land to each household; (b) the absence of commodity exchanges and correlative with this: (c) the distribution of the products within the group in accordance with rules that are closely related to the kinship organization.<sup>2</sup> In practice however,

The different forms of commune or tribe members' relation to the tribes land and soil to the earth where it was settled depend partly on the natural inclinations of the tribe, and partly on the economic conditions in which it relates as proprietor to the land and soil in reality, i.e. in which it appropriates its fruits through labour and the latter itself depend on climate, physical make-up of the land and soil, the physically determined mode of its exploitation, the relation with the hostile tribes or neighbour-tribes and the modifications which migrations, historic experiences, etc., introduce.<sup>3</sup>

Karl Marx often reiterated, that 'Primitive communes are not all fashioned on the same lines. On the contrary they form a series of social groupings which differ as much as types as by age and which represent successive stages of social evolution.'<sup>4</sup>

Both the Naga and Mizo economies with the exception of some advanced sub-tribes of the Nagas, by and large, had the following characteristics:

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- (i) A de-commercialized agricultural sector in which the organization of labour and means of production bore close resemblance to the theoretical description of primitive communes. Agriculture was most primitive (called *jhooming*) in north-east India. Those who practised wet-rice cultivation, like the advanced Naga tribes, could commercialize it to some extent as slavery was prevalent—people from the plains were captured through raids and attacks were put to work. But slavery did not play a dominant role in the mode of production. They were more to prove the power of the tribes to the plains people and sometimes for securing technology. These slaves did not

- constitute a major source of labour nor did they initiate a structural change facilitating a transition to a slave-owning mode of production.
- (ii) A home-based industrial sector having an auxiliary role in the economy where family acted as the nuclear group.
  - (iii) Simple commodity relations with other tribal/sub-tribal groups; and
  - (iv) Raids and plunder in the outer zones. — Why?

The Mizos lived by rice cultivation and hunting. The method of cultivation was the primitive system of slash and burn, called 'jhooming'. Since there was a paucity of plain lands in these hills, the hill people evolved a pattern of cultivation in which the elevated slopes of its ridges were usually cleared off the jungle and burnt during winter. During the next monsoon they would sow paddy and other seeds with the help of a plough stick. After the harvest the land would be left fallow for few years and another plot selected for *jhooming*. Though the method of cultivation was called *jhooming*, the Mizos did not give any name to it. In Myanmar it is called *taunya*. The following five are the characteristics of this system of cultivation: (1) Rotation of field, (2) Keeping the land fallow for a number of years, (3) Use of human labour as the chief input, (4) Non-employment of animal, and (5) Use of very crude and simple implements. This method of cultivation was the backbone of the Lushai economy, which made the Mizos a migratory tribe, their villages were not stationary. They went to changed new locations at regular intervals. Salt was produced from salt springs and often this scarce commodity led to wars between two tribes. The Mizo Hills being full of wild animals the Mizos were good hunters. Rice was the staple food and meat was a regular item on the menu. The meat of the tamed bison (mithun), deer and pigs were the favourite food of the Mizos. Barter was a prevalent system. Scarcity of land and food often made the Mizos hardpressed. The clash of economic interests led to frequent inter-tribal feuds. Economic necessity was also the reason for frequent Mizo raids on the plains from where they generally picked up necessary consumption items as well as slaves. Slaves were an important part of the Mizo economy and society. The Mizos lived in villages (*khua*) inhabited by 500-700 people. While locating a suitable site for a new village the hunters in the community would consider a variety of factors like abundance of land for *jhooming*, proximity to drinking water, protection from enemies and so on. Since the Mizos



were constantly on the move, they hardly possessed any property except for their Mithun and chickens. Food production included *jhooming*, fishing and hunting.

The Nagas practised both *jhooming* and wet rice cultivation. Wet cultivation was done through the method of terracing. The lower hills were terraced in a pattern through organized cooperative labour. Each layer was irrigated by means of an effective construction of a chain of channels linked with successive layers. It retained the required amount of water and drained the excess to the next terrace. These channels were constructed along the contours of the hills through long distances and have been in use for hundreds of years. This method was used by the somewhat advanced tribes like the Angami, Mao, Sema and Tangkhuls. The less advanced tribes generally followed the slash and burn method of cultivation, same as the Mizos did. Besides cultivation, fishing and hunting was the other important feature of their mode of production. An important aspect of the Naga economy was the barter of their forest-products with the people in the Assam-plains coupled with raids on those plains.

The Meitheis being inhabitants of a plain area had a much advanced mode of production. In fact it was a transitional phase advancing towards a feudal economy. And be described as a quasi-feudal structure where features of primitive Communism had not yet disappeared. The rain-abundant alluvial valley was a rice economy, and state intervention in the production process was necessary. The state performed its function by enumerating the entire male population of the kingdom which was required to render services to the state, in turns, through public works which included the constitution of a massive irrigation network and its maintenance. Agriculture was the mainstay of the economy and the method and technology of production was fairly developed compared to those of the neighbouring communities. There were two fundamental forms of cultivation: (1) *Punghul*, in which seeds were directly sown in well-ploughed fields. (2) *Lingaba* in which the seedlings from the nurseries were transplanted in well-prepared fields. Both are extensively used in Manipur. The tools and implements of cultivation were those used in eastern Bengal. Bullocks and buffaloes were used to plough the land. Iron tipped single-hoe, *langol* or plough, *kangpat* or sledge, *ukai* or harrow, *humai* or fan for winnowing the paddy, *chairong* or paddy-thresher were among the important implements of cultivation. During the nineteenth century the king had predominant claim and authority over state land though remnants of the earlier communal forms of ownership was also prevalent. The

king granted lands of various demoninations to a number of officials, sepoys, Brahmins and royalty. The *inkhol* was homestead land, and the *tauna* cultivable rice land. Although the *inkhol* lands were revenue-free these could be sold and inherited and the king could not confiscate it from the owner. But the *tauna* (*lou*) lands could not be sold. Most government employees were granted land in lieu of their salaries. The royal land grants to the nobles and spiritual aristocracy led to the growth of the rich and powerful feudal landlord class. Slaves were available to cultivate the lands of the royalty as well as the aristocracy both spiritual and temporal. The peasants were bound to render labour services to the state under the *lallup* system. Weaving, knitting, basket making were part of the cottage industry, internal commerce was extensive but external trade was minimal. The feudalization of this transitional economy was strengthened by Hinduization of the society through a process, which D.D. Kosambi described as 'feudalism from above'.<sup>5</sup> A new class of spiritual and temporal aristocracy—equivalent to the feudal lords—emerged after the king's adoption of Hinduism as the State religion.

The political life of the Mizos was typical of any tribal formation. It centred round the village chief, in case of the Mizos it was the *lal*. A *lal* was the head of the clan and was the most important functionary in the Mizo political system. He was assisted by the village elders like *upa* or *mantris*. Every chief had his separate cantonment, with a number of dependent villages attached to it. These cantonments consisted of strong men who could be mobilized into fighting a garrison under the order of a chief. In matters relating to public interest he would consult his brothers or subordinate chief. All public business was conducted from his *zawlbuk* or the office which was at once a public house and a protected fortress. Generally the youngest son inherited the chieftainship and other sons had the right to set up new village with their own followers. The chief had to be the best warrior in a village, a strong man who could offer people protection, judgement and guidance. Politics was based on daily life, there were some groups who would try to get special favours from the chiefs. Both warfare and raids on other villages or the plains area was a part of this political life.

The permanent political institution of the Naga society was the village. The Semas, Konyaks and Maos had hereditary chieftainship (monarchy) while the Aos had a council of elected headmen called the *tatar* which constituted the government. The Angamis, Lothas and Rengmas were nominally governed by the kings or chieftains of

their respective villages who were chosen for their bravery in war, skilful diplomacy, wealth in the form of cattle, and power of oratory. This was in contrast to the hereditary system where the eldest or youngest son succeeded his father. Being the head of the village the king or chieftain—considered to be the repository of God's favour—commanded peoples' obedience and had special powers and certain privileges. The chief had to ensure the observance of the village laws which was not a command of the chief but based on the Naga customs. He was responsible for peace and tranquility in the village, and also dealt with foreigners directly.

In contrast to the Nagas and Mizos, the Meitheis had a full-fledged feudal monarchy in which the king was the head of secular and spiritual matters. The chief feature of this rule was that a wide monarchical paraphernalia consisting of the king's immediate brothers and sons played a crucial role. The 'heads' of the clans were associated with administrative tasks. The day-to-day administration of the state was vested in the *Darbar* which included most of the important officers of state. The immediate younger brother of the king would be the *yuvaraj* or heir-apparent to the throne, and the brother next to the *yuvaraja* would be the *senapati* or commander of the army. In the nineteenth century Manipuri political setup, the law and primogeniture was not observed and hence there was no specific trends of succession to the throne. Consequently there was intense rivalry among the claimants to the throne. Appointment to high offices seemed to depend virtually on the wishes of the king. Between 1834-66 there were as many as fifteen attempts to overthrow the king. There was no separation of executive and judicial powers in the strict sense. All the *Darbar* members were ex-officio members of the *cheirap* court—the highest court of justice. Traditional customary laws were the basis of judgement and the most common forms of punishment were death for murder and treason, and exile (to *loi*) for women committing adultery. There was another court called *pacha* or women's court, in which all women related disputes were dealt with. Common cases included divorce and adultery. The punishment for adultery was *khungoinaba* (social ostracization) and exile to *loi* villages. In the villages there were traditional clubs called *singlups*, and all the villagers were supposed to be members of such clubs. The *singlups* were essentially meant to serve the socio-economic needs of the villages. The village headmen, who was appointed by the king for the realization of the feudal labour service and other taxes, would take charge of such *singlups*.

Tribes or ethnic groups like the Meithies were absolutely apolitical and had no interest in modern politics introduced by the British in India. While the rest of Indians had ample time and preliminary training in preparing themselves for participation in the bourgeois political process, these groups had been confined within their own system. The British felt it unnecessary to open and train them to the new system but even the Indian State did not provide time to training to join the rest of India as we shall see later in this study.

### RELIGIOUS PRACTICES

When the Naga Club submitted its memorandum to the Simon Commission in 1929, it stated that the Nagas had nothing in common with the people of India who were either Hindus or Muslims. This was quite right as can be seen from the details of their religious practices. Even though Hinduism itself in many respects an advanced form of animism and nature-worshipping, Hindus tended to look down on these tribes for their 'tribal' religious practices.

The Mizo tribes were generally 'pagan' in their religious beliefs. They believed in a supreme being known as *Pathian*, and that there were numerous *ramhuis* (demons). They also worshipped a spirit less powerful than *Pathian* named *Khuarang*. However, the Paite Kulkis who lived under the raja of Tripura had adopted Hindu religious practices. The Mizos buried their dead along with a few hunted heads as they believed that the chief would require slaves in the next world. Similarly, the Naga tribes generally were animists who believed in an invisible God as the creator of all earthly things. According to them there are white gods (lower in status) who stood for everything good and black gods who stood for everything evil. There were also gods of earth, sun, sky, light, fire, wind and so on. These gods were supposed to maintain everyday records of the words and deeds of man and assign rewards for good and punishment for evil deeds. In order to propitiate and exorcize the evil gods and spirits the Nagas would offer pigs, liquor, eggs, etc., in sacrifice. Tribal taboos were observed and also ritual ceremonies, prayers, and incantations, were performed by the Nagas to prolong life, recover from illness, ward off evil and destroy or harm enemies. They also believed in life after death, the immortality of soul and ancestor worship.

The Meitheis believed in a religion called *Sanamahi* before the Manipuri King Pamheiba adopted Hinduism in 1714 and declared it as the state religion. The imposition of Hinduism from above and the

anti-caste and anti-ritualistic character of Vaishnavism helped the spread of Hinduism among the Meitheis. Though many Hindu sects were active in Manipur it was Chaintanyite Vaishnavism which was accepted by the king. By the nineteenth century Hinduism was firmly established despite opposition from the supporters of the traditional religion. Along with it the Meithei society adopted—not too stringently—some of the pollution-purification and ritualistic practices of Hinduism like the caste system, sati, purdah, prohibition on food and drink. All Manipuris became either Kshatriyas or Brahmins. Besides Hindus, a small portion of the population were Muslims as well. This was a result of the Mughal-Manipur interaction.

#### TRIBES IN INDIAN CIVILIZATION: THE INTERACTION

The protagonists of the separation of tribes from the Indian State often put forward the theory that these tribes have never been a part of India to legitimize their position. Despite the mutual dislike and suspicion between the tribals and the plainsmen, it would be a historical fallacy to believe that the tribes did not form a part of the Indian civilization as can be seen in this examination of their role in the Indian context.

The term 'tribe' and its subsequent conceptualization is as recent a phenomenon as the colonial period. During this period, colonialists-turned-anthropologists began categorizing social groups—based on colonialist parameters—which were in a relatively backward stage of advancement as 'tribes'.<sup>6</sup> Although identifying communities as tribals is a recent phenomenon, tribes have played a significant role in all the civilizations that history of mankind witnessed. In the 21 civilizations that Toynbee examines, he traces the process of civilization 'exerting influence' and 'drawing into its orbit' the 'outlying barbarian societies' which were described as its 'pre-civilizational neighbours'. Toynbee also related the process how the same group emerged as the *external proletariat* as against *internal proletariat* to bring about the collapse of many a civilization.<sup>7</sup>

In the Indian context, people whom we today refer to as tribals were known as '*janas*', which mean 'communities of people'. Although most of these aboriginals were subsumed by the *jati* system of the powerful Aryans, some of the *janas*, whom we call tribe, continued to remain outside the control of the *jati* system of the social organization. The so-called 'tribals' of India were the indigenous, autochthonous people of the land before Aryans penetrated India. The Aryans in

course of their settlement in India had settled as agricultural people, mastered the technology of settled agriculture, developed a highly capable language, evolved ideas and institutions of a political system as seen in *sabha samiti* and *parishad* as well as a social system (as seen in the *varna-jati* system) and a set of religious ideas, principles and institutions known as Brahmanical Hinduism. All these developments took place while some of the pre-Aryan *janas* were still in the food-gathering stage. Practising slash and burn (*jhoom*) and hoe cultivation. They lived in isolated settlements, spoke a variety of languages, belonged to a variety of physical types and practised some kind of pagan cults. The pressure of the conquering and expanding Aryans pushed them to the remote, inaccessible regions, forests, and fringe and frontier areas to escape assimilation. The task was difficult because not only the technological power of the Aryans was superior, their socio-political institutions also proved stronger than that of the aborigines. Once they were caught in the production system of the *jati* it was no longer possible for them to resist its social implication. That is what happened to Tibeto-Burmese stock of *janas* in north-east India. But some continued to live far away in the inaccessible frontier areas and continued to resist these assimilation processes. These were the *janas* who are found in the eastern and north-eastern frontier of India. Some of them were not even enumerated in the country's history or historical geography except for the Nagas who were mentioned by Ptolemy in the second century AD. The *kiratas* was the blanket name given to these frontier tribals of north-east India.

Assam (formerly north-east) forms a part of the great land of India which could not be always in the limelight because of its geographical position in the extreme corner of vast country. . . . Yet Assam was never wholly isolated from the rest of India and at times loomed large in Indian History and politics. . . .<sup>8</sup>

Assam formed a highway not only for trade but also for the movement of people and exchange of ideas between India, Myanmar and south-west China from at least the closing centuries of the first millennium BC. The prehistoric stage of Indian history continued longer in the eastern frontier including Assam and since time immemorial there were movements of people in the region. Different branches of the great Sino-Tibetan speaking people from the Yang-Tse-Kiang and Hwang-Ho river areas were pushed down south and west probably 200 BC onwards and some of these tribal groups infiltrated into India mostly along the western coast of Brahmaputra.

The great Bodo tribe appears to have been established over the valley of the Brahmaputra fairly early and to have extended into the north and east Bengal, and into north Bihar. The north Assam tribes of the Abors and Akas, Dafflas and Miris and Mishmis appear to have come later and established themselves in the mountains of the Brahmaputra Valley. There were some Austric and Dravidian tribes who preceded the Bodos in the area. Finally we have the incursions of some Kuki-Chin tribes into south Assam. Assam was thus open to all the tribal movements from the east, including the advent of the Tibeto-Chinese, and Tibeto-Burmese speaking Mongoloids into India, and it was in Assam primarily that this great element in the formation of the Indian people became largely Indianized. Certain Tibeto-Burmese and Sino-Tibetan speaking Mongoloid tribes become part of the settled population of Assam since time immemorial and had come within the orbit of Indian civilization at a fairly-early age.

✓ Although remotely connected with the Mongoloid people of Myanmar, China and Tibet, they have acquired a special niche in the hall of Indian *penplades* and have long been separated from the countries of origin. The Nagas belong to India as much as the Mishmis, Miris, Daflas, Akas and Abors. To the Europeans they were known as Mongoloid and to the Sanskrit-using Indians as *kiratas*, *asuras*, *danavas* and *mlecchas*. In fact, most of the important ruling clans of the region belonged to these groups. Bhagadatta, the legendary king of ancient Assam was the son of Naraka, the Asura and was the captain of the *cina-kira-mleccha*.<sup>9</sup> The dynasty of Pushyavarman belonged to this clan. Salasthambha was also a *mlecchadhipathi*. The Pala's also belonged to the same stock. The terms *kirata*, *danava*, *mleccha* were applied to these early rulers and their kinsmen by the Aryans to denote their non-Aryan origin.

✓ The Meitheis were the most advanced section of the 'Kuki-Chin people' whose ultimate homogeneity with the Nagas and Kukis of the hills is undoubted. 'Two hundred year ago in internal organisation, religion, habits and manners the Meitheis were as the hills people are now.'<sup>10</sup> The Manipur Valley most probably had been occupied by several tribes which had come from different directions, the principal among them being the Koomal, Looang, Miorang and Meithei. For a time the Koomal appeared to have been the most powerful and with their decline the Moirang tribe takeover. But soon the Meitheis subdued the whole group which came to be known as Meithei. The successive waves of foreign invasions of the Shan, Burmese, English and Hindu each left their permanent mark on these people who

have passed finally from the stage of a relatively primitive culture into one of comparative civilization.

Since then the Meitheis have been playing the role of fringe communities in Indian civilization. Similarly, although the Mizos had migrated to Mizoram only in the seventeenth century south Cachar has been home to the original forest people to which the Puranas and *Mahabharata* testify. Suniti Kumar Chatterjee feels that like the Bodos, the Kukis of the Cachar frontier are the *kiratas* of ancient Indian history. In fact, the Kacharis claim to be descendents of Hidimba, the wife of Bhima which is of course a later day idea coined during the process of Sanskritization. It is a historical fact that these Tibeto-Burmese Mongoloid groups were the earliest settlers in north-east India and as such had close socio-economic contact with the people of the plains. In fact, the Mizos (specially the Lushai clan) have more interaction with the Bengalees than any of the other frontier tribes.<sup>11</sup> Hindu slaves (Bengalee men and women) were brought as captives through raids by the Lushai chiefs from the Cachar plains and later integrated into the Lushai society. The Kuki chiefs of Lalchukla clan had been important frontier officers of the rajas of Tripura, and Lalchukla's *mantris* could converse in Bengalee with the officials. The Lushais of Sylhet frontier had similar connections with the Hindus of Sylhet. It is also likely that the Kukis and Dimasas of Cachar intermarried.<sup>12</sup> Again, every year at the Silicoorie tea estate in South Cachar a *mela* is held in the honour of a Kuki saint Baram Baba—a local Kuki godman who had disciples among the plains people too. Bengalee words were introduced into the Mizo language wherever a new word was required, e.g. *motor* (motor vehicle), *duli* (*adhuli*, half a rupee), *lekhabu* (book), *panruang* (pan, betel-leaf), *kuva* (*gua*, betel nut), *monena* (chillies), *bawlbawa* (brinjal), *alu* (potato), *mula* (radish), *mistri* (carpenter), *lekhatui* (ink), *lhekhapuan* (paper), *tangka* (*taka*, rupee), etc. Even certain food habits and cultural traits of Bengalee were adopted by the Mizos from the inhabitants of Cachar and Sylhet including the habit of chewing betel leaf, cultivation and eating of rice and vegetable cultivation. In fact, when halted by the British the Mizos were migrating for settlements towards the plains of South Cachar in the foothills.

Systematic historical records of the Nagas are not available for the pre-Ahom period, except for some stray references. The slender accounts of the period of the Hindu kings of Kamrupa, between the fourth and twelfth centuries are silent regarding the Nagas. The first tribal settlements were those of the Nagas which the Ahoms came



across in AD 1228 on their way to Assam after crossing the Patkoi range. Some Nagas did attempt to resist this advance but the powerful Ahoms defeated the tribal warriors and advanced towards the Brahmaputra Valley. For a temporary period this brought the Wanchu, Nocte, Tangsa, Konyak, Ao and Lothas under the control of Ahoms. The subsequent relationship between the Nagas and the Assamese were of amity as well as of hostility. The Nagas raids on the plains, head hunting as well as fights for the salt springs were some of the issues over which there were frequent warfare between the Nagas and the Ahom state followed by periods of peace and tranquility. Nagas living in areas bordering the Brahmaputra Valley plains had to submit and pay tribute to the Ahom kings in exchange for which they were granted revenue-free lands and fishing waters on the tacit understanding that they would not carry any predatory raids on the plains.<sup>13</sup> These lands were known as *naga-khats* and the officer in charge were *naga-katakis*. The Buranjis, however, referred to these Nagas tribes not by their tribal names but by names assigned to them by the Assamese, e.g. Khamjangias, Aitonias, Tablungias, Namchangias, etc. Commencing from the west, between Dayang and Dikhous rivers, the Naga tribes are known as the Panihatias (those who come by water), the Torhatias or Dayangias (those who come by land), the Hatigorias, Asiringias, Dupdorias and Namchangias. The first two are the sub-tribes of the Lothas and the rest are Aos. Between the river Dikhous and Buri-Dihing, the Naga tribes are known as the Tablungias, Jaktoongias, Moloongs, Changhois or Bhitars, Namchangias, Jobokas (Abhaypurias), Banferas, Mutonias, Paniduaris and Barduaris. Besides these some Nagas were known by the name of their native villages or simply as 'Nogas'. The Assamese names of these tribes originated either from the *duars* (passes) through which the particular group of Nagas descended into the plains or from the important Naga villages or places in the plains situated at or near the entrance of the passes.<sup>14</sup>

During the Ahom rule, for purposes of trade, the Naga tribes bordering the plains were in constant communication with the plains men. They would offer hill products like cotton, betel leaves, ginger and salt and in exchange take goods that were scarce in the hills. In fact the so-called self-sufficiency of the tribes was a myth as they were dependent on the plains for consumer products. Even the Ahom state partially depended on the Nagas as they were in possession of quite a few salt springs; though the proprietary rights of these springs were jointly held by the Nagas and the Ahoms quite often hostility

broke out over these springs. Moreover, the constant Naga raids in the Assam plains and the abduction and kidnapping of the Ahom subjects prompted the latter to send repeated expeditions into the Naga villages. The Assamese came into contact with the Nagas of the Dayang Valley during the reign of Gadadhar Singha (AD 168-96). This Naga population was made up the Lothas who lived by the river side of Dayang. These Lothas were apparently loyal to the Ahom king and accepted Gadadhar Singha as their overlord and agreed to pay annual tribute to the Ahom king. As a part of the tribute the Nagas offered two of their princesses to the Ahom king. The relation was so cordial that during a crisis Gadadhar Singha kept his two sons in a Naga village for reasons of safety and security. Moreover the custom of adoption and matrimonial alliances with the hill tribes was practised during the Ahom regime. Sometimes the adopted children were placed in high positions. The Dupgaria Nagas presented three boys, Ao, Apam and Lachit to the Burha raja. References of many marital relationships between the Ahoms and the Nagas are found in the chronicles. For example the Dihingia raja had a son by a Naga woman and this son Tyachengung was later made a minister. Supimha, son of Suhampha handed over one of his queens to a Naga chief for her misbehaviour. Dihingia raja offered Khunbaw, a Naga, an Ahom princess as a token of gratitude. In AD 1504 a treaty was concluded in which the Nagas acknowledged the supremacy of the Ahom king and promised to pay an annual tribute. A Naga chief arranged the wedding of his daughter to Suhungmung to strengthen their mutual relations. Moreover many Rengma Nagas had 'Cacharee and Assamese wives'. Sankardeva (AD 1449-1569) made a major contribution towards the amity between the people of the hills and plains. He adopted disciples from among the hill people, Norottam—a Naga, Gobinda—a Garo, and Balai—a Mikir were prominent among them. Even today some Naga villages in Sibsagar subdivision and Tirap district follow Hindu practices. The Nagas that migrated to the plains did not speak the Naga languages. The seven Sema villages at Margherita of Dibrugarh district, Latungaon and Ligiri-Pukhuri Gaon (Konyak) at Sibsagar are notable in this respect. Linguistically these Nagas have merged with the plains people of Assam. Similarly, during the Mughal and Burmese invasions many Assamese who took refuge in the Naga villages (in Mokokchung and Kohima districts) were also assimilated with the Nagas. Such contacts and socio-economic intercourse enabled the Nagas to speak in broken Assamese which served as the medium of communication between the Nagas

and the plainsmen. During British rule Assamese language was introduced in the schools of Nagaland, this further helped to spread the Assamese language in Nagaland which soon emerged as a pidginized language. Since each Naga tribe had its own district language which was unintelligible to others, they used this language in communicating amongst themselves. Soon it came to be known as Nagamese. And is in fact a living example of the Naga-Assamese socio-economic relationship. The Nagas bartered products such as salt, cotton, ivory, wax, Naga dao and medicinal herbs for rice, clothes, and beads from the plains. The Assamese reserved some agricultural farms and fisheries for the friendly Nagas called *bori* (friendly) as distinguished from *abori* (non-friendly). In fact, whenever the Nagas came down to the Assamese villages they were protected and it was customary to keep their spears at the house of the Assamese hosts (*naga-kataki*). On the other hand, the Naga-Meithei relationship was one of hostility. The Meitheis often tried to extend their suzerainty over the unwilling Nagas which resulted in a series of conflicts. As a result of Hinduization, the Meitheis kept the Nagas outside the social system as outcastes and considered them inferior.

Manipur has been described as an 'Oasis of Civilization' implying that it had achieved a high degree of civilization despite its isolation from the rest of India. It had a settled agriculture and production technology like the rest of the Indian plains. It had regular socio-economic and cultural contacts and exchanges with the Cachar Valley. In fact it was due to these exchanges that Hinduism was introduced in the Manipur Valley and had a very firm foothold by the eighteenth century. The adoption of Hinduism as a religion brought about a change in the social fabric too. It became a Hindu society complete with the Brahmanic ideology and its hierarchical structure. But the Meithei society was not exactly as Hindu as the one in the Ganga-basin. In Manipur there was a synthesis of the Brahmanic Hinduism and the traditional Sanamahi religion. It was in the fourth century AD that Brahmins migrated to the Manipur valley and by the fourteenth century Brahmin priesthood was already established. From the eighth century onwards Puranic gods like Hari, Shiva, Ganesha and Vishwakarma made their appearance in the valley. By the turn of the century Hari replaced the pre-Hindu household God Atiya-Sidaba as the supreme God and imperceptibly the Vishnu cult made its way into the valley. It received further filip during the reign of Kyaamba (1467-1508). In 1704 the ruling prince Charai Rongba embraced Vaishnavism through the influence of one Krishnacharya, whose school of

Vaishnavism centred round the Radha-Krishna worship. During the reign of his son Pamheiba, re-christened as Garib Nawaj, the Chaitanya School also became active in Manipur. Later, another preacher Shanti Das arrived in Manipur who worshipped Rama as the supreme deity. And his sect was called Ramandi-Vaishnavites. This captured the imagination of Garib Nawaj who along with a number of palace retinues and nobles joined the Ramandi School which became the state religion. However, the Vaishnavism by which the Meithei Hindus ordered their lives still looked upon Krishna as their prime deity. The synthesis of this variety of Hindu religion and culture with that of the Meitheis gave rise not only to a new form of Vaishnavism but resulted in a new and unique culture. It gave rise to distinctive dance-forms, music and musical instruments, a distinctive *gotra* system, caste system, etc. The coming of Islam in Manipur was another important development. There was a continuous Muslim migration into Manipur from the seventeenth century AD. About 1,000 Muslims, captured and held as prisoners in AD 1606<sup>15</sup> during the rule of King Khagemba, were settled in the state. They were then given respective occupations and permitted to attend the *lallup*. They were known as *pangal* by the Meithei Hindus.<sup>16</sup> Soon there were inter-marriages and social interaction, and as a result some became Meithei Muslims. There were about 40 Muslim sub-clans and a significant number of Islamic institutions in Manipur. Since then they have been an important part of the Meithei society.

#### THE PLAINS: NATURAL OUTLET FOR THE TRIBES

Although historical compulsions like physical and numerical weaknesses, inability to withstand hostile attacks from stronger neighbour and search for safer living shelter had pushed migratory tribes like the Nagas and Mizos (Lushais) to the hills, they were still increasingly dependent on the plains for sustenance. The plains at the foothills provided the tribes their natural outlets. As mentioned earlier, the tribes would come down to the foothills to barter their forest, agricultural and handicraft products for salt, iron, etc., which were not available in the hills. The plains were also happy hunting ground for the tribes for the perpetration of raids, kidnapping, head-hunting and slave-procurement. By colonial parameters these acts were an expression of 'barbarism', 'inhumanism' and 'low-civilization', but for the tribes these were essential components of their mode of living. Raids, were committed to procure consumer items which they could

not afford to barter or otherwise procure. Slaves were procured by kidnapping to make up for manpower shortage in a tribal economy. These slaves were also a source for improved technology. Kidnapping was also necessary to procure women for tribal chiefs who needed to prove their might by such acts. Lastly head-hunting was necessary to procure human heads for the funeral rites of chiefs. After the acquisition of the *Dewani* of Bengal (1765) the Englishmen were horrified to witness these 'barbaric' acts and sought their immediate suspension. For example when Lalrina, a powerful Lushai chief died in 1843, his son Lalchukla raided the Kachubari area of Pratapgarh in Sylhet and carried away 22 heads and 6 captives including a girl to complete the mortorial rites of his late father.<sup>17</sup> An event which would have been condoned in pre-British days, now provoked a punitive expedition from the British ensuing in life-long deportation of Lalchukla. Since British assumption of the administration of Sylhet in 1765, this was its first contact with the raiding Lushai tribes. Cachar was incorporated into British India in 1830 which brought them into closer contact with the Lushais. Similarly the annexation of the Brahmaputra Valley (1862) brought them into confrontation with the Nagas who were committing similar raids on the foothills. The British initially left the control of these raiding tribals to the kings of Tripura, Cachar and Manipur. Even though these respective kings claimed suzerainty over these tribes they virtually had no control over them. The tribes on their part claimed themselves to be free and sovereign people who exercised authority in the plains of the foothills.

This was a crucial period of history for the Naga and Mizo tribes. There were heavy migratory movements of the Thadou, Lushai, and Naga tribes in the Cachar area.<sup>18</sup> J.W. Edgar reported in 1840 that around that time the Lushais entered the hills of South Cachar and Manipur and drove the original inhabitants of the area—the Thalangums, the Changsels, the Thadous and Paites—away to the Hills of Cachar, Manipur and Tripura. Among the Naga tribes too there were increasing number of violent inter-tribal feuds for supremacy leading to warfare, devastation and head-hunting. Simultaneously there was also a discernible migratory movement of the tribes towards the plains—Cachar for the Mizo tribes and Brahmaputra Valley for the Naga tribes.<sup>19</sup> The increasingly difficult life of the hills, an increasing population and shortage of cultivable lands prompted northward expansion of the tribes towards new settlements in the plains. The advent of the British not only halted this migratory movement, it also encroached on its suzerain areas. For example, the

Nagas and Mizos had self-assumed authority over the foothill plains and villages where they committed regular raids. They not only considered raids as a display of their authority, they even imposed tributary levies on these villages which the terror-stricken villagers paid.

Many of them advanced claims to rights more or less definite over lands lying in the plains; others claimed tributary payments from the villages below their hills or the services of the paiks, said to have been assigned to them by the Assam authorities. It mattered of course little to us whether these claims had their basis in primeval rights from which the Shan invaders had partially ousted the hillmen or whether they were expressions of Barbarian cupidity. Certain it was that such claims existed and that had been to some event and in some places, formally recognised by our predecessors.<sup>20</sup>

The advent of the British in the Valleys of Surma and Barak, and their attempt to derecognized and usurp the authority of the tribals were resented both by the Nagas and Mizos. They saw the situation had changed with the advent of the 'pale people' (the British), and woke up to the fact that the plains which was the natural outlet for them was not the same anymore. It had a new breed of people who not only objected to their 'acts' which were 'natural' but even sent armed expeditions into the hills and threatened their very survival. After returning from a fact-finding mission a Sizang delegation reported to a conference of their chiefs: 'These enemies (British) were different from other people, we have ever seen. They are as white as goats. They clothe themselves from head to foot. They cover their feet with leather and we believe they will not be able to climb the slopes of the hills (unlike us).'<sup>21</sup>

The tribals reacted violently through a series of raids, kidnapping and carried off heads as trophies. The Paite raid in Sylhet in 1827 which resulted in the killing of a few woodcutters was one such raid, and was committed as a protest against the withholding of the annual protection fee by the British police at Pratapgarh.<sup>22</sup>

## INTRUSION

Not only had the British blocked the migratory movement of the tribes, restricted their expansion and free movement into the plains but even begun to trespass into their territory.<sup>23</sup> As early as 1832 the British endeavoured to survey the Naga Hills to find an alternative route through these hills to accomplish this goal to Manipur.

Capt. Jenkins, Pemberton and Gordon with 700 Manipuri troops and 800 porters entered the Naga Hills, and marched through the Mao and Angami villages from Imphal. The Nagas viewed this unauthorized trespassing as a prelude to invasion and vehemently opposed the march. A similar survey was conducted in the Lushai Hills too. The British even encouraged Gambhir Singh, the ambitious Manipuri king to annex the western Naga Hills and amalgamate it with Manipur. In a blatant display of authority over the tribals, the British often sent expeditions inside the hills, as in the Lushai Hills during 1826-49, even when there were inter-tribal warfare which was an internal affair of the tribals. In 1849 when the Lushais killed 20 Thadou Kuki captives, the British intervened and raised a Thadou Army of 200 men as a bulwark against further Lushai attacks. Very often British officers marched to the heart of both the Naga and Lushai Hills with their men armed with modern weaponry and unleashed a counter reign of terror. Large number of villages were burnt down, crop stocks, cattle and poultry destroyed and men-women were punished indiscriminately. While the tribes considered the villagers living on the foothills as their subjects, the British felt that it would do no good to their image to stand helplessly without protecting their subjects on the foothills. The English point of view was evident from the argument presented by Henry Hopkinson the Chief Commissioner of Assam, who did not favour the idea of non-interference, in the course of his correspondences (1862) with Cecil Beadon, the Lt. Governor of Bengal. The establishment of a British outpost in Samaguting (1847) and the posting of a British police officer there, the subsequent strengthening of the outpost and the establishment of further outposts at Khonoma (1850) and Kohima (1878), the heart of the Naga territory, was the ultimate display of British intrusion and authority as far as the Nagas were considered. The same was true of Lushai Hills too. Tribal life was associated with complete freedom, unrestricted movement and action, exclusiveness and insularity. Trespasses were aggressively retaliated. This was true of the Naga and Lushai tribes as well. They had an intuition that these intrusions were just a prelude to an invasion. They had also come to realize that this was not the same 'plains' that they used to interact with. The 'half cooked people' (as the British were described by the Nagas) not only had sinister motives, they were powerful too; they could even advance to the heart of their land and devastate them through 'promenades'—the British official term for punitive expeditions. The pent-up anger at such intrusion and suppression manifested

itself in instances such as the retaliatory killing of Bhogchand Daroga of the Samaguting outpost (1849), the raids and brutal killings of the people associated with the British, and the tea gardens.

### THE TEA FACTOR

The suspension of the Chinese tea supply to the East India Company led the British to a desperate search for an alternative source which resulted in the discovery of wild tea plants in Assam in 1823. It was immediately taken up for experimental plantation. A tea committee was formed by the government in early 1834, a government experimental tea garden was set up in 1836 and in December 1837 the first Assam tea was successfully manufactured.<sup>24</sup> In 1840, two-thirds of the official experimental gardens were transferred to the Assam Company—rent-free for the initial years. To facilitate private investment in the tea industry a set of rules were formed (1838) to make wastelands available to the planters, which was revised (1854) and made more attractive (1861) from time to time. The wasteland settlement policy tempted the planters to grab more lands than what was required or what they could manage. As a result about 0.7 million acres of land had been settled by the planters in Assam by 1870-1. The planters usurped the grazing land and encroached upon the *jhoom* lands of the tribals. By 1859, the Assam Company itself had 4,000 acres of land under tea cultivation producing over 16,87,200 kg per year. Its local expenditure extended to Rs.1 lakh in 1853 by which time nine other gardens had been started in upper Assam. Soon tea was found in Cachar and Sylhet too, and in 1855 gardens were set up in Cachar. By 1872, 27,000 acres were under tea plantation in the Brahmaputra Valley, 23,000 acres in Cachar and 1,000 acres in Sylhet. Edward Gait described the land grabbing craze for tea cultivation as a 'mania'. 'Fresh gardens were opened in all directions and a period of wild excitement and speculation supervened. The mania extended to the Government officers and three Deputy Commissioners and several police officers threw up their appointments to engage in tea gardens.'<sup>25</sup>

As a corollary, the planters soon came into conflict with the tribals because the expanding network of tea gardens were threatening to, and in many cases actually did, encroach upon tribal land. Such land grabbing in the Brahmaputra Valley affected the Nagas while in Cachar and Sylhet it affected the Lushais. Initially the 'pale-people' (as the Lushai's called the Englishmen) objected to the raids (Nagas



in the Brahmaputra Valley, Lushais in the Surma Valley) and kidnapping in the areas which the tribals considered their domain, and even sent punitive expeditions thereby trespassing on their freedom and usurping their authority over the foothills. Now the English were advancing towards the hills as a result of the advancing network of tea gardens towards the hills. Both the Nagas and Mizos soon woke up to the fact that the new pale entrants were here to stay and the situation had changed. The advancement of the English towards the hills was seen as a threat to their very existence. They foresaw that the day was not far when the English would penetrate the hills. Indeed the British were drawn towards the fertile slopes which were ideally suited for tea cultivation. 'If cultivated', it was felt 'these strongholds of tigers, leopards, elephants, etc.' would be replaced by flourishing 'gardens of tea, coffee, oranges and lemons'.<sup>26</sup>

As early as 1860, the Assam Company had taken land in the Naga Hills for tea cultivation and by the turn of the century there were more than 40 tea gardens on the land claimed by the Nagas, e.g. Jamguri Tea Estate (T.E.) Amuguri T.E., Nagura T.E., Wokha T.E., Gildhari T.E., Mukhrung T.E., Borhaolla T.E., Guejam T.E., Kalipari T.E., Rajabari T.E., Bossabari T.E., Modhupur T.E., Kherimea T.E., Bahuni T.E., Naga Junka T.E., Nagini Jan T.E., Laojan T.E., Singloo T.E., Deopani T.E., Ahoo T.E., Tiphook Nanti T.E., etc.<sup>27</sup>

The government endeavour to grant lands—claimed by the Nagas as their own—to the planters resulted in a crisis situation. The Nagas took in not only as an encroachment but also an invasion into their territory. When their appeal and arguments were ignored, the helpless Nagas resorted to their own primitive means of registering objection and thwarting such invasions. To obstruct British plans the Nagas led perpetual raids on the plantations and killed people. The Lushais too faced a similar problem, under the leadership of Sukpial they raided the Monierkhal Tea Estate in Cachar (1869).<sup>28</sup> The Monierkhal raid affected the tea plantation in the Surma Valley and seriously jeopardized the interest of the planters. The government had the obvious obligation to protect the tea planters. The raid was followed by more raids which aggravated the situation and threatened the plantation economy of the region. Between 1826 and 1844 about 150 persons were killed in the Lushai raids. In 1849 a violent raid was committed in Rupcherra, in which 30 persons were killed and 42 kidnapped. The tea merchants and newspapers in England raised a hue and cry over the situation. George Campbell the Lt. Governor of Bengal himself was stirred into action as he felt, 'The planation in Cahcar seems to

have been more successful and the system has been put on a better footing than anywhere else and it will be a subject of very great regret if this enterprise is seriously checked (due to these tribal raids).<sup>29</sup>

In Naga Hills too the raids created terror which prompted the Lt. governor of Bengal to stop fresh grants of land to the planters in the disputed territory (vide letter no. 2733, dated 13 June 1871).

It was not just tea, timber too was being extracted from the tribal lands. The Lushais caught elephants as a part of their subsistence from the hills. But the Government of India began to permit non-tribals to catch elephants thereby depriving the Lushais of their traditional livelihood. The annoyed tribals expressed their anger by repeated raids which prompted the administration to abolish the operation of elephant *kheda*. In fact the raids as a result of encroachment had become so acute that the Government of India had to think of a device to control encroachment by Britishers as well as by Indian non-tribals into the Naga and Lushai territory, lest the security of their tea plantation be jeopardized and a prosperous plantation sector had to be abandoned on account of something as 'silly' as tribal raids. The device formulated to control encroachment came to be known as the Inner Line Regulations according to which the Lt. governor of Bengal was empowered to draw an inner line beyond which no British subjects, specified classes or foreign residents could enter without a valid pass or licence issued by the deputy commissioner. Tea planters were not allowed to acquire land beyond the inner line either from the Assam Government or the local tribal chiefs. This came into force both in the Naga and Lushai Hills. It is another matter however that throughout the colonial period the line continued to be violated ensuing in violent repercussions.

#### THE CONFRONTATION

After the punitive<sup>30</sup> expedition under Capt. Lister (1849) there was a need for a stronger standing army that would effectively deal with the raiding tribes. But the Government of India was sceptical about the efficacy of coercive methods. It asked Lister to try to conciliate the tribes and their chiefs. However, as soon as the British left, the Lushais butchered 20 Thadou captives proving the inadequacy of conciliatory tactics. But when a levy of 200 armed Thadous were raised the area was peaceful for 12 years.

By the 1860s the Lushais became restive again. On 22 January 1862 the village of Adampore in Sylhet was attacked and burnt. In

1863 another raid took place in Chandraipur. In January 1867 the Lushais attacked Monierkhal and burnt down the tea garden of Loharbund in Cachar. The military expedition having failed, the British tried to conciliate the chiefs. The result was a treaty with one such chief Suakpuilala who recognized Cachar as British territory. But while Suakpuilala was negotiating the boundary between the Lushais and the British, two other Lushai groups descended on the plains of Sylhet and Cachar. One party was led by Liankhama, Buantheuva, Pawibuwaia and Lalbura and the other by Savunga, Lalphunga and Benghuaia. On 23 January 1871, the Cachari *punjee* of Ainerkhal was burnt, 25 persons were killed and 37 kidnapped. The second party burnt the Alexandrapore tea garden, shot dead Winchester—the tea planter—and kidnapped his five year old daughter Mary. On 24 January 1871 Katlichera, and on 27 January Monierkhal was raided. On 27 the tea gardens of Nudigram was also raided, 11 persons were killed and three were taken as captives. On the west on the border of Sylhet, the British frontier was attacked on 23 January and the next day another outpost was overrun. The outpost at Allinagar was raided on 27 February. Some villages in Tripura were burnt down on 21 January and the next day the village of Boonbari was destroyed.

In the famous 1871 military expedition with two columns the British attacked the raiders from two sides. This brought devastation and deaths for the Lushais on a scale that they were unable to withstand. As a result of it the chiefs Lengura, Vanlula, Vanhnuaia and Vanhnuna followed by another batch of chiefs—Savunga, Lalingura, Lalzika and Bengkhuiaia surrendered to the British. As a result of this surrender there were 16 years of relative peace in Anglo-Lushai relations. During this period with the death or aging of the chiefs the younger leaders who took over were resentful of the restrictions imposed on them by the British. They realized that the only way to get back their earlier freedom was to overthrow the British. But they had not yet forgotten the proven might of the whitemen. Whenever possible they would ambush the British. And would steal cattle from the British camps, destroy vegetable gardens and cut telegraph cables—essentially to vent their resentment.

During the period 1880-95 the British were busy suppressing tribal uprisings one after another. In February 1888, Hausat, Vantuai and Dokhuai of the Thantlang clan ambushed the survey party of Lt. Lewin killing eight of its members. Around the same time a party of Lushai chiefs led by Nikhama, Khairuma and Lungliana attacked a

village near Demagiri and kidnapped 15 persons. In early 1889 Lianphunga Sailo attacked 23 villages, killed 100 people and took 91 persons as captives. The British realized that the Lushai tribes were out to threaten the peace of the area again. A strong punitive expedition—which became the famous Chin-Lushai expedition (1880-9)—was planned for a multi-pronged attack on the Lushai tribes. The massive attack by the British and the counter offensive by the Lushai tribes reached the scale of a prolonged war. It finally succeeded in getting most of the chiefs to submit to British authority. It also succeeded in the building of a road connection between Chittagong and Kale and in setting up outposts at Aizawal and Lungleh. The Lushais instinctively knew that their territory had been annexed, their chiefs were deposed, and that they had lost their hunting rights in the forest, and raiding the plains was no longer possible so all the chiefs of the west Dhaleswari-Liengpunga, Rangkuper, and Mintang area decided to rise in rebellion. On 9 September 1890 a party of British political officers was ambushed which left seven persons dead. H.R. Browne the political officer succumbed to his injuries. R.B. McCabe who had distinguished himself in suppressing the Nagas was hurriedly sent to the spot and was able to restore order and secure the surrender of the guilty chiefs. Following these incidents the Government of India approved the proposal of D.R. Lyall to constitute Lushai Hills as a district together with Chittagong Hills district under a superintendent. The district was to be governed through the chiefs. But the British attempt at imposing taxes and levy of labourers aroused immense resentment and turned into a violent uprising. It was only after 1896 that relative peace dawned in the Lushai Hills. The glorious history of Lushai resistance which spanned over seven violent decades came to an end in 1898 (27 January) when the whole of Lushai Hills was placed under the charge of a superintendent with headquarters at Aizawal.

As far as the Nagas were concerned the murder of the Daroga of the Samaguting outpost, Bhogchand was an event that greatly outraged the British. An expedition under Lt. Vincent was sent to avenge the death of its official. The expedition was however called off due to a reprisal. A revitalized expedition was sent in 1850 which, amidst violent reprisals, succeeded in establishing an outpost at Khonoma village. The rescue of the stranded Lt. Vincent necessitated another expedition which was the tenth in succession. This one included a detachment of 384 men with sophisticated weapons. But after a prolonged war to enter the Khonoma fort, when the British

finally got there, the Nagas had abandoned the village. Frustrated, the British troop, in order to demonstrate its might, burnt down several villages. But the villagers of Kekrima did not give in till about a 1000 of its warriors died fighting the unequal battle.

After the Kekrima battle, the British decided to try the policy of non-interference vis-à-vis the Nagas. But it proved to be one-sided as the Nagas did not believe in it. In 1851 itself there were no less than 22 Naga raids, in which 35 persons were killed, 10 wounded and 133 taken captives. In 1862, the Commissioner of Assam, Henry Hopkinson pointed out to the Lt. Governor, Cecil Beadon the ineffectiveness of the policy of non-interference arguing that it was not good for the image of British power to look so helpless in countering tribal raids and protecting their subjects living in the plains. His reference was to the period between 1854 and 1865 when there had been raids by the Angamis alone in which 292 British subjects had been killed, wounded or taken as slaves.

The subsequent discussion on the matter led to the strengthening of the outpost at Samaguting (1866) and placing it under the charge of Lt. Gregory. In 1869, Gregory was succeeded by Capt. Butler, who was successful in gradually extending his influence over the tribes.

The year 1874 marked the beginning of a significant change in British strategy—a slow and tacit process of annexation of the hill areas to British India. Capt. Johnstone who was officiating for Butler effected the submission of three villages which agreed to pay a nominal revenue to the government. In 1875 survey operations were undertaken and continued despite intermittent attacks and ambushes.

But the Angamis of Khonoma and Mezoma still remained a major source of concern for the British. In two years they had plundered as many as 6 villages and killed 384 persons. Therefore in 1877 Carnegie a British political officer, attacked the Mezoma village and destroyed it, thereby compelling it into submission. In November 1878 the Khomia village was occupied securing the submission of 16 other villages. But Khonoma continued to be the trouble spot. The British tried to assert its might by levying fines on the villagers. But the murder of Damant, the political officer of Naga Hills, whilst trying to enter the village proved fatal. The avenging British troops marched to Khonoma on 21 October 1879. A six-day-long siege of Khonoma eventually brought its downfall. But the surrender of the villagers was still along way. On 22 November 1879, Khonoma was attacked by a reinforced British force. The assault only brought about the loss

of 3 more British officers and 44 other men at the hand of the Nagas who abandoned the village and retreated to the mountains. To nab the fleeing villagers, the British had to subdue 13 other villages whose resistance was countered by a ruthless use of British military power without any compunction. While the villages of Piphema, Merema, Sechuma Chipema and Pfuchama were reduced to ashes Khonoma continued to hold out till March 1880 when it finally capitulated. As a symbol of their subjugation the villagers were made to pay revenue to the British Government.

The Sema Nagas of Rotomi village were the next source of trouble as they had murdered two Lotha Nagas who were British subjects. McCabe's district officer of North Lushai Hills expedition had quietened the Semas which encouraged him to lead an expedition to the Ao areas where he met with little opposition. In April 1888, the villages of Yaju, Jesu, Noksen and Liteng in the Tuengsang area were also occupied following the tribal raids. But undaunted, these Nagas attacked the Ao villages of Mongsem-di and Lungkung killing 148 and 40 villagers respectively (June 1888). To prevent such incident a 50-men stockade was posted at Mongsem-di which itself became the target of Naga attack. The deputy commissioner had no way but to lead another punitive expedition—which devastated several villages—to procure the surrender of the offenders. But his two successive promenades met with no success.

In 1892 an Ao Naga was killed by a Sangtham Naga in the village of Yongphang. The deputy commissioner proceeded to the village to catch the murderer. Though the DC spared the villagers and destroyed only the house of the absconding murderer the villagers attacked the villager, who had provided the British troops with necessary supplies. The retaliatory violence secured the submission of the village. A similar event took place in November 1903 when the Philashi *khel* of Tuengsang killed two Ao Nagas and followed it by conducting raids in British territory. This was followed by another punitive expedition (January 1905) which destroyed the village of the offenders thereby securing their submission.

By the turn of the century, raids were reduced as the Nagas had realized the power of the new masters of the plains, and refrained from harassing either the British or their subjects. Thus ended one of the glorious histories of peoples' resistance to British colonialism in India. In fact it is amazing that the Naga and Lushai tribes fought the British power during the entire nineteenth century.

CAPTURE OF THE JEWEL<sup>31</sup>

In the annals of Manipur's history 1714 marked an important year when Pamheiba alias Garib Nawaj ascended the throne. He immediately shot into prominence as a powerful monarch and warrior. Pamheiba made several unsuccessful attempts to occupy the neighbouring Burmese kingdom which was also growing as a power at that time. The murder of Garib Nawaj by one of his sons and the consequent power rivalry plunged Manipur into one crisis after another resulting in the gradual weakening of the state. This was the time when the westward expanding Burmese empire inflicted a series of invasions on Manipur. The Burmese devastated the valley and committed inhuman cruelties on the people. The reigning King Jaisingh appealed to the East India Company for help but the detachment sent to help him could not proceed beyond Kashipur in Cachar. Unable to check the Burmese attack, Jaisingh abdicated and left his sons behind who were involved in a bloody rivalry over the throne for the next 23 years. In 1812 Marjit, one of his sons, seized the throne through Burmese aid and remained in power till 1819 when consequent upon his refusal to pay the promised tribute the Burmese attacked Manipur again and this time nearly depopulated the valley. In 1823 when the first Anglo-Burmese war broke out and the Burmese invaded Cachar, the East India Company entered into an alliance of mutual assistance with King Gambhir Singh of Manipur. When the Burmese were defeated and the Treaty of Yandabo (1826) was signed, Gambhir Singh was recognized as the king of Manipur which implied that from then on the state had only a semi-independent status according to the provisions of Subsidiary Alliance. The years following Gambhir Singh's death saw another phase of internecine rivalry over the throne. Gambhir Singh was succeeded by his brother Nar Singh who abdicated in favour of his nephew Chandra Kirti Singh. But a conspiracy by Gambhir Singh's widow prompted Nar Singh to occupy the throne. On Nar Singh's death (1850) Chandra Kirti Singh proceeded to Manipur and seized the throne. But his sense of insecurity led to seek British recognition. The British Government in turn made the king accountable to it for all his actions. In other words Manipur was for all intents and purposes a British protectorate and was not to do anything that was against their interest. Chandra Kirti Singh played this role so well that he was conferred knighthood. But again during 1890-1 the royal household was rife with conspiracies and rivalries over the throne. When things really got out of hand, the new King Sura Chandra ran to the safety of the British residency in Imphal. The following day despite the

advise of the Political Agent, he declared his intention to abdicate and proceed on a pilgrimage to Brindaban. But on reaching Calcutta, he changed his mind and wanted to regain his throne. In the meantime Tikendrajit Singh, the step-brother of the king persuaded his elder brother Kula Chandra Dhwaja Singh to occupy the throne and requested the British Government to recognize the succession. The British Government knew that recognizing Kulchandra was in their interest but wanted to take Tikendrajit to task for creating a crisis in the valley. But Kulchandra's inability to secure the arrest of his brother Tikendrajit prompted the British to attempt to capture him by force. The anti-British sentiment was so strong that it ended in the public beheading of British officers. Viewed as an anti-British upsurge it was tantamount to waging war against the Government of India. War was declared on Manipur, and its defeat was followed by the trial and execution of Tikendrajit and Thangal, the generals on 13 August 1891. But despite lobbying by the pro-annexationists, Manipur was not annexed. It was decided that Manipur would be a Tributary State and native rule be re-established. The great grandson of Narsingh, Churachand was selected to be the ruler of Manipur. During the period of minority of the ruler a regency administration (1891-1907) was set up. On the assumption of authority by the raja (May 1907), the Manipur Darbar was reconstituted at the instance of the British Government. According to the new pattern of administration, the president of the Darbar was the raja himself and the vice president was to be an officer from the Assam Provincial Civil Service. Besides them were six Manipuri members who were entrusted with portfolios such as judiciary, public works, civil, police and the jail. The president was given charge of education, medicine and health, and armed state police, and the vice president was made responsible for the hill tribes, finance and revenue. The members were appointed by the Government of India on the recommendation of the raja and the British Political Agent in Imphal and could be removed by an order of the government. In other words the raja was a mere pawn and real powers were vested in the Political Agent and the vice president.

#### DETRIBALIZATION AND WESTERNIZATION

The turbulent years of Anglo-tribal conflict soon gave way to a more peaceful life in the Naga and Lushai Hills. The emphasis of the British was to structurally detribalize the tribals while a superficial policy of non-interference in their life and culture was followed. In other



worlds the British believed that the only way to 'tame' these 'savages' as the tribals were referred to, was to bring about changes in their mode of production. So trade marts were established at the foothills in order that the tribal need not raid. Three such trade marts in the Lushai foothills were set up at Tipai-Mukh, Lushai-hat and Jhalnacherra.<sup>32</sup> In these marts the tribals sold or bartered commodities such as rubber, ivory, etc., for salt, iron, brass-utensils, tobacco and cattle. The shifting cultivators were taught to produce potato, cabbage, etc. Links with the outside world were established through road communications.

By 1871-2 the road between Sungoo Valley and Dalekmai, and Demagiri and Lungleh was complete.<sup>33</sup> The Silchar-Aizawl road was completed by 1872. The East Bengal Railway was extended up to Chittagong in 1896 connecting it with Calcutta. By 1898 Silchar was connected with Calcutta and soon a branch line was opened till Lalabazar at the foothills of the Lushai district. In 1900, measures were taken against the water scarcity by establishing an elevated water reservoir at Aizawl.<sup>34</sup> The British rendered innumerable welfare services to the Lushais during the periodic famine that devastated the Lushais in 1881-2. Western medicines and hygiene were introduced along with education.<sup>35</sup> Momentous changes in the life patterns of the tribes were taking place. But interestingly the British insisted that they retain the tribal dresses and hair-cuts and not emulate the British or the Westernized Indians.

So by the beginning of the twentieth century the 'pale'<sup>36</sup> intruders, whom the Lushais had previously fought against, had been accepted as the Mirang Sawipa or Mikang Topa or Mirang Lalpa—the White Masters. The introduction of Christianity reinforced the detribalization process. The first missionary to the Lushai Hills came in the 1880s and it was Rev W. Williams of the Welsh Calvinistic Church. In 1893, R. Arthington of Arthington Aborigine Mission financed two missionaries to Aizawl—F.W. Savidge, and J.H. Lorraine. Despite their initial failure in the conversion of tribals to Christianity, they learnt the Lushai language, introduced the Roman script to the tribals, translated portions of the Bible into Lushai and prepared a Lushai-English dictionary. The British administration had neglected the education of the tribals. The missionaries introduced Western education in the hills and by 1944 the Lushais had their first graduate. The number of Western-educated Lushais increased giving rise to the growth of a middle class in the hills. The successive wartime changes, political upheavals, and nationalistic fervour—nationally and

internationally—activated this new middle class which though lacking numerical strength was on an equal footing with those of the plains.

A similar transformation was taking place in the Naga Hills too as a result of the British initiative. The British tried to consolidate their position immediately. They realized that unless paramountcy was established, the conquered tribes might revolt again. The only way to achieve this was to introduce British administration in the Naga Hills. The Ao area was formed into the Mokokchung subdivision (1890). The area which was known as the area of political control (part of the present Tuensang) was also incorporated into the Naga Hills division (1866). Kohima was formed into a subdivision too. The tribes covered by the Naga Hills district at the close of the nineteenth century were: the Angamis, the Aos, the Kachha Nagas, the Lothas, the Rengmas and the Semas. The Sangthams, Konyaks and Changs were still living in the unadministered area. A Deputy Commissioner assisted by a European assistant was posted at Kohima whereas Mokokchung was placed under the charge of an European police officer along with an engineer and civil surgeon. The criminal and civil procedure codes of India did not apply to this district. However, Deputy Commissioner was empowered to exercise his power in cases involving life and death in consultation with the Chief Commissioner of Assam. The village headmen were given the authority to decide civil and criminal cases according to the customary laws of the respective tribes. The *dobashis* (interpreters) too had a role to play. A small police force, military battalion and a small jail were set up for law and order purposes.

Education was encouraged but left to the initiative of the Christian missionaries. The number of students recorded in 1890-1 was 297 which rose to 319 in 1900-1 and to 647 in 1903-4. By 1903-4 there were twenty-two primary schools, one secondary and two special schools in the district.<sup>37</sup>

The hills were then connected with the plains through modern communication system. Roads were constructed by 1903-4, 117 km of cart-roads and 757 km of bridle paths were ready. The road linking Manipur and Kohima and Dimapur was widened and a railway head installed at Dimapur.<sup>38</sup>

Christian missionaries, as they have done worldwide, followed the British flag to the Naga Hills. To avoid overlapping the organized Christian missionaries assigned the Naga Hills to the American Baptist Mission. Rev Miles Bronson set out for the Naga Hills and

set up a Naga Mission School at Namsang in 1839-40.<sup>39</sup> But with Bronson's sudden departure prompted by illness, the work came to a standstill until E.W. Clark replaced him in 1869. Clark, with the help of Susongmeren, a local Ao convert and Godhula an Assamese evangelist opened the Baptist Mission Centre to Molungyimchen village. But when the converts increased in number and a conflict grew in the village over the question of observance of tribal rituals and festivals vis-à-vis Christianity, Clark founded a new village at Molungyimchen which would be completely Christian. As soon as the Ao area came under British administration the mission was shifted to Impur (April 1894) which emerged as the centre not only for the Ao churches, but also for the Sema, Lotha, Chang, Phom and Sangtham churches. In the Kohima subdivision the American Baptist Mission Centre was opened at Samaguting. Rev C.D. King was the first missionary in the area who converted the first Angami in 1885. The mission opened a few schools. Persons of eminence like Kevichusa, Zopianga Longlang, J.B. Zasokie and Vizol were products of this mission centre. The progress of Christianity was slow initially but accelerated after the Second World War.

In Manipur too, the advent of colonialism heralded a change in every sphere of life. The land system introduced by the British was qualitatively different from the pre-colonial one. It involved a thorough monetization, commercialization of agriculture and introduction of the concept of private landownership. The state also abolished (1892) the Manipur version of slavery and the lallup system—a local variety of serfdom. The colonial authorities surveyed the land and introduced taxes on homestead land. Unlike the earlier system the taxes had to be paid in cash. In order to effectively implement this system and elaborate administrative structure was instituted. The valley was divided into five *panas*, and each *pana* was in charge of a *lakpa* (local revenue officer) which was a prestigious post. Due to these changes new social categories of people emerged. In the pre-British society there were only two broad social categories: the king and the feudal nobles on the one hand and peasants on the other. Colonial Manipur saw the emergence of such as rent receivers, tenant-cultivators, ordinary cultivators, and field labourers. The new system adversely affected the former nobility and even the peasants but a new category of middle rankers like the Lakpas, Amins, etc., became prominent. They formed the progeny of the modern middle class of Manipur which made its presence conspicuous in the post-war period.

The colonial policy of introducing English education in Manipur

was to serve imperial interests. The emphasis was on teaching literature—Bengalee and Sanskrit, and philosophy rather than science and technology. However, the number of lower primary schools rose from 56 in 1909-10 to 82 in 1929-30.<sup>40</sup> The number of students increased from 3,380 in 1909-10 to 6,520 in 1929-30. The government encouraged the growth of this sector and increased its outlay from Rs.18,806 in 1909-10 to Rs.34,717 in 1929-30. There was however only one high school in Manipur—the Johnstone High School which was recognized by Calcutta University only in 1921-2. In 1921-2 a Matriculation centre was opened in Manipur. After 1930 there were three Boys High Schools and one Girls High School. These schools were opened through voluntary efforts and given grants-in-aid subsequently. But the only college, that is the D.M. College was set up after the Second World War. Nevertheless, the percentage of literacy increased from 0.9 per cent in 1901 to 3.0 per cent in 1921, and to 5.0 per cent in 1941. Between 1927-8 and 1930-1 as many as 82 students passed the matriculation exam. Between 1922-3 and 1929-30, 11 students completed graduation in the arts and science streams. Between 1930-40, two journals, *Yakairol* (quarterly) and *Lalit Manjuri Patrika* (monthly) and two daily newspapers—*Dainik Manipur* and *Manipur Matam* were published.<sup>41</sup> All these marked the emergence of a modern middle class from the middle ranking categories of the transformed society. Like the plains of Assam, the proselytization efforts of the Christian missions did not succeed much in the plains of Manipur. But it did much better in the Hills of Manipur which consisted of numerous Naga, Kuki and Mizo tribes.

#### *Fruits of Transformation: Emergence of Middle Class*

The emergence of a modern middle class in Manipur was late as it was among the last states to come under the influence of colonialism. A full-fledged colonial takeover of the state was only after 1891 and an embryonic middle class was visible in the post-War period. They were small in number and mostly trained in the education institutions of Calcutta and Gauhati. They were largely land based and from semi-urban areas and adopted for new professional careers like teaching in schools and colleges, administrative posts like clerks in the government offices and positions like *amins* and *lakpas* which were hitherto filled by people brought in from Assam and Bengal. They were products of the changed system and trained in Western thought and

ideas which were considered modern as against the orthodox/traditional.

What was important was the change in their outlook. They began to look upon Europeans as models and tended to become pro-Western in taste and attitude. They also began to regard themselves as belonging to more or less different categories and assumed new leadership—political and religious. In this way the emergence of a new elite group disturbed the structures of traditional social organisation.<sup>43</sup>

Initially the essential concern of this class was educational development, religio-cultural change and to secure respectability for Manipuri language, literature, art and theatre.<sup>44</sup> They believed that reforms within the religious—structure getting rid of Brahmanic oppression and hegemony and other such ills that had crept in to Hinduism—was a sure way to reform the society. Strangely enough during the colonial rule Hinduism (Gaudiya Vaishnavism), the religion of the Meithei was encouraged by the colonial government. The new middle class favoured this religion. It took pride in professing a faith that was the dominant faith of the subcontinent. Translation of Hindu religious scripture and literature into local languages and ways to strengthen Hindu practices without the hegemony of the Brahmins were suggested. Only a very small and feeble voice of dissension came from a group led by Naorem Phullo who wanted to do away with Hinduism and revive the pre-Hindu faith of the Meithei, the Sanamahi. But it had a different context and originated in a place outside Manipur. A small migrant Meithei peasantry lived in Cachar which suffered discrimination as a minority and was not accepted as proper Hindus by the caste based, hierarchical majority of Cachar. Phullo's voice was that of a hurt community, of a rebel and the fact that his ideas were not accepted by the Meithei of Manipur proved the people's tilt towards Hinduism.

The second concern was the education of its people. The new middle class advocated the necessity of modern education for the Meithei men and women and the need to work towards the goal. It also recognized the need for industrialization and adoption of trade and business as a profession by Meithei which could help in the removal of poverty in Manipur. It was suggested that people should buy locally manufactured products rather than British manufactured goods.

In the inter-War period when the whole of India was steeped in the freedom struggle and the 'nationalist' movement had come to be

termed as 'politics' the Meithei middle class too became restive. The new form of politics attracted them because in the monarchical regime common people were not allowed to participate. They now had political rights and aspirations, became aware of their rights and were determined to realize them. These people were apolitical as the medieval monarchical system of Manipur had only allowed the participation of a limited number of people in the political process. Political decision making was the domain of a select group of royal family members and their ministers. Decisions were imposed on people and orders came from above and anyone protesting or not complying with decisions was charged with 'sedition' and ruthlessly suppressed. Trained in Western political thought and processes, the new middle class saw the 'power' in democratic institutions and also the prospects of their participation in these political institutions and decision making processes. They demanded the democratization of the medieval political system with modern political institutions in which people could participate. The Meithei middle class was ready to go all out to secure the introduction of such institutions. The establishment of the Nikhil Hindu Manipur Mahasabha in 1934 was one such effort which was transformed into a political party in 1938 with a secular name—Nikhil Manipuri Mahasabha. The Indian National Congress was the avowed inspiration of the party.

#### NAGA MIDDLE CLASS

The various Naga tribes remained overwhelmingly tribal except for the Semas and Angamis as is evident from their views on land-ownership. Private ownership was practised by the Angamis while the Semas were vested with the 'legal ownership of their land'. Most of the other tribes practised collective ownership. These two tribes had also advanced considerably in terms of technology. Some feudal trends were already emerging in the Angami and Sema Hills. But the processes of colonization had checked such a development. Colonial rule without disturbing the land pattern prevented the break up and decline of tribalism in these hills. For example shifting cultivation was not discouraged. Commercial crops were introduced but commodity production was not encouraged. Monetization was introduced but the traditional barter system was also retained in the exchange between the plainsmen and the tribes. Trade with the plains was thoroughly discouraged not due to the fear of exploitation of the tribes by the plainsmen but to restrict the entry of outsiders to the hills

which could bring about a renewal of raids and jeopardize the flourishing tea industry. In fact, the Inner Line Regulations was one such device to restrict the entry of outsiders to the hills. The regulation had nothing to do with the preservation of indigenous identity, culture, institutions, etc. It was aimed at preventing the land-hungry planters from encroaching on the Naga land and thereby creating a problem for the government. Thus the break up of the tribal society and the development of feudal relationship of production were arrested by British rule and hence the middle class that finally emerged in the Naga Hills, had its roots neither in the landed aristocracy nor did it evolve through commercial development.<sup>45</sup> The growth of this class in Nagaland was inextricably linked with the spread of Western education introduced by the Christian missionaries and it was composed mainly of small entrepreneurs, salaried bureaucracy and independent professionals like teachers, doctors, lawyers, etc.

The first act of the this emerging middle class seemed to have been the formation of the Naga Club in 1918. But we should not overlook the fact that the control over the club was still retained by the chiefs which was evident from the preponderance of *dobashis* (interpreters) in its membership. *Dobashis* were mostly chiefs or erstwhile chiefs. There is very little material on the Naga Club (which seemed to have become defunct after it submitted the famous memorandum to the Simon Commission) but the very idea of club/association, cooperatives which it ran in Mokokchung and Kohima were modern and obviously the work of ex-soldiers, returning from the war, government officials, professionals like teachers who comprised the nascent middle class. The odd men were the chiefs, who seemed to have found place in the Club by virtue of their being *dobashis* which was a very important office during the British regime and had played an important role in matters relating to the Nagas vis-à-vis British India by virtue of their being chiefs.

In 1929, the Naga Club submitted a memorandum to the Simon Commission which was accepted asking the British Government to exclude the Naga areas from the prospective political reforms as the community was too backward and lacked leadership capable of representing the numerous Naga tribes.

A look at the memorandum shows that although it claimed to lack leadership capable of representing all the Naga tribes the memorandum itself was signed by representatives which included 15 Angamis, 1 Zeliang, 1 Sema, 1 Lotha, 1 Rengma, and 1 Kuki. Among the signatories there were 9 *dobashis* or interpreters, 3 teachers, 2 clerks,

1 doctor, 1 *potdar*, 1 treasurer, 1 sub-overseer, and 1 *chaprasi* which again proves the preponderance of *dobashis*. The institution of *dobashis* was instituted by the British in the Naga Hills as in the rest of India. The primary function of the *dobashis* was to interpret Naga dialects into Assamese which the British officers knew. In pursuance of its policy of giving special importance to local authorities these *dobashis* were selected from among the chiefs and rulers and in course of time were given authority to decide cases. They were allowed to establish *dobashi* courts in district and subdivisional headquarters like Kohima and Mokokchung. Cases which could not be settled at the village level were brought to these *dobashi* courts and decided according to the customary laws of the respective tribes. The British administrators generally confirmed the decisions of these *dobashi* courts and did not encourage appeals against them which meant that the *dobashis* had emerged to be a powerful institution. The fact that *dobashis* were chiefs also gave them extra authority over the tribes. The *dobashis* were allowed to go out on tour to various areas of the district to settle cases regularly. They were close to the administration and often accompanied British administrators who visited their area annually and assisted them in deciding cases. Given the context of the memorandum submitted to the Simon Commission which appealed to keep the Nagas out of modern political institutions and processes and permit them to retain their old tribal structures, and given the background of the *dobashis* who were chiefs in reality, it is likely that these chiefs feared the loss of power, privilege and hegemony which included economic assets if a new political system was imposed on them and that their appeal was only an attempt at preserving the *status quo*. The Second World War contributed towards the strengthening of the Naga middle class and led to the weakening of the Naga Club. The Naga National Council (1946) was truly an organization of the Naga middle class which took over the leadership of the Naga people from the Naga Club. The Naga National Council (NNC) emerged out of the Naga Hills District Tribal Council which was formed at the initiative of Charles Pawsey, the Deputy Commissioner of the Naga Hills. The Naga National Council primarily aimed at actively supporting of British officials working for social, economic, political and cultural development of the Nagas but in the wake of the impending British withdrawal from India, it switched over to political activity. Originally NNC consisted of 29 members representing various tribes on the basis of proportional representation from among whom the office bearers were elected. The finances were raised by contributions from



every family making them an indirect member of the NNC. The modern outlook of the NNC leaders was testified by the various reform work which it undertook for the tribes. But its support of the Naga Club Memorandum to the Simon Commission, which was the handwork of traditional chieftains was surprising. It would be explained by the retention of the overwhelmingly tribal structure from which this middle class emerged or their ambitiousness. However, under a new leadership, the Nagas were participating in the modern political process and institutions.

#### MIZO MIDDLE CLASS

In the Mizo Hills too the British emphasis was on structural detribalization while encouraging the retention of tribal way of life at a superficial level. In other words the Mizos were restrained from changing their dress, hair style, etc., but the production process was drastically changed. The food-gathering Mizos were introduced to commercial crop production like rubber and vegetables; cattle rearing, poultry, piggery and trading. This detribalization process was reinforced by the introduction of Christianity and Western education which came along with the modern ideas of hygiene and medicine. Certain restrictions and curtailment of the traditional rights of the chiefs were ordered by the British despite the fact that they required the institution of the chiefs and administered the district through them. As a result the power and wealth of chiefs started diminishing with the coming of the British.

On the other hand the British as we have stated earlier, to protect their interest in governing the area with minimum expenses favoured the chiefs in contrast to the common people. This however could not check the growth of an enlightened section of the Mizos (because of education and Missionary activities) viz., traders, nurses, teachers, public men.<sup>46</sup>

Even though the initiative was from the British and purpose was religio-social, the Young Lushai Association (1938) was the first middle class attempt at actualizing its modern concepts. The emergence of the Mizo Union (1926) was only a logical follow-up. The former was social while the latter was fullfledgedly political. The removal of the Mizo Union office bearers, on the ground that they lacked 'college education' showed the importance of modern education among the Mizos and the movement for the abolition of 'chieftainship' showed the emergence of a modern middle class in the Mizo Hills and their Westernized perspective. The integrationist and secessionist debates

also showed the dilemma between the old chiefs and the new middle class. In effect, it was the reflection of a society in transition—a society making a wild leap, from the tribal stage to that of a bourgeois society.

## NOTES

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