UNDERSTANDING

CONFLICT SITUATION IN NORTH-EAST INDIA

FOR NATIONAL INTEGRATION

Edited By
RANJIT BARUA

Understanding Conflict Situation in North-East India

for National Integration

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Disclaimer

FOREWORD

Postcolonial Northeast is a cauldron of discontent. There is unrest everywhere. This beautiful region, spotted with hills and dales, rivers and fountains, meadows and forests, which has been an integral part of political India since early years of the nineteenth century, is now tending to be another Kashmir in respect of unrest and violation of human rights. There is a long list of problems battering this region, and at the head of them is terrorism. In fact, terrorism is both the child and the father of the problems. Though the old colonial masters are gone, the new colonial masters, with their evil network around us, are never at rest. They are feeding far the separatist dragon that has endangered peace in the region. We held a two-day national seminar on 31st January and 1st February, 2011 to discuss and diagnose the maladies of the Northeast and endeavour to suggest remedies. The scholars who joined it in various capacities did not disappoint us. After all had been said and discussed, it got imprinted on everybody's mind that the prevailing unrest in the region should stop to expedite its development and prosperity. Scholars were unanimous on the point that there could be no development in a region where peace was on the periphery. In my address of welcome I maintained that it was not the politically-disturbed France, but the relatively peaceful Britain that took the leadership of the Industrial Revolution in Europe. I believe, the participants of the seminar responded positively to the implications of this observation.

The Northeast is demographically heterogeneous. This heterogeneity is the natural law of the Northeast and the fountainhead of its strength. Heterogeneity is the demand of modern civilization also. We are proud of Pragjyotishpur, which once illuminated the

whole of Eastern India with the light of civilization, represented heterogeneity in one of its finest forms. The heterogeneity of ancient and medieval Northeast got remarkably expanded in the colonial age, when the Bengalis, the Marwaris, the Biharis, the Oriyas, the Tamils, the Santhals, the Mundas and such other people came from outside the region as teachers, traders, lawmakers, public servants, labourers *et al*. While we condemn infiltration, we pledge to defend diversity. This diversity is our proud inheritance. We strongly feel that nothing more ruinous than secession and more profane than the demand for a separate state. Separation or secession is no remedy for the underdevelopment of any community in the region. Terror or violence is an abject answer to negligence. There are exploited and tortured in all communities as there are torturers and exploiters in all. Hence, there should be a common platform of the exploited and tortured against the exploiters and torturers. The common cause perception that held the Nagas, the Kukis, the Karbis, the Mizos, the Manipuris, the Assamese, the Bodos, the Marwaris, the Bengalis, the Hindustanis, the Nepalis and the Adivasis together against the colonial masters should hold them together in this postcolonial scenario also against all regional discriminations and disparities by the Centre. I am glad that though the participants debated on the causes, motivations and outcomes of different conflicts in the region, all of them emphasized the indispensability of national integration.

I thank all the resource persons, scholars and guests who attended the seminar organized by the Department of Political Science of our College and enhanced our knowledge with their scholarly works and observations on the subject. Our efforts will be crowned with success if this compilation of selected research papers and relevant articles can offer any insight for planners, policy-makers, analysts, research scholars, human rights activists and socially concerned citizens. I thank the publisher also for bringing out our compilation of selected papers and relevant articles in book-form.

December, 2011   **Dr. Ajanta Dutta Bordoloi**
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Introduction

North-East India is a region which is extremely diverse in terms of ethnic, linguistic and cultural composition. These diverse communities have had different historical and political experiences and many of these communities still perceive them as unique entities. The existence of diverse ethnic groups with distinct culture and tradition of their own has made the region very special and unique one. The region is aloof from rest of India as only 2% of the landmass is connected with mainland India. The region shares over 4500 kilometers of international boundaries with foreign countries like Bhutan, China, Myanmar and Bangladesh. It makes North-East India geo-politically and strategically significant.

For long, the affairs of this region had only marginal importance at the centre of power in New Delhi. It resulted in feeling of alienation and relative deprivation. Economic backwardness also added fuel to the fire. But in last few decades there has been gradual change of attitude and increasing awareness about North-East India in the rest of the country. The North-East India has been suffering from prolonged conflicts and unrest after independence. Socio-political unrest and conflicts have become a part of life in this region. Ethnic resurgence, autonomy movements and separatist activities have created a politically volatile situation here. The conflicts are not

necessarily between the state and those who challenge its authority. On many occasions, conflicts are between different ethnic groups who for long shared the same geographic areas and resources in the past. Conflicts between different ethnic groups are on thr rise and these have made the situation worse. Migration from other parts of India and unabated influx from foreign countries have also added to the woes creating further trouble.

The strategic significance of this region necessitates proper understanding of the issues involved and root causes of conflicts. It is equally important to find out ways and means for solution of ongoing conflicts as conflict situation is not only hampering development and progress of the region, but also posing a serious challenge to stability and integrity of the nation as a whole.

Professor Anuradha Dutta's 'Understanding Conflict in Northeast India for National Integration' is the curtain riser of the issue. She points out that conflict is endemic to modern societies. Conflict can be viewed as a triangle with contradiction, attitude and behaviour at its point- contradiction is underlying condition of conflict, attitude includes parties' perception of each other and behaviour includes co-operation and coercion. In the post-war period, more people have died because of ethnic and internal conflicts than inter-state wars. She has attributed the genesis of conflict to the colonial policies of the British and discussed how the issues became more and more complex in the period after independence. British policy of segregation of the tribal areas, migration and demographic transformation generated trouble. Language issue and subsequent demand for autonomy- all have made conflict dynamics a very complex one. Ethnic conflict in Northeast India originally grew essentially through primordial affection. Language has always been the centre stage of ethnic turmoil. Autonomy granted under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution and under state legislation has not been able to satisfy different ethnic groups. In the name of dealing with the conflicts, the state and its agencies have violated basic human rights

in this region. Normal socio-economic order has been compromised and many other disastrous consequences can be noticed. Analysis of the process of governance in the region shows that Government of India's process of national integration, state building and democratic consolidation have aggravated the conflict scenario in the Northeast. Prof. Dutta rightly points out that conflict resolution is an extremely challenging job. For proper resolution of any conflict, there must be a just solution. Three different types of responses to the conflict in the Northeast have been applied by Indian Government, viz. use of military and paramilitary forces to wipe out insurgency, negotiation with insurgent groups and packages of development. Despite these efforts, conflict in the region continues to persist. She, therefore, emphasizes on adoption of right set of measures for integration of the destabilizing forces getting integrated with the mainstream populace of the country.

Professor ANS Ahmed points out that ethnic and primordial divisions have been sharpened in recent years to make the world a dangerous place to live. Most of the violent manifestations of man's quest for a space and share of economic and political power destabilizing peace and just society centered around the issue of ethnicity. He beautifully illustrates this with examples of ethnic conflicts from different parts of the world. Many sociologists of early twentieth century including Robert Park and Max Weber foresaw decline of ethnic and primordial relationship with the advancement of modernization. But the expected decline of ethnicity and racial attachment did not take place despite the progress of modernity. Rather, the last century came to be known as century of ethnicity making a mockery of the prophecies and predictions of celebrated thinkers. It has become the basis of politics and a formidable challenge to national integration in many countries of the world including India. Professor Ahmed explains in detail the experience of multiethnic society of Soviet Union and how ethnic assertions by different ethnic groups ultimately resulted in its disintegration. It is true that if powers

are not equally shared among all social groups, there is social in-equilibrium and tension. When ethnic communities are marginalized and discriminated and when they become aware of it, there are disastrous consequences. India as a nation state has also experienced ethnic assertions and movements of different magnitude. Ethnic movements in North East India are a testimony of this. Ethnic assertions and grievances should be properly taken care of. He maintains that if ethnicity is beholden within the perspective of celebrated diversity, and nations learn not only to live together but also enjoy its benefits so profoundly associated with the positive side of the concept, ethnicity is a source of strength and not a weakness.

Dr Subhash Barman and Ms. Dipanjali Devi focus on the Bodo identity movement and the Bodo-Adivasi conflict in their paper. They take up the issue of Adivasis- a marginalized group of Assam and the culture of silence. The Adivasis are at the bottom of the Assamese society and viewed as 'other' by the Bodo identity movement. As such that particular community became the target and victim of 'ethnic cleansing' perpetrated by the supporters of the Bodo movement. They lamented the attitude of the post-colonial state as it remained mute spectator during the period of ethnic violence. The resultant conflict induced displacement seriously compromised human rights and human security aspects of the Adivasis. The women and children are the worst sufferers. Thus the authors pointed out that the identity movement of the Bodos, an oppressed community, has further marginalized another oppressed community, the Adivasis. They suggest adherence to the UN Guiding Principles on Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) as a positive step.

Sanjit Muchahary and Rajesh Deb Barman identify language and culture as the centre-stage of ethnic turmoil in the Northeast. The broad racial difference between India and its Northeast and the unique geographical link contributed to a sense of alienation, a feeling of 'otherness' that subsequently gave rise to a political culture of

violent separatism. Migration has altered the demographic balance fomenting further trouble. Denial of the fact that the region is a shared homeland has added to the complexity of the conflict scenario as some groups have targeted others in order to have compact homeland of their own. Internal displacement has taken place because of these conflicts and thousands of IDPs are living in relief camps for years without having basic amenities of life. In this paper, it is suggested that maintenance of law and order may be necessary and effective as short term measure. But it cannot offer permanent solution. Long term policy initiatives such as enforcement of rule of law, system of accountability and transparency in administration, good governance, socio-economic development etc. are also very important. Mutual interaction and trust-building among conflicting groups are necessary.

Dr. Shantau Chakravarty and Barnali Sharma consider ethnic upsurge in India's North-East as a manifestation of identity politics which poses a challenge to the authority of Indian State. This challenge has been countered by adoption of extreme coercive measures either in the garb of democratic legislations or by the sheer use of military force. They identify that the responses of the Indian State basically fall under two broad categories viz. coercive means and politico-constitutional response. A number of politico-constitutional responses including Sixth Schedule status, creation of new state, provision of autonomous and regional councils, ethnic accords etc. have also been identified. They observe that ethnicity related problems need multi-dimensional and multi-stage tackling and suggest local initiative for development and planning. There should be decentralization with maximum powers transferred to the grass root level. They also put stress on greater psychological integration with the rest of India. The fear that the tribal identity would be lost as a result of integration has to be dispelled.

Migration has remained a major issue in Northeast India more particularly in Assam since colonial period. The issue finds place in the paper of Arup Kumar Deka. He takes up the issue of Bangladeshi

migration to Assam from a historical perspective and elaborates how it generated conflict. Referring to the studies made by many scholars, he points out that over population, poverty, environmental disasters like floods and cyclones, religious, political and state repression, scarcity of arable land- all encouraged migration from Bangladesh. Bangladeshi migration to Assam generated native-migrant conflict which has deep impact on the society and politics of Assam. Given the circumstances in Bangladesh, migration from that country is inevitable. So Deka suggests work permit system for migrants and strict border vigil in order to prevent illegal migration to Assam.

The issue of migration is again taken up by Dr Kishore Kumar Sarmah in his paper. He identifies four spheres where migration was significant- tribal migration in tea plantation, Muslim Bengali migration in agriculture, Hindu Bengali migration in the service sector and Marwari migration in business and industry. Economy of Assam has been overburdened because of large scale migration. It remains one of the poorest states of India with only 1.5% share of the national income. In spite of abundant natural resources in the form of oil, natural gas, coal, tea, timber etc., the state fails to generate sufficient wealth and a huge amount of money is siphoned off out of the state by the migrants from other parts of India and Nepal. Unabated migration of Bangladeshis has further increased the burden of the state economy. There is urgent need to check immigration to Assam and proper policy initiatives are necessary for this purpose. Dr Sarmah puts forward a number of steps like issue of identity cards, work permit to migrants, updating of the National Register of Citizens, proper registration of birth and death, vigil at border etc.

India is suffering from many maladies and terrorism is an important one. Admitting that the North-East is ethnically and linguistically different from the rest of India, Dr Aditya Singh attributed insurgency in this region to many factors like economic and infrastructural backwardness, unemployment, lack of opportunities, a sense of deprivation, ethnic insecurity and indifferent attitude of the

Central Government. Inadequacies in governance and administration, public perceptions of widespread corruption and lack of accountability have also contributed equally to the creation of feelings of alienation among local population. He rightly points out that there is a troublesome lack of interest in the North-East, a lack of understanding of the problems of this region and a lack of admiration of its concerns among the general populace in the rest of the country. Dr Singh suggests for opening up of the economy of the region for South East Asia through Look East Policy. Accelerated economic development can help in ending the feeling of alienation and neglect. To end insurgency, a holistic and consistent policy is essential. There cannot be an exclusively security-oriented solution to such a complex problem.

The concept of human rights is the most important one in contemporary world. Despite having a democratic structure of governance, we have failed to evolve the kind of norms, values, attitude and style of conduct conducive to the functioning of a healthy democratic system and observance of human rights. The working of the Indian democracy in the North-East needs to be rigorously re-examined in the context of violence where human dignity is being undermined. Pankaj Kumar Sarmah and Jahnabi Devi analyse human rights and human security issues in the context of the North-East. They attempt to examine how insurgency has jeopardized human rights and human security here. Even counter insurgency operations by the security forces are also equally responsible for undermining concern for human rights. They suggest that violation of human rights should be dealt with according to the laws of the country and the spirit of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). There is also a need for proper training on human rights during combat for security personnel. Until and unless human rights of the people are not respected and protected, rule of law, in real sense, will not prevail in this region.

Kalyan Bora and Smarajit Ojha view that human rights violations

in Assam and the adjoining region are due to a pre-meditated and systematic state policy to contain insurgency. Insurgency in Assam rose in a political context, as has happened in the other adjoining states. But the Government has chosen to view it solely as a security problem, and has adopted policies to root out insurgency militarily. It has also aggravated the human rights situation drastically. Army was given wide powers under Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA). Army operations have resulted in gross violation of human rights with torture, fake encounter, forced disappearance, unlawful detention and even rape by armed forces becoming common. The systematic annihilation of the sympathizers and kith and kin of ULFA by vigilante groups supported by the State came to be known as *'Secret Killings'* or *'Gupta Hatya'*. The provisions of AFSPA which give sweeping powers to military violate even internationally recognized human rights norms including International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). It is suggested that since insurgency has a political root; the Government should view the problem from this angle and formulate its policies accordingly.

In their paper, Achyut Kumar Das and Birat Kumar Panyang observe that over the years Northeast India has witnessed growth of insurgency and violent conflicts of different magnitude. These issues may have different dimensions. But most of the insurgencies in this region are based on ethnicity. Insurgency has become a lucrative business for many. In the name of liberation struggle, many groups are earning easy money and have degenerated into groups of criminals without having any political ideology. Insurgency and counter insurgency measures- all have contributed to violation of human rights of common people. Attack on migrants from Hindi belt has become a regular feature in recent years. Pointing out that the role of Government is very crucial in maintaining peace and tackling insurgency, they suggest that negotiation for a just and honourable settlement is necessary. There is urgent need to prevent illegal influx from foreign soil. The issue of migration from other parts of India is also to be tackled judiciously in the best interest of the people. Civil society can also play a major role in initiating multidimensional peace building process.

Autonomy has remained a major issue in this ethnically diversed region. Two different systems of autonomy have been devised- one under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution and the other under law of state legislature. Dr. Manoj Kumar Nath examines this issue of autonomy in the context of Assam. Six plain tribal groups, namely Mising, Tiwa (Lalung), Rabha, Deori, Thengal Kachari and Sonowal Kachari, have been given the provision of self rule through Autonomous Councils. But these Autonomous Councils have remained examples of government inaction and negligence since their creation. These have become an insult to the democratic principles and structures of our nation. The Sixth Schedule which was originally meant for the hill tribes has to be extended to the plains when BTC was formed. Dr. Nath observes that if the Constituent Assembly had formulated some kind of institutional arrangement for the upliftment of the plain tribes of Assam, the present ethnic unrest would have never emerged. He further analyses that the extension of the Sixth Schedule to the Bodos, a plain tribe, is against the constitutional spirit. However, if the Government is really interested to extend the provisions of the Sixth Schedule to the plain tribes, then other plain tribes of Assam should also be provided with the same arrangements. He warns that the use of self rule provisions as a political tool to win elections can damage the whole issue of tribal autonomy- both ideologically and structurally.

Manoj Kumar Das and Himangshu Sarmah take up the demand for autonomy by the Tiwas- a plain tribal group of Assam for analysis. They explain the growth of political consciousness and the demand for autonomy among the Tiwas vividly. At present there is an Autonomous Council for the Tiwas created by the state government. But the Tiwa Autonomous Council has failed to ensure socio-economic development of the community. Rampant corruption and mismanagement of funds have created the dilemma among the Tiwas

whether to support such autonomy or not. In fact the TAC has become a hotbed of power politics instead of an agency for development. It has resulted in the demand for autonomy under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution.

Sonowal Kachari is another important ethnic group of Assam. Manuj Kumar Chutia and Sewali Changmai take up the autonomy movement of this tribal group for analysis. Autonomy movements are essentially the outcome of the intense desire of ethnic groups for the recognition that they have a distinct identity. The Sonowal Kacharis' demand for autonomy is not different from this basic idea. Socio-economic backwardness and relative deprivation have led to the demand for autonomy. Chutia and Changmai both point out that the Sonowal Kacharis have long being neglected by successive state governments. They have been deprived of their due share in the process of governance. The autonomy movement of the Sonowal Kacharis finally resulted in the creation of the Sonowal Kachari Autonomous Council (SKAC) in 2005. The formation of SKAC has been a landmark event in the history of autonomy movements of Assam. It has unfurled a new horizon in the political scenario of the state.

Conflict is a situation in which people perceive a threat to their well-being. It occurs when people perceive that there is a threat to their needs, interests or concerns. As conflict is inevitable, attempts for conflict resolution has also become equally important. Sanchita Bora and Ranjana Borah both try to give a thematic touch to the whole issue. They identify that conflict resolution has four key components- controlling emotional responses, seeking understanding, identifying needs and common interests and seeking mutual benefit or purpose. Emphasizing emotional integration as very important for national integration, they point out that the question of national integration remains unsolved as the psychological integration is lacking. It is suggested that the concerned national and state authorities should readily attend the feeling of neglect and deprivation, the substantial

regional imbalance, economic inequalities in the Northeast to strengthen the spirit of integration. We should learn to appreciate and respect beauty of diversity in order to achieve unity and national integration.

The Armed Forces Special Powers Act has long been a part of conflict discourse in the North-East. Ranjit Barua tries to find out the role of this controversial act in deepening conflict situation in this region. Many provisions of AFSPA goes against the spirit of international human rights standards and wherever the AFSPA is in operation, enforced disappearances, extra-judicial executions, torture, rape and arbitrary detention are routinely reported. Tension has only further escalated because of the harsh nature of this Act. Because of gross violation of human rights by armed forces, the people have become all the more hostile to them. Pointing out that the response of the State to the conflicts in the peripheries is different from its response to those in heartland as is evident from government policies in Maoist affected areas, he questions why and how AFSPA became essential and sacrosanct in the North-East. What is required in the region is a nation-building exercise in the true sense of the term and that too with due respect to the ethnic, cultural and other diversities of the people of this region. He maintains that the repeal of AFSPA is the first minimum requirement for any attempt at conflict resolution in the North-East.

The conflict situation in North-East remains a major challenge to the process of nation-building and national integration in India. Karabi Devi, Prasanta Kumar Sharma and Pradeep Dey examine how conflict resolution is necessary for any successful attempt of national integration. The multi-ethnic and multi-cultural setting of India and its attempt to attain nationhood provided a fertile ground for the development of ethno-nationalism and other forms of identity quest. Though conflict in this region is mixed with complex political and economic issues such as control over natural resources, migration related issues, social exclusion and so on; but politics of identity lie at

the heart of the bigger part of the current conflict constellations. They argue that conflict resolution in the North-East would require a judicious mix of various approaches. There is need for urgent and innovative efforts to build capacity in different wings and levels of governance. Culture of peace must be promoted and civil society should be given larger space in peace building process.

Muni Kakati discusses conflict situation in Assam in the light of insurgent activities of different groups and peace initiatives with few such groups. The efforts of People's Consultative Group (PCG) and Sanmilita Jatiya Abhibartan (SJA) for dialogue between Government of India and ULFA have been examined thoroughly in her paper. Ajai Sahni's analysis finds acceptance as he talks about the 'underground economy of terrorism', a clandestine power arrangement between each state's legitimate power elites and various terrorist groupings. Somehow the purpose of insurgency now, is not the upheaval of the established political order, or even the once 'noble' idea of independence, but the development of a system of free flowing corruption that benefits all at the cost of the life of the civilians, the armed forces and the youth disillusioned by unemployment, economic disparity and blinded by the fervor of ethno-cultural identity. Kakati emphasizes on a strong citizen's initiative for encouraging conflict resolution. What more is required is a revolution, a revolution of the sentimental nature, humanistic nature, one that reminds everyone that deep down, we are all the same- human beings capable of probably more love than we are capable of hatred and violence.

The present volume is the outcome of a national seminar on 'Understanding Conflict Situation in North East India for National Integration' organized by the Department of Political Science, Nowgong Girls' College in collaboration with Government Sikshan Mahavidyalaya, Nagaon. The seminar was sponsored by the University Grants Commission. We take this opportunity to express our gratitude to both. Dr Ajanta Dutta Bordoloi, the Principal of our college remained a constant source of inspiration. In fact without her interest, neither the seminar nor the present volume would have been possible. My colleagues in the Department Mrs. Ranjana Borah (HoD), Ms Rosy Deka and Mr. Sankar Jyoti Bora were part and parcel of the whole endevour. Their help, encouragement and valuable suggestions have benefited me immensely all along. I also express my sincere gratitude to the teaching and non-teaching staff of our College for their cooperation and valuable services that they have rendered. I must thank my wife Nemika and daughter Dikshita as they have to bear much pain as I was not in a position to pay proper attention to them for a long time because of my work. Last but not the least we also thank Mr. Kailash Rajkhowa and his team of Krantikaal Prakashan for undertaking the responsibility of publishing this volume and Hemanta Kumar Bora for cover designing.

December, 2011   *Ranjit Barua*

1 Understanding Conflict in Northeast India for National Integration

Prof. Anuradha Dutta

I

Peace and conflict research assumes that conflicts are expression of opposing interest, characteristics of modern societies and so are endemic to modern societies. Johan Galtung, the founder of Peace Research Institute, Oslo rightly proposed that conflict can be viewed as a triangle with contradiction, attitude and behaviour at its point- contradiction is underlying condition of conflict, attitude includes parties' perception of each other and behaviour includes co-operation and coercion. Galtung argued that conflict resolution must involve all three components of the triangle - de-escalation of violent behavior, a change in attitude and a transformation in the relationship or clashing interest that are at the core of the conflict structure. However, the most basic distinction in armed conflict literature has been between intra state conflict (international conflict taking place between states) and inter-state conflict (taking place within states), the later being per se the order of the day in most countries across the globe today.

In today's globalised world, organized violence has yet again taken a new form that differs from classic inter-state war or civil wars of the past. These new wars are fought by armed networks

including paramilitary groups, terrorist cells, organized criminal groups, private military companies and mercenaries and are the result of two inter-related processes of globalization- the emergence of global weapons' market and erosion of the capability of governments to uphold the monopoly of violence. The nineteenth and early twentieth century world in fact did not see the emergence of any new peaceful order; rather civil wars emerged in the twentieth century as an even more acute form of conflict. According to some estimates, five times more people have died in civil wars than in inter-state wars in the post world war era. States today are also undermined by weakened government legitimacy as globalization reduces the financial resources available in the state exchequer to exercise power to its fullest.

A survey of ninety two armed conflicts during the period 1945-89 revealed that most of the wars in today's world are because of ethnic hostilities- politics of exclusion and discrimination along ethnic lines which very often than not leads to ethnic political mobilization and spiraling of conflict. Brian Min and Andreas Winmar have rightly stated that:

"The process associated with the formation of the nation state, particularly over the national character of the state and decision about whom to include or exclude from the privileged state-owning nation have been the source of many of the world's conflict and represent the basis upon which many of today's conflict unfold."

II

Northeast India in History: A Review

Northeast India today comprises of the eight states of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura. The region is linked with the Indian heartland through the 21 km wide Siliguri Corridor, which is commonly known as the Chicken Neck, created by the Radcliff Line, the boundary drawn by the British colonial administration before they departed from India in 1947. After India attained independence, the region effectively became land locked, sharing borders with Nepal, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Burma and China further increasing its isolation and resulting in increased spatial discrimination at the hands of the newly formed Indian State.

The British policy was such that they segregated the tribal population into the excluded areas that were administered differently. As a result, the issue of development of the tribal areas was taken up differently by the colonial policies. The Inner Line system prohibited the entry of outsiders into these areas unless they obtained permission from the government. This created a difference between the tribal areas and the plains. The Simon Commission in the year 1929 noted that the tribes in the region do not ask for self determination but for security of land tenure, freedom in the pursuit of the traditional method of livelihood and reasonable exercise in their customs.

The establishment of the British rule and the setting up of a new administrative system also brought a number of persons in different roles such as administrators, tea garden labourers, cultivators from different parts of India as a result of which cultural diversity of the area became even more complex. When the British annexed Assam, their control over the Brahmaputra valley witnessed large scale officially sponsored migration from the rest of India. Bengalis came as white collar workers, Bihari Muslims for farming, tribal from Orissa and Santhals as labour, Nepalese for coal mining etc. Beside the launching of new economic activities, such as tea plantation and the beginning of extractive industries saw the pouring in of waves of immigrants from East Bengal, especially the land hungry Muslims which threatened the very identity of Assamese community in her own land.

The above two major demographic changes during the period 1874-1905 as quoted by Dr Amalendu Guha, led to a shift in the ethnic composition and change in the spatial distribution of the population. The policy of isolation got rooted in the region only to germinate conflict in its most pertinent form in times to come.

III

Conflict and Northeast India

Even after India got her independence the isolationist policies persisted– no attempt whatsoever was made by the civil society organizations of the so called mainstream India to include the isolated groups. The result is bare thread.

Throughout the post independence era, the demands for autonomy were viewed by the Government as potential threat for secession, and therefore the Government tried handling the demands accordingly. However, in Assam in the region, as argued by Dr Sandhya Goswami :

".... The articulation of self-identity arrived at sooner than elsewhere in the Northeast. This awakening in Assam manifests itself in the form of two-track movement in which nationalism and sub-nationalism move together".

Amidst these demands for security, the hill districts of Assam eventually became separate states of Nagaland, Meghalaya and Mizoram.

Many of these movements soon went on to become full-blown armed insurgencies, the most prominent ones being the ULFA (United Liberation Front of Assam), PLA (Manipur Peoples Liberation Army), National Socialist Council of Nagalim (NSCN) to name a few. Today the region counts around 30 major insurgent outfits along with numerous smaller ones. With this background if one examines the causes of conflict in the region, one can very well justify Pradip Phanjoubam's argument that :

"Insurgencies result because of the non-compatibility of the identities of ethnic groups with that of larger national identity. This is when sub-nationalities or ethnic groups being to see larger national identity as anathema to their own".

Even after independence, politics of Assam was guided by the fear of becoming a linguistic minority and an ethnic minority in their own land. The problem of immigration led to the Assam Movement

which finally saw the signing of the Assam Accord, which however, also failed to solve the problem. This rather led to the radicalization of the Assamese nationalism giving it a separatist tendency. At the same time, the Bodos demanded separate state and took up violent means. The Bodo separation is a testimony to the failure of the Assamese leadership in realizing the Assamese hegemony. Thus, it was the leaders of the Assam Movement themselves who contributed to the process of ethnisization of the Assam politics.

Ethnic conflict in Northeast India originally grew essentially through primordial affection. Language has always been the centre stage of ethnic turmoil. As the Bodo Sahitya Sabha and PTCA was successful in making the Bodo language the medium of instruction, so also the Mising Sahitya Sabha succeeded in introducing Mising as one of the languages to be taught. Thus in the last decades of the last century, movements for autonomy got prominence in political discourse in the region.

The autonomous districts in Assam, formed under the auspices of the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution are rather showpieces of the state's capacity to address indigenous ethnic aspiration in the Northeast. Despite the creation of several new states and territorially defined autonomous councils, different tribes in Northeast India continue to demand the creation of new states and autonomous councils under twin impression that adequate share of political power is a necessary condition for their development and for retaining their identity.

When autonomy was granted based on the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution there was large space between the individual and the village on one hand, and the state on the other. But the experiences of the last few decades have shown that the different ethnic groups in the region have not been able to achieve their dream of political autonomy. Today, the Bodos are divided into several political groups and parties following contradictory strategies to achieve their dream of political autonomy. In other places as in

Mizoram, the minorities like the Chakmas and Reangs feel discriminated and are seeking further autonomy. In Assam, the two hill districts of Karbi Anglong and North Cachar (Dima Hasao) too are demanding an autonomous state under Article 244A of the Constitution.

At times autonomous councils have been formed to gain political mileage. The passage of the Thengal Kachari Autonomous Council Bill 2005 is one such example. The formation of the Thengal Kachari Autonomous Council is very different from the formation of the Bodoland Autonomous Council and Autonomous Council for the Mising, Rabhas, Tiwas, Sonowal Kacharis and the Deworis. Each of these was preceded by prolonged agitations though not violent as that of the Bodos which has not been the case with the Thengal Kacharis. This Bill was passed in the State Assembly merely two days after an agreement was reached with the Thengal Kachari Autonomous Council Demand Committee.

Given the different hue of these conflicts, huge chunks of the region like Manipur, Nagaland and many parts of Assam have come under the draconian laws- the Armed Forces Special Powers Act and the Disturbed Areas Act for more than two decades now. Insurgent groups and terrorist cells have aggravated the situation. The state actors too are not far off. These very state actors have been violating human rights in the guise of 'fighting terror'. In fact, the special power granted to the armed forces in the Northeast region began to be exercised to such an extent that laws were formulated subsequently to give this very special power a legal sanction. Normal social and economic order has been compromised and in most cases displaced with constant threat and anxiety. In certain situation, psychological effect of these conflicts have been so strong that it has led to many a disastrous consequences- drug addiction, increased female headed households, leading to taking up prostitution as a means of livelihood, post trauma stress without any kind of support etc.

IV
Assessing a Way out of Conflict for Integration in Northeast India

Analysis of the process of governance in the region shows that Government of India's process of national integration, state building and democratic consolidation have aggravated the conflict scenario in the Northeast region. The politico-administrative arrangements made by the centre have not been successful. These are lacking credibility. It is even alleged that it is "a mere platform for aspiring politicians who nurture ambitions to contest assembly polls in the future". Moreover, this has created another group of politicians who are found to be involved in fulfilling their own interest rather than development of their areas. For instance, the introduction of the Sixth Schedule Autonomous Councils (currently there are ten such Councils in the region and many more demanding such status) ended up creating multiple power centres instead of bringing in a genuine process of democratization or autonomy in the region. Moreover, Para 12(A) of the Sixth Schedule clearly states that whenever there is a conflict of interest between the District Councils and the state legislature, the later would prevail.

Autonomy and autonomous institutions too have not delivered justice. As long as autonomy arrangements are seen as tools to manage the political demands of people in the region, there will always be problems for its implementation. For in the very instance, when one ethnic group is promised autonomy there will be others who would claim to be aggrieved by the arrangement. One would find this to be a regular feature in Northeast India.

Conflict resolution is an extremely challenging job as the nature of conflict varies from case to case. Any attempt to resolve conflict needs acquaintance thoroughly not only with the history of the conflict but its political, social and economic roots as well. For proper resolution of any conflict, there must be a just solution for both the parties. It has to be freely acceptable to all. The ethnic problems are less complicated but not easy to solve.

According to Ashid Kolas, three different types of responses to conflict in Northeast have been applied by the Indian Government. Firstly, the Government has used both military and paramilitary forces with the aim to eradicate insurgency by gradually countering the insurgents in the region with the help of countries like Bhutan and Myanmar. Secondly, conflict resolution has been tried at through negotiations, signing of accords and cease fire agreements. Cease fire agreements have been short term and on entering cease fire agreements, the armed groups are literally confined to designated camps. But no strategy on disarmament of the groups in cease fire has been adopted so far. Hence the policy has not been successful. In fact, it has created division in the armed groups. No scheme has been adopted to reintegrate these groups into the mainstream. Thirdly, the Government has gone for packages of development. According to this strategy, the understanding has been that insurgency is best tackled by ensuring economic development. Despite these efforts conflict in the region continues to persist.

Modernization tends to increase heterogeneity In Northeast India. The process follows a set pattern where groups have been found to have consolidated around issues of cultural unity leading to engagement with the state for some concessions resulting in nothing but intractability and violence. However, the case of peaceful Mizoram in Northeast India today does provide lessons for conflict resolution, be it through surrender policy for insurgents, availing the service of indigenous mediator, empathizing with the conflicting actors, limited use of force etc. Right set of measures can lead to the destabilizing forces getting integrated with the mainstream populace of the country.

■■■■■

2   Origins of Ethnicity and Its Ramifications

Prof. Abu Nasar Saied Ahmed

> So shall you hear to yet unknown world
> How these things come about so shall you hear
> Of carnal bloody, and unnatural acts,
> Of accidental judgments, casual slaughters,
> Of deaths put on by cunning and forced cause,
> And, in the upshot, purposes mistook
> Fall'n on the inventors' death...
> *—William Shakespeare*

These prophetic words of Horatio have outlived centuries to prove their relevance till today. It may be an extremely painful task to prepare a list of bloody carnages that took place in the last century in the quest of "rightful existence" of man and his race, be it for the Nazi's so called racial superiority in Germany, be it in Nigeria where Igbo community's search for homeland in 1960 soon after the independence led to the destruction of thousands of lives, be it in former Yugoslavia where the Serbs outraged the world by undertaking ruthless pogrom of the Bosnian Muslims, be it ethnic war between the Hutus and the Tutsis in 1994 leading to the massacre of more than one million people in just 10 days, and many more, but the fact

remains that ethnic and primordial divisions have been sharpened in the recent years to make the world a dangerous place to live. Most of the violent manifestations of man's quest for a space and share of economic and political power destabilizing peace and just society center around the issue of ethnicity.

Eminent sociologist Robert Park wrote in 1926 that ethnicity would disappear in the 20th century when the process of modernization would overtake the pre-modern affiliations to ethnicity as the basis of human consciousness. He argued that certain formidable forces like trade, migration, new communication technologies and entertainment media, such as cinema and music, would dismantle the primordial barriers, ethnic prejudices and boundaries. To him these factors would "enforce new contacts and result in new forms of competition and of conflict. But out of this confusion and ferment new and more intimate forms of association will arise". He foresaw the emergence of a melting pot - both at local and global levels which would have magical impact on race relations. The people of the world would be integrated into a broad stream of shared culture and social life. He concluded "Everywhere there is competition and conflict, but everywhere the intimacies which participation in a common life enforces have created new accommodation and relations which once merely formal and utilitarian have become personal and human". Though not a Marxist, Richard Park believed that class conflict and tension would supersede the racial and ethnic conflicts. Even Max Weber agreed that the importance of ethnicity was bound to decline. To him rationalization of human action and organization was the cornerstone of modernity, and ethnicity in contrast was based on communal and primordial relationship. With the progress of civilization and "rationally-regulated" social life, the communally regulate relationship and ethnic-centric emotions, tensions and conflicts will not survive for a long time.

However, the expected decline of ethnicity and racial attachment did not take place, despite the progress of modernity, global process of urbanization, significant growth in economy,

international trade, speedy developments in communication technology, industrialization, institutional changes and transformation of human life and society in the context of globalization. Rather, the last century came be known as century of ethnicity making a mockery of the prophecies and predictions of celebrated thinkers. The last quarter of the 20th century witnessed resurgence of ethnicity in various parts of the world taking toll of millions of people. Ethnicity became the core of politics in various countries across the world, posing to be a real challenge to national integration of many new born countries and to international understanding.

Why has this happened? There are many explanations. One of the arguments advanced to give an answer to the question is that some of the Western countries fanned the negative aspects of ethnicity to combat communism. It may be relevant to mention that soon after World War II, the wartime collaboration between the United States and the Soviet Union turned into peace time hostility. With the death of President Franklin D. Roosevelt just before the end of the War, there was change in the US foreign policy. The new President found that at the end of the War, half of Europe came under communism. All the East European countries - Albania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Yugoslavia - came under communism. The Soviet Union deployed 1.6 million highly trained Red Army in Eastern Europe. It was a part of its strategy to ensure that this part of Europe would never be turned into a "corridor of invasion" by the Western powers against this communist country. The United States took this development as a calculated threat of the communists to the free world.

It was George F. Kennan, then serving as US diplomat in Moscow, sent a long telegram to the US State Department in February 1946 in which he argued that the Soviet Union was an over extended empire occupying one-seventh of the total land of the earth. It could be weakened and eventually dismantled if the numerous ethnic communities could be made aware of their separate identities which were quite different from the Russian. One day they would revolt

against the rulers in Moscow and that would lead to the dissolution of the Soviet empire. The long telegram was followed by the publication of a well-articulated article of 'Mr. X' in Foreign Affairs in July 1947 entitled "The Sources of Soviet Conduct". The author of the article was no other than George Kennan himself. The article contained the theoretical details of the future plan of action to arouse ethnic assertion sentiments in Eastern Europe and inside the Soviet Union. The most notable step taken in this direction was the setting up the Radio Free Europe launched in February 1948 from West Germany. It started programmes to convey the message of ethnicity to the people of various shades and historical differences - you are Uzbeks and not Russians, you are a Tajik not a Russian, you are a Hungarian not a Russian; you have a glorious past, you have different culture, language, history, tradition and geographic identity which cannot be undermined and subjected by militarily powerful Russian, and you have the right to become independent once again. The basic idea behind all this is to weaken the mighty Soviet Union from within. There were revolts within the Soviet empire. There was anti-Soviet uprising in East Berlin in June. Similar revolt took place in Poland in June 1956. A few months later anti-Soviet revolution took place in Hungary in October 1956. Czechoslovakia followed it in August 1968. All were crushed by the Soviet army. But the ethnic communities continued to harbor the hope that one day they would be free from the Soviet control. It took time, but it happened. All the East European countries came out of the Soviet control by 1991. The mighty Soviet Union crumbled like a house of cards. The very exercise of fanning the ethnic separatism and assertion played a crucial role in the process of disintegration of the Soviet empire.

The ethnic movements did not remain confined to the Soviet sphere of influence. The wind of political aspiration within the framework of ethnicity engulfed other parts of the world. Every community wanted a space in the political arrangements within the territorial and political domain of larger frame. This was the result of de-basketing the communities from the larger space of nation-state.

Leaving aside the examples elsewhere, one can cite hundreds of such examples of communities striving to assert their ethnic identities in the quest of getting separate political space for them. Like most of such ethnic movements in different parts of the world, India too experienced ethnic-based movements, some of which are for autonomy and others for secession from the Indian Union. Such movements, most of which are armed and violent, put enormous stress and strain on the nation-state. In this process, the civil society too faced huge and unmitigated problems of human rights violation committed by the state and the armed groups. It is argued that many of these are the direct ramification of ethnicity when taken as a vehicle for self-aggrandizement of self-seeking leadership at the cost of masses. Others hold that where power is not equally shared among all social groups, there is social in-equilibrium and hence social tension. When ethnic communities are marginalized, sidelined and discriminated, and when at some point of time they become aware of it, the consequences are often foretold. The syndrome of "we" and "they" takes place leading to dramatic transformation of the political and social arrangements, as experienced in India's Nort-East, which has been drawing much attention of academia, policy planners and also political actors.

It is also argued that ethnicity may not be always viewed from negative perspective. If ethnicity is beholden within the perspective of celebrated diversity, and nations learn not only to live together but also enjoy its benefits so profoundly associated with the positive side of the concept, ethnicity is a source of strength and not a weakness. As English poet John Donne wrote "No man is an island", no community is insular in its existence. Those who do not see the writings on the wall are doomed. Whatever may be the origins of ethnicity as socio-political wave, one has to bear in mind that the forces of economic interactions among communities, markets and states will level many of the primordial definitions and boundaries paving the way for the foundation of a new civilization based on universalism having infinite capacity to be little particularism to the lowest ebb.

■■■■■

Post-colonial State, Bodo Identity Movement and Marginalization of the Adivasis of Lower Assam

Dr. Subhash Barman, Ms. Dipanjali Devi

The Assamese society has emerged as a multi-ethnic, multi-racial, multi-religious and multilingual society since historical period. At different times many ethnic groups came to Assam and since then they have been living in harmony forming the larger Assamese Society as we call it today. Among these communities some are lagging far behind the ruling dominant communities. Some communities have been marginalized by colonial state and their marginalization continued even during post-colonial period. The post colonial state has been insensitive towards the socio-economic development of such community. One such socio-economically marginalized community is the Adivasis of Assam; the vulnerable situation of the community has become visible in the course of Bodo identity movement. Since colonial period the community has not been given a place of dignity in the larger Assamese society and the attitude has been continuing even during post-colonial period.

Marginalized Group and Culture of Silence

Overriding concern with reduction of poverty and inequality among the people, the current thinking of development locates individuals at the centre stage. These are important issues of human life. But they neglect a vital dimension of human well-being and social stability i.e. the group dimension (Stewart 2008). Group membership is an inherent part of human life that makes up the identity or multiple identities of individuals. If group inequality persists, then individual within the depressed group may be handicapped and therefore cannot make the contribution to their self and society's prosperity that they otherwise could have. For example, if one group has less access to education than another, children within that group will not acquire the human resources that other of equal merit do, and not only the individuals but also society will suffer. In multi-ethnic society, each ethnic group and community seeks some basic form of self-esteem, a sense of self-respect, dignity, honour, or recognition. Many ethnic groups in multi-ethnic society that have a profound sense of their own worth suffer from serious cultural confusion when they come in contact with relatively advanced ethnic groups. Due to the significance attached to material values in developed nations, worthiness and esteem are nowadays increasingly conferred only on those groups that are in an advantageous position so far resources are concern. Danish Goulet observed, "The relevant point is that underdevelopment is the lot of the majority of the world's population. As long as esteem or respect was dispensed on grounds other than material achievements, it was possible to resign oneself to poverty without feeling disdained. Conversely, once the prevailing image of the better life includes material welfare as one of the essential ingredients it becomes difficult for the materially 'underdeveloped' to feel respected or esteemed... Nowadays the Third World seeks development in order to gain the esteem which is denied to societies living in a state of disgraceful 'underdevelopment'... Development is legitimized as a goal because it is an important, perhaps even an indispensable, way of gaining esteem." (Goulet 1971:89-90) What happens to the group to which an individual belongs may affect that individual's welfare directly, i.e. individual welfare depends not just on a person's own circumstances but the prestige and well being of the group with which he identifies.

Due to their lack of grip over power instruments or access to and control over media these ethnic groups find no other way but to subject themselves to the hegemony of the dominant groups of the region in which they live. "Self-depreciation is another characteristic of the oppressed, which derives from their internalization of the opinion the oppressors hold of them. So often do they hear that they are good for nothing, know nothing and are incapable of learning anything---- that they are sick, lazy, and unproductive ----- that in the end they become convinced of their own unfitness." (Freire 1992:38-39) Centuries of social, economic and political domination may create a situation where critical awareness and response have become difficult for them. In the process, the Adivasis lost their regenerative capacity and were virtually silenced.

Assamese Nationality Formation Process and the Adivasis

The Adivasis were forced-migrants of colonial regime. The colonial land revenue policy, forest policy, *Diku* etc. had marginalized them in their historic homeland i.e. Jharkhand and surrounding areas. Alienated from their agricultural land and other sources of livelihood they were forced to leave their homeland in search of livelihood in somewhere else. The colonial political economy had uprooted them in their traditional homeland and was resettled in new colonial ventures i.e. tea plantations. Along with tea plantations labourer, a large number of Adivasi peasants migrated as ordinary peasants. Some of them had settled down in lower Assam in the foothills of Bhutan. Since the second half of nineteenth century they have been living in Assam accepting the later as their own home. The Adivasis has become an inseparable part of the Assamese society since the colonial period. But, the Assamese nationality formation process has failed to accommodate them by giving them a share of dignity. For an in-depth understanding of the present status of Adivasis in the Assamese society it is necessary to comprehend the emerging class structure and socio-economic dynamics of colonial Assam. Besides, an enquiry into the economic interest, source of income and social roots of the

Asamiya middle class is crucial for understanding their attitude towards the Adivasis in historical perspective. The *Asamiya* middle class though was not a ruling class in the colonial period; it was still the most dominant class in the Assamese society. The dominance becomes visible from the last part of the nineteenth century and has become more and more apparent in the twentieth century, very significantly during the post-colonial period. The accounts of freedom movement reflect that by the time colonial rule ended, the value premises of the *Asamiya* middle class acquired almost universal character in the Assamese society. Thus, the ideological supremacy of the *Asamiya* middle class began to be established from about the last decades of the nineteenth century, continued to hold its sway in the post-colonial period. And even in present day Assam, social and political values are set to a great extent by the ideological preferences of the middle class.

The *Asamiya* middle class was not an entity of homogeneous class rather it was heterogeneous in nature. The *Asamiya* middle class had their moorings in villages. "The middle class, however, had very crucial links with the rural life of Assam. This was because directly or indirectly, the Assamese middle class had links with the agrarian sector. Many of these middle class men, as soon as they had some money would buy agricultural land." (Sharma 1990:108) The *Asamiya* middle class included a small group of educated and enterprising tea-planters, garden-workers or *babus*, land owners, *satradhikars*, colonial officials and clerks, *mauzadars*, *choudhuris*, lawyers etc. According to Gohain (1985: 80-81), the sources of income of the Assamese middle class were government services and garden jobs and *mauzadaris*. Since colonial period, along with the landless agricultural labourers who migrated from erstwhile East Bengal, the tea-plantation labourers, largest part of who were ex-displaced of Jharkhand have been living at the bottom of the Assamese society.

The colonial rulers and the planters backed by the colonial state and capital were obviously at the top of the class

structure in colonial Assam. Next to them in the hierarchy, but much below the British ruling group, stood a very few *Asamiya* planters and Marawari traders. Next to them stood a relatively large Bengali middle class and a small Asamiya middle class and some petty traders in towns. The zaminders in Goalpara district and mauzadars in the rest of the Brahmaputra Valley form the rural gentry. Most of the member of the emerging *Asamiya* middle class largely belonged to the *Asamiya* high castes, and had their rural link as absentee landlords. Below them stood the fragmented peasantry– medium and small. The landless agricultural labourers, who migrated from East Bengal, peasants and the tea-plantation labourers, most of whom were the tribals from Jharkhand region, stood virtually at the bottom of class structure of colonial Assam. (Hussain 1993:48-49)

The middle class Assamese appear to have laid utmost stress on issues concerning material interests of its own class than those of the masses in general. During the course of freedom struggle the leadership of the movement did not give adequate importance to the aspirations of the Adivasis. In spite of insensitive attitude of the Congress leadership, the exploited and oppressed tea labourers took active part in India's struggle for independence. A number of tea labourers sacrificed their lives for the cause of independence. Thus, the leaders of the national movement did not utilize the historic opportunity to unite the marginalized Adivasis in their struggle against foreign clutches.

Imagined Enemy: the Bodo Identity Movement and the Adivasis

Though the end of colonial rule generated new hopes and aspirations among the Adivasis of Assam but in reality their socio-economic conditions remain unchanged. In spite of the end of colonial rule, the exploitation and oppression of the Adivasis continued both

in old and modified ways. Independence from colonial rule has brought no tangible change for them, perhaps except some kind of presence in the representative bodies. In every sphere the Adivasis are lagging behind the larger Assamese society. The Adivasis, after more than hundred and fifty years of living in Assam, have remained socio-economically one of the most stagnant communities. Their vulnerability became most conspicuous during the course of Bodo Movement.

The Bodo, with 8% of the total population of the state, is numerically the largest tribal community of Assam. With the other groups of the larger Assamese society, the Bodos played an important role in the freedom struggle. Like the other tribal groups Bodos are also one of the most oppressed communities of Assam. The Bodos have become conscious about their position and have gradually built up a movement based on ethnic identity. "A sense of identity can be a source not merely of pride and joy, but also of strength and confidence. It is not surprising that the idea of identity receives such widespread admiration, from popular advocacy of loving your neighbour to high theories of social capital and of communitarian self definition." (Sen 2006:1) The binding agent may be 'ethnicity' (generally associated with a common history, language, mores), or religion, or race, region or even class.

On the other hand, identity may lead to exclusivist, solitarist approach to human identity and that might be behind many, perhaps most, conflicts of present day. Ethnic identity is itself a variable rather than a fixed or 'given' disposition. Anthropologists and historians have in recent years focussed on the way history and cultural symbols are manipulated in the creation of ethnic identities and traditions are invented and social realities constructed (Hobsbawm: 1983). 'Cultural' groups encompassing common cultural identities based on common behaviour and value is one of the most important identities. The reductionist approach of identifying people exclusively or primarily in terms of religion-based distinct and antagonistic

civilizations ignoring other relevant ways of seeing people themselves has breed enmity towards each other. Such conflicts come closer to Huntington's predicted 'clash of civilizations' (Huntington: 1996). In a historically multi-ethnic landscape as Assam, the emerging identity movements based on allegedly 'unique' often related to a particular territorial space is not only divisive in nature but also is divested from the shared, plural history of the region. Such identity movements have ignored the rights of 'other' groups and in the process the marginalised groups become victims of the situation.

Like all other identity movements, the Bodo Movement has gradually become a movement of 'us'-where the 'us' is all about homogeneity-- a homogeneity which sometimes given, sometimes invented amidst incomparable heterogeneity. For formation of nation/ nationality all available notions talk about cultural commonalities. And search for such commonalities frequently led to exclusivity and insularity and it terminates cultural exchanges and views every group outside the exclusivity as 'the other'. "A nation/ nationality begin its journey by shedding all the other from its purview thereby viewing and creating a number of cultural groups as the other and even an enemy. Then it starts looking for characteristics of the other in its own self and then shedding them. This shedding process then continues by excluding the weak, poor and marginalized. In the name of developing 'us', thus weak and marginal sections are displaced, evicted and expelled not just materially, but also from the frontier of its nationality."(Nag 2001:4754) A section of the Bodos, particularly the extremist elements viewed the non-Bodos of the area as the cause of all their ills. They started viewing the growing number of non Bodos as their contenders for cultivating wastelands and other resources. The demographic picture, particularly the denial of separate statehood by the Bhupinder Singh Committee on the ground of heterogeneous demographic character of the area disappointed the agitators. Under such circumstances the area witnessed a series of brutal violence.

"And very intelligently, the largely oppressed and marginalised and very importantly ex-displaced groups have been made target of such cleansing process. It must, however , be pointed out clearly that the common Bodo masses are not at all enthusiastic in the cleansing process; therefore , the armed militants took the responsibility of cleansing by using their foreign made sophisticated armament with minimal manpower." (Hussain 2000:6)

Even there was a time when slogan like *Bodoland for Bodos only* was raised. The Bodo Movement propelled unprecedented violence for a relatively longer period and even 'ethnic cleansing' process was started in the area. Massacre and severe conflict-induced internal displacement had destabilized the region.

Bhupinder Singh Committee Report

The government repression and unabated brutality pushed the movement to go underground and to develop extreme tendencies and it assumed violent character. Bomb blasting, kidnapping, burning of wooden bridges, removal of fish plate from railway, wanton killing, attack on people having faith to AGP and the PTCA became a day-today reality during that period. The emergence of Bodo Security Force under the Chairmanship of Ranjan Daimari to liberate Bodoland to maintain their distinct identity and civilization through armed struggle gave a new direction to the movement (Sentinel, 6th July 1992). The BSF terrorized the people of the area by killing 42 persons within 24 hours on 22nd and 23rd November 1992. Though the ABSU- Bodo Peoples' Action Committee (BPAC) very often condemned these violent activities and denied their relation with the militants but militant activities during bandhs proved that the militants supported the ABSU programmes. On the part of government, it invited the agitators for negotiations; tripartite talks that included the Central Government, the State Government and ABSU- BPAC were held for finding out a solution to the Bodo problem.

In the 8th tripartite talk of 13th September, 1990, the Union Government submitted a proposal that runs as follows, "On serious consideration of the Bodo problem, the Government of India proposes that a three member committee of experts may be set up to determine the area of Bodos and other plains tribes to the north of the river Brahmaputra and make recommendations to the autonomy, legislative administrative and financial power that may be given to them. This committee will consult all the groups concerned and submit its report within a period of forty five days to the Government of India." (Minutes of Tripartite Talks, dated 13th September, 1990)

On 25th February, 1991, the three members Expert Committee formed with Dr. Bhupinder Singh IAS (Retd.) as the Chairman of the Committee. The Expert Committee observed that total Scheduled Tribes population in the northern bank of the Brahmaputra is 16.31 lakhs out of which the number of non Bodo Scheduled Tribes is 5.24 lakhs. The reports and its recommendations were rejected by the Bodo leadership. In a memorandum submitted to the Prime Minister and Home Minister, they maintained that the *"Report can never meet the hopes and aspiration of the Bodos"* (The Assam Tribune, 14th April, 1992). In this context, it would be pertinent to mention here that the Bhupinder Singh Committee report focused on the fact that there was a practical defect of formation of a territory contiguous Bodoland as the Bodos do not constitute absolute majority in the proposed Bodoland. But the Bodo leadership was not prepared to accept such formula and remained adamant to their demand for a separate state. It demanded demarcation of 'Bodoland territory' and also submitted a list of 4653 villages for inclusion in the proposed Bodoland territory.

On the other hand the state government was not prepared to accept these demands. A series of negotiations were held between government and Bodo leaderships. Eventually on 20th February, 1993, the Memorandum of Settlement (MOS) was signed between Central, State government and the ABSU, BPAC leadership. The Memorandum of Settlement popularly known as Bodo Accord envisages the 'formation of the Bodoland Autonomous Council' (henceforth BAC), on the north bank of Brahmaputra comprising a contiguous area of 5186 square kilometers, from the river Sonkosh in the west to the Pachnoi in the east. Although the signing of the Bodo Accord brought new hope in Bodoland but not quite a few quarters lagged behind in rejecting the Accord. Eminent Bodo leader S. K. Bismutary observed that the "hopes and aspirations of the Bodo could not be realized unless there is a separate full fledged state of the Bodos." (The Sentinel, 8th November 1993) Moreover, the Assam government refused to hand over a huge area, comprising 2570 villages and some townships to Bodoland Autonomous Council and then Chief Minister Hiteswar Saikia justified government position by stating that "it would be unfair to the non Bodos who were a majority in many areas of the proposed Bodoland Council."(29 September 1993) Some areas had more than 50 per cent non Bodo population, comprising of Assamese Hindu, Muslims, migrant Muslims, Bengali Hindus, Santhals and Nepalis. In the BAC area, the Bodos do not constitute a simple majority. Thus the Accord failed to resolved the Bodo problem and "it was only a question of time when the Bodos will demand radical amendments and even statehood falling which joining hands with the Br. S. F., then at large, renew agitation vigorously to achieve their ultimate goal." (Barpujari,1998:100) And gradually the ABSU and Bodos lost confidence in the BAC and resumed their demand for separate Bodoland. The Br.S.F., later rechristened as National Democratic Front of Bodoland (henceforth NDFB) rejected the Accord and raised demand for a 'Soverign Bodohadot.' The NDFB termed the event of signing the treaty as 'historic blunder.' Eventually, the ABSU took concrete step to check the advance of the NDFB. And on 18th June1996, the Bodo Liberation Tiger Force (henceforth BLT) was formed with Hagrama Mahilary as its Chief. The BLT adopted its strategy of creating a separate Bodoland within the sovereign India.

both the Bodos and the Santhals, the lowest section of the Indian society." Thus, timely intervention on the part of the district administration and police could have saved lives and properties in both the districts. Another memorandum submitted to the Justice Haque Commission dated 5th February 1999, Mukut Singha Chutia, General Secretary, URMCA, stated, "Local administration including police were completely inactive during the period of violent incidents in the month of May, 1996. the sufferer sought police help, but police refused to protect the victims….they have stated that they approached the Officer In-Charge of the Sapkata Police Out Post (under Gossaigaon P/S) for protection and help and In-Charge refused to give any protection stating that he could not take any responsibility under the circumstances."

Most of the internally displaced persons of lower Assam are living in pathetic conditions in make-shift camps. The conditions of relief camps are dreadfully sub-human. Assistance in the form of food, medicine and shelter provided mostly by the State Government, and in certain cases by some NGOs, were absolutely inadequate. The government failed to provide adequate security to the IDPs taking shelter in relief camps located in remote areas of lower Assam. The state is usually represented by the majority and dominant groups and thus the marginalized groups have almost no access to political power within the existing structure. Displacement from once habitual residence has severe negative impact on the livelihood of the IDPs. The larger part of the IDPs of lower Assam was ordinary peasants and they earned their livelihood from agriculture. As the tension of conflict continued for a long period, it was difficult to continue their normal livelihood pursuits, i.e. cultivation in their fields and rebuilding their homesteads. Their main source of livelihood is cultivation in the field. But larger part of the victims had found that with displacement from their villages, their agricultural land was also occupied by 'others'. Moreover, they earned a good part of their livelihood from goat, poultry, pig etc. But once they were forced to leave their villages, they lost all those things vital to their livelihood.

Conflict-induced displacement has very severe impact on the lives of women. In the relief camps, absence of adequate provisions for women's privacy is a notable feature. So far the livelihood of women is concerned, it became more dangerous to go out of the camps for work as they are more vulnerable to rape and other atrocities. There are number of news reports of women trafficking from the IDP camps of lower Assam. Usually young girls and their parents are lured by the rosy prospect of employment outside the camps. Once they fell into the clutches of these traffickers, they are sent to different brothels and some of them even reached Mumbai, Haryana etc. Moreover, many displaced women of lower Assam have resorted to prostitution along the National Highway No.37. Another group of worst victims of ethnic conflict is children. Malnutrition among the children is very high. Some of these children passed their complete childhood in the relief camps and thus lost their childhood. Besides, the health facilities provided by the Government have been absolutely inadequate. So far as rehabilitation of the Adivasi IDPs is concerned, both the Government and larger Assamese society have been insensitive. Further, some of the IDPs have been identified as encroacher of the reserved forests. It has posed another challenge to their very identity. The Government has not shown its commitment towards these IDPs. The United Nations Guiding Principles on Internally Displaced Persons have given a framework for rehabilitating and taking care of the displaced. But in this part of the world, such legal and ethical framework has failed to penetrate into the heart of the policy makers. Thus the identity movement of the Bodos, an oppressed community, has further marginalized another oppressed community, the Adivasis without acknowledging the fact that Assam is a shared homeland.

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4 | Identity Crisis, Insurgency, Migration and Ethnic Conflict in Northeast India

Sanjit Muchahary, Rajesh Deb Barman

Introduction

Northeast India consists of eight states - Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura and Sikkim. This region is linked with India's heartland through the 21 k.ms wide Siliguri Corridor, which is also known as *Chicken's Neck*, created by the Radcliff Line, the boundary line drawn by the British colonial administration before they departed from India in 1947[1]. The Northeast region borders four countries, viz. China and Bhutan on its North, Myanmar on its East, Bangladesh on its South and West. It has an area of 2.6 lakh square kms (7.6% of India's total land area) while its population is more than 39 millions (2001).

Ethnic group is a social group having common national and cultural tradition. Hence, ethnic group or ethnicity signifies the distinct cultural features based on language, religion, national origin, dietary practices and a sense of common historical heritage or other distinctive cultural traits[2]. Unlike racial characteristics ethnic differences are culturally learnt, and not genetically inherited[3].

Social exclusion, identity crisis and insurgency movement in Northeast India

Northeast India is politically vital and strategically vulnerable region of India. Diversities in terms of Mongoloid ethnic origins, linguistic origin, cultural tradition and religious pluralism characterize the region.

The British colonial regime, at the outset, applied the policy of non-intervention in Northeast India[4]. Two British administrators J.H. Hutton and N.E. Parry advocated for separation of hill areas from general administrative scheme. "The Inner Line" in hill areas, beyond which no individual could pass without a license, was introduced in 1873. Under the provision of Government of India Act, 1935, the British administration declared most of the hill areas as "Excluded Areas". Most of the tribal communities remained cut off from social and political development taking place elsewhere in India. Local tribal people resisted colonial interference and they frequently attacked British posts. Their resistances were depicted as 'raids' and 'uprisings'[5]. Thus, the seeds of tribal-non-tribal; hills-plains; inter-tribal; and intra-tribal conflicts were deep-rooted during the colonial regime and pre-independence period. However, following independence, the old policy of maintaining status quo and isolation designed by British administration were replaced by a policy of development and integration. The post-independence period, in fact, witnessed acceleration in the pace of social transformation and modernization of different tribal groups, and their effective induction for respective tribal identities or separate political identities within the framework of the nation-state. Thus in post-independence period, social formations became more vivid, functional and effective in turning tribes, castes and language groups into ethnic blocks.

The phenomenon of ethnic identity crisis is an interior component of socio-political reality of the multi-ethnic states in Northeastern region. The issues of tribal identity crisis in the region have transcended other problems and become one of the major factor of politics[6].

Language and culture have always been in the centre-stage of ethnic turmoil in Northeast India. The tribes had not been fixed or static category in those early times and hence there were many instances of change from tribal to non-tribal status. This brought the issues of identity crisis of ethnic tribes and they suffered from fear of losing their identity. The language/script movement emerged among several ethnic groups in Assam and the Bodos and the Misings ultimately succeeded in making their languages the medium of instruction in schools (Bodo language in 1963 upto secondary level and Mising language in 1987 at primary level). The rejection of Assamese script by the Bodos, Misings and other tribes in Assam dismayed the Assamese, who thought that without their tribal counterpart they might become minority overwhelmed by the Bengali speaking population.

The broad racial difference between India and its Northeast and the unique geographical link contributed to a sense of alienation, a feeling of 'otherness' that subsequently gave rise to a political culture of violent separatism. After independence of India, several ethnic groups had made effective use of the factors of ethnicity and regionalism as the basis of ethnic rage, democratic struggle for self-rule and greater autonomy, and violent militant actions. Many other factors such as frontier location, economic negligence, influx of infiltrators and minority syndrome led to movement of separatism among the communities. The success story of attaining 'statehood' and greater economic autonomy by the Nagas and the Mizos, which changed their minority status to that of a majority status in respective hill-states, encouraged other tribes to raise similar demands.

Almost the entire Northeast region has been plagued by various ethnic movements since 1980s. Most of the movements were non-violent in their initial stages. But these movements gradually assumed militant character or transformed into insurgency. At present, there are reportedly more than thirty active insurgent groups operating in this region. National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN-IM, NSCN-K), United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA), National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) and People's Liberation Army (PLA) are the most prominent among them. However with the passes of time, the number and quantum of insurgent groups in the region have been increasing. Their demands range from 'autonomy' to 'complete secession'.

It is firmly believed by tribal militant groups that preservation of culture, language and religion can be possible having greater autonomy or separate statehood. In words of B. Dutta Ray, "The most important point in the quest for an identity has a distinct political motivation."[7] The militant groups which have the quest for identity rather retard the developmental process and bring substantial losses in the socio-economic dimensions. However, most of these groups operate with the idea that "political identity is presently more important than rapid economic development."[8]

Migration, Insurgency and Ethnic Conflict in Northeast India

Migration, though defined differently by various experts, demographers, geographers etc., is commonly understood as the permanent change of residence of all individuals or group of people over a significant distance due to either economic, socio-religious or political causes. Ernest Ravenstein, an English geographer and widely regarded as the earliest migration theorist, developed 'Laws of Migration' (1889) and concluded that migration is governed by 'push-pull' process, i.e. unfavorable conditions in one place 'push' people out, and favorable condition in an external location 'pull' them in.

With the advent of globalization, the world has become a global village. It has resulted in migration all over the world. Generally, we believe the validity of *urban-pull* and *rural-push* in the migration issues, which is applicable to both educated and uneducated labourers. However, the migration pattern of ethnic tribal communities is overwhelmingly *rural to rural*. They migrate to remote rural areas which is economically viable place for them when their habitat goes urbanized or semi-urbanized. This is because of lack of access to

education and hence they have inadaptability with respect to urbanization, advancement of science and technology, and globalization.

Immigration from the rest of the sub-continent is one of the prime issues of Northeast's conflict because of resultant fear of becoming minority by the indigenous people of the region. The steady population inflow from mainland India particularly from North India and illegal immigration from Bangladesh into the plains of Assam and Tripura accentuated the ethnic and religious diversity, and introduced a native-outsider dichotomy to the simmering conflict[9].

Bangladesh War resulted in more than 10 lakh refugees taking shelter in Assam who never returned[10]. The presence of illegal migrants from Bangladesh has changed the demographic profile of the Northeast and has threatened the very identity of indigenous people. The All Assam Students' Union (AASU) launched Anti-foreigners Movement in 1979 which ended with the 'Assam Accord' in August 15, 1985. The economic backwardness, declining standard of living and continued immigration into Assam along with unemployment had turned a section of Assamese youths against the federal government and they took up arms in their hands under the banner of ULFA for a 'Sovereign Asom'. Immigration has been a central issue since then in the politics of Assam.

The partition of India intensified migration pressure in Northeastern states particularly in Assam and Tripura. After partition, Assam was compelled to accept more than 6 lakh refugees by 1961. When the Hon'ble Chief Minister of Assam, Gopinath Bordoloi opposed it, the then Hon'ble Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru threatened him to deny developmental funds unless refugees were allowed to settle in Assam. Even the then Home Minister of India, Sardar Patel wanted Assam Government to distribute the reclaimable land evenly between landless Assamese peasants and Bangladeshi Hindu refugees. The Assamese opposed not only changing demographic profile but also exploitative economic policy

of New Delhi. The Refinery Movement raised this issue. ULFA was founded in April 1979 at Sibsagar, to liberate Assam. In Tripura, rapid demographic changes provoked young tribesmen to form insurgent groups like Tripura National Volunteers (TNV) in 1980s and All Tripura Tiger Force (ATTF), National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT) etc. later. These groups want to throw out immigrant settlers from the state, which are seen as responsible for physical, cultural, political and economic marginalization of the indigenous tribesmen.

The period of Assam Agitation (1979-1985) witnessed governmental instability, political turmoil and some of the worst ethnic violence in Assam including the infamous Nellie Massacre of 1983 where more than 3,000 people were killed. The 'Assam Accord' signed in August, 1985 failed to solve the issue of Bangladeshi migrants in Assam. It contributed to the strengthening of insurgency movement of ULFA..Bangladesh-India corridor is one of the top migration corridors in the world and an estimated inflow of 3.5 million immigrants in 2005 accords it the top slot in Asia (World Migration Report, 2005)[11]. Continued negligence of the issue by successive governments both at the centre and the state and 'vote-bank politics' have prevented any solution of this burning problem.

Land is another important factor in on-going conflicts in the region. Several armed groups claim exclusive right over their homeland and deny the fact that the region is a shared homeland of many ethnic groups. These armed groups often attack other rival tribes and immigrant settler communities as a part of strategy of ethnic cleansing to achieve ethnically compact homelands[12].

Ethnic conflict often results in large scale violence leading to loss of lives and damages of property and displacement of people. The ethnic conflict-induced internal displacement of population has become one of the most serious issues in the Northeast. There have been several major cases of conflict-induced internal displacement in the recent years like displacement of Hindus and Muslims of Bengali

descent from and within Assam, displacement of Adivasis (Tea tribes) and the Bodos in western Assam, displacement of Bengalis from Meghalaya (particularly from Shillong), displacement of Nagas, Kukis and Paites in Manipur, displacement of Brus (Reangs) from Mizoram, displacement of Chakmas from Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram, displacement of Karbis and Dimasas in Karbi Anglong District of Assam, displacement of Muslims within Assam (particularly in Barpeta and Udalguri Districts) and displacement of Rabhas and Garos across Assam-Meghalaya border.

The tale of these internally displaced persons (IDPs) who are victims of ethnic conflict is very tragic and their condition is very pathetic. Thousands of IDPs are living in relief camps for years without having basic amenities of life. The condition of Adivasis in relief camps of Kokrajhar District of Assam and Bru refugees displaced from Mizoram who are living in camps in Tripura are glaring example of this humanitarian crisis. It is surprising but tragic that the indigenous people, having close cultural affinities, suddenly take up arms against each other and become worst enemies. On many occasions, such ethnic conflicts have resulted in growth of insurgency among the victims. The emergence of Bru National Liberation Front (BNLF) from Bru-Mizo conflict, Adivasi Cobra Militants of Assam (ACMA), Birsa Commando Force (BCF) and Adivasi National Liberation Army (ANLA) from Bodo-Adivasi conflict, Kuki Liberation Army (KLA) from Naga-Kuki conflict etc. are some such examples.

Policy debates over Northeast India:

There are policy debates to find lasting solution to insurgency-induced conflicts in Northeast India. Maintenance of law and order may be necessary and effective as short term measure. But it cannot offer a permanent solution. Long term policy initiatives such as enforcement of rule of law, system of accountability and transparency in administration, good governance, socio-economic development etc. are also very important to break the cycle of violence.

Northeast India is extremely rich in terms of ethnic culture of different groups. Therefore, deep study of culture, languages and exchange programmes can be viewed as alternative policy options. In fact mutual exchange programmes among conflicting groups can come a long way in building trust and understanding. The 34th Indian Folklore Congress held in Kohima, Nagaland in December, 2010 has emphasized the infusion of folklore, folktales and other oral literatures among the ethnic groups to understand one another's culture. It also emphasized on serious academic study of folklore to understand and recognize core components of culture of a community or a tribe.

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5 | Understanding State Response to Ethnic Uprising in Indian Peripheries: A Contextual Discourse from North-East India

Dr. Shantanu Chakravarty, Barnali Sharma

Introduction

Ethnicity has been one of the most important, though complex phenomenon of modern period, more so in the post-cold war era. Many countries of South Asia have been experiencing the menace of ethnic uprising leading to separation in some form or other. Even the democratic countries having the politico-institutional mechanisms to accommodate the conflicting interests of multi-ethnic societies are not spared. There is hardly any region in South-Asia where ethno-national groups are not mobilized for greater autonomy of political and other nature. In most of the cases the demands for more autonomy has been transformed into movement for secessionism defying political and constitutional response initiated by the individual states. The prevailing ethnic turmoil has threatened not only the security of respective nation-state but also international security to a great extent.

Like most other countries of South Asia, ethnic upsurge in India's North-East is a manifestation of identity politics which poses a challenge to the authority of Indian state. Its genesis can be attributed to a variety of pattern variables. In the aftermath of its independence, India embarked into a policy of accommodating the ethnic minority

groups. But despite providing safeguards through politico-constitutional means, large pockets of ethnic discontent still continue to subsist. In the North-East the nature of this discontent assumes extreme form leading to secessionist activities engineered by a number of insurgent groups belonging to various ethnic identities. This challenge to a powerful nation-state like India has been countered further by adoption of extreme coercive measures either in the garb of democratic legislations or by the sheer use of military force.

Here an attempt has been made to assess the nature of state response towards resolution of conflict in the light of prevailing dynamics of ethnic uprising in North-East India. Efforts shall also be made to understand the existing fault lines. It would also try to find out ways and means of resolving the prevailing conflict.

Understanding Ethnicity

Ethnicity is a mobilization of minority social groups, who want to enhance their bargaining position vis-à-vis the dominant groups in the given context. Thus, ethnicity may be viewed both as a device as well as a focus for group mobilization by its leadership through the select use of ethnic symbols of socio-cultural and politico-economic purposes[1]. However, ethnic groups do not always belong to the minority communities in India. The cris-crossing of ethnic, linguistic and religious groups in India makes it extremely difficult to have a clear branding of any group as a majority or minority[2]. For example, the tribals are treated as minority, but in the North-Eastern Region they are in preponderant majority. Thus, ethnicity does not always represent the psyche of a minority group as has been demonstrated in the North-East where the tribals constitute majority in the immediate geo-political context.

Ethnicity also represents a response to a homogenization thrust inflicted by the project of modernity which entails a new mode of homogenizing and straight jacketing the whole world[3]. Most societies of the South, prior to their achieving independent statehood were described as 'ethnic patchworks' that, they were told, needed to be

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replaced by homogenous and centralized nation-state that would undertake to integrate all diversities and cultures into one common mould[4]. This, however, was carried too far and consequently ethnicity appears as a revolt against it. The recent assertion of ethnicity is directed against existing nation-states and the hegemony of the national centre. Ethnic compositions are claiming themselves to be 'new nationalities' and, thereby, striving to become new nation-states. Thus, ethnicity assumes a new political connotation, wherein the manifestation of the increasing politicization of the people is found in a new distinct expression of its own. The utilization of ethnic identity in politics is quite natural as the deepest loyalties in society are ethnic and in politician's terms, 'these are the elements of electoral arithmetic which makes elections sure things'[5].

Ethnicity in Indian Peripheries: The Case of North-East India

The North-East as a regional conglomeration shares its borders with Bangladesh, Bhutan, China and Myanmar. The geographical isolation from mainland India intensifies its emotional alienation from the rest of the country. The origin of current ethnic conflict in the North-East is deep rooted in the history. The problems in the region originated from the conditions set in place by the British in 1826. The annexation of the semi-tribal and semi-feudal society in undivided Assam by the British in 1826 brought about a change in the internal dynamics of the region by ending its long isolation from the mainstream. However, for the tribes of this region the isolation continued as they were not allowed to cross the boundaries set forth by their British Masters and establish contact with the rest of India[6]. The tribes were encouraged to retain their ethnic identities so that they remained separated from the plains people and the economic interest of the colonial masters in the plains was not disturbed. The Inner Line system which restricted the entry of the outsiders to the tribal areas further alienated the tribes from the rest of the region and the mainland India. Ironically, the same policy of isolating the tribes was followed even after independence of India. After the onset of

various armed revolts in this region, the post-colonial Indian state sought to intervene in the domestic feuds of the backward communities with the objective of 'bringing them into the mainstream' which backfired with almost the entire tribal population rising up against the Indian state[7]. Besides, the characterization of these people by their ethno-national identities as that of 'a tribal' further helped in widening the gulf between them and the non-tribals. This is one of the main factors behind the rise of various struggles for autonomy or secessionism in North-East India. In this region, one can also notice the initiation of infra-national movement which relates to identify expansion. There have been attempts to re-interpret, reiterate and elaborate traditional elements of culture to build up unified entities. Here, the need of the tribes is to create an identity for them or link up with other tribes to launch violent campaign against the outsiders. Furthermore, the partition has added to the woes of the North-East as its access to the sea was lost through the entry port at Chittagong. Thus, the traditional routes through East Pakistan got cut off, thereby multiplying the transportation cost incurred by the North-Eastern states. For example, in the days before partition, the distance from Agartala to Calcutta was only 400 kilometers whic has now been increased four times to 1600 kms., because the route goes all the way around Bangladesh, through the Siliguri Corridor, to Calcutta. This had adverse impact on the economy of the region. The cumulative impact of this as well as other factors is that, while the per capita income of Assam (Undivided) before 1947 was well above the national average, today it has fallen far below. The entire North-East has been transformed into an economically backward region, which it was not prior to 1947[8].

Thus, the geographic isolation of the North-East from mainland India along with its prevailing diversity on ethnic, linguistic and religious terms has made the region more conducive to outbreak of ethnic uprising and conflicts. What adds more to it has been the factor of demographic intrusion, especially in the post-1947 era. It is the

continuous migration of population across the border that has been primarily responsible for ethnic uprising as well as insurgency in the states of Tripura and Assam.

Ethnic Demands: A Prelude to Conflict

The rise of ethnicity is intractably linked to the kind of demands raised by various ethnic groups in various forms. The ethnic assertion is made initially through raising demands which represent the interest of individual ethnic groups. Partha. S. Ghosh[9] identifies three broad categories of ethnic demands in India. The first category includes all such demands which are located in the border regions and which often exhibits strong secessionist impulses. These impulses are predominantly found in most part of the North-East -especially in Nagaland, Assam and Mizoram. The second category consists of all such demands that are in favour of more autonomy through creation of new states within the Indian Union. The demand for creation of Bodoland is a case in point. The earlier instance of bifurcating Assam and creation of new states of Nagaland, Mizoram and Meghalaya highlights the same point. The third category of ethnic demand includes all those demands which seek more autonomy within the institutional framework of the existing states. It basically craves for more autonomy through the devolution and transfer of power in the form of separate institutional mechanism. The agitations of Karbis, Rabhas, Tiwas, etc. in Assam fall in this category.

The intensification of the ethnic demands led to mobilization of the concerned ethnic groups. The resultant assertion usually creates conflict situation. The state responses towards resolution of the ensuing conflict revolves around the adoption of a variety of methodologies. The initial response of the Indian state towards the ethnic unrest of the North-East was based on a faulty perception. Its theoretical frames rest too heavily on ideological postulates and co-relates such as multi-nationality and ideology of integrative universalism. New Delhi views the entire North-Eastern mosaic as a universal whole without differentiation of parts and talks of integration and assimilation

synonyms. However, integration and assimilation make different connotations. While integration unites all without destroying their separate identities, assimilation obliterates different eco-social systems and ethnic differences. As such, assimilation is a word not liked by the tribals of North-East India, and they are not yet ready to submerge their individual identity to Pan-Indian identity. The enforced Indianisation has created great amount of suspicion among the tribes and led to violent resistance and insurgency in the entire region.

State Response to Ethnicity

From the foregoing discussion, it is evident that right from the colonial period, India inherited the seeds of separateness and secessionism in the region, which led to all kinds of ethnic conflict and the growth of autonomy demands in the post-independent period As a response, all the tactics of statecraft, including the Kautilyan, have been employed. In short, the political process must be able to deal with conflict in the society which results from multiple diversities among its members.

Broadly, the response of the Indian state to ethnic tensions can be studied under the following two heads:

> **Response through coercive means**

The coercive means of the state refers to the military response where the Indian armed forces or that of any paramilitary forces has been involved. The Indian state has faced one of its challenges to its territorial integrity in the North-East in the form of various insurgent groups. The Naga insurgency which has its roots in the colonial period became a serious problem during fifties, when under the leadership of Phizo, the Naga National Council formed a parallel government in the Naga Hills. In 1956, the Indian Army was sent to deal with the insurgency and eventually through the creation of Nagaland, a state within the Indian Union, the problem was managed. But secessionist tendencies still remain with some groups. The armed forces had also been deployed in Assam and Manipur to contain the secessionist activities. The Indian state also used its coercive instruments to its

extreme in Mizoram during 1960s and 1970s to eliminate insurgency. With the use of force by the state machinery it is believed that the disgruntled elements can be suppressed and peace can be prevailed. Accordingly various acts like the Defence of India Rules, Preventive Detention Act, Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act etc. gave power to security forces to check terrorism. However, the strategy adopted by the state through coercive means to tackle ethnicity was considered as immoral, and the acts as repressive measures. The Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act of 1958, applicable to the states of the North-East, confers powers directly to the army to shoot to kill, use mortar and shell, blow up hide out, arrest as well as search civilians without warrants. The Act has, therefore, further alienated the people of this region from the political process of the country and a section of them regards the state as their enemy.

> **Politico-Constitutional response**

India being a democracy provides the fundamental institutional structure for the resolution of problems related to ethnicity. With regard to tribal areas which particularly suffered from a sense of neglect and which emitted a strong flavour of separateness, special constitutional provisions were conceived to ameliorate their grievances. Partha S. Ghosh[10] identified four broad categories of responses from the politico-constitutional angle –

1. State-centric response- Creation of New State

One of the most successful devices to meet the demands of autonomy has been the creation of new states. Article 2 and 3 of the Indian Constitution deals with the creation of new states and alteration of areas, boundaries or names of the existing states in order to manage the heterogeneity of India. Likewise new states are created in the affected areas to end ethnic problems and the people are granted a political identity within the Indian Union. The basic idea behind the creation of new states is to devolve powers of governance so as to make the units feel that their identity is being respected by the Indian state. Following this provision of the Constitution, new states in the

form of Nagaland, Mizoram and Meghalaya were created. However, in spite of the creation of new states in the North-East, the problem of separatism and insurgency has not been solved. In fact creation of new states has encouraged other ethnic groups to demand their own states. So creation of new states has not solved the problem rather it is creating more problems.

2. Intra-state centric response- Creation of Autonomous Councils through Legislation

The Government of Assam, through various legislations, has created a number of Autonomous Councils responding to the demands of various ethnic tribes. This includes the Mising Autonomous Council, Rabha-Hasong Autonomous Council, Thengal-Kachari Autonomous Council and Tiwa Autonomous Council. It is believed that if the local people of the conflicting area are given power to make certain policy decisions, they will be induced to participate in the political process of the country and their alienation from the political system will come to an end. For instance following the signing of the Assam Accord, the Bodo demand became more strident punctuated by sporadic violence. When the situation became unmanageable through administrative measures, a political solution was found in the form of creation of the Bodoland Autonomous Council (BAC) in May 1993. It was subsequently replaced by Bodoland Territorial Autonomous District (BTAD) and Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) in 2003.

3. Region (Inter-state) centric response- Creation of Regional Councils

The region-(inter-state) centric response includes five zonal councils in India created by the State Reorganization Commission to promote cooperation and coordination of policies. The most prominent of the zonal councils, however, is the North-Eastern Council (NEC) which was created in 1972, comprising all Chief Ministers and Governors of the region. In fact the NEC is actually the only

functional regional council. The prime objective of the Council has been tribal upliftment based on infrastructure development pertaining to transport, communication, power generation, and natural and human resources. However, the NEC experiment has been criticized on the ground that it is more politically oriented than development oriented.

4. Village or District-centric response- Tribal Autonomy under 5th and 6th Schedule

Tribal people constitute about 7 per cent of India's population located mostly in the North-East and central India. After independence the necessity was felt to take care of tribal welfare and to gradually bring them into the political mainstream without disturbing their traditional ways of life as far as possible. With these objectives special provisions were made in the Constitution in the form of Fifth and Sixth Schedule. The Fifth Schedule applies to the administration of Scheduled Areas by Tribes Advisory Councils in any part of India except the North-East. The basic idea is to provide for Union Government's intervention to ensure tribal welfare in case the concerned state government is not sufficiently sensitive to their developmental needs.

Keeping in view the special needs of the tribals of the North-East and their tribal identities the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution was conceived. On the recommendations of the Bordoloi Committee, the Constituent Assembly adopted the Sixth Schedule which enumerated provisions for creating Autonomous Districts and Autonomous District Councils so as to allow the tribes of this region to take care of their administrative and developmental affairs at the local level. Over the years, the following District Councils have been created-

1. The North Cachar Hills District (Assam)
2. The Karbi Anglong District (Assam)
3. Khasi Hills District (Meghalaya)
4. Jaintia Hills District (Meghalaya)
5. The Garo Hills District (Meghalaya)
6. Tripura Tribal Areas District (Tripura)
7. The Chakma District (Mizoram)
8. The Mara District (Mizoram), and
9. The Lai District (Mizoram).

5. Response through Ethnic Accords

Many of the ethnic demands in India have been settled through political bargaining and signing of accords between the leaders of the movements on the one hand and the central or the state government on the other. During Rajiv Gandhi's regime three accords were signed, namely, the Assam Accord, the Mizo Accord, and Accord with TNV in Tripura to put an end to the prevailing ethnic crisis in Assam, Mizoram and Tripura respectively.

Apart from the aforesaid steps for conflict resolution, some more provisions have been incorporated into the Constitution to preserve the ethnic, cultural and the religious identity of the people and also to maintain the demographic uniqueness of the entire region of North-East. Some of these provisions are listed below-

1. Article 371 A: Special provision with respect to the State of Nagaland
2. Article 371 B: Special provision with respect to the State of Assam
3. Article 371 C: Special provision with respect to the State of Manipur
4. Article 371 G: Special provision with respect to the State of Mizoram
5. Article 371 H: Special provision with respect to the State of Arunachal Pradesh

India is yet to develop a response mechanism which would take into account the special needs of its ethnic communities without actually fragmenting geographical boundaries. The former Prime Minister Narasimha Rao, at a seminar on 'Ethnicity, Conflict Resolution and Nation Building in Democratic India', in 1994, stated about the

positive aspects of ethnicity. To him ethnic groups were to be considered as 'building blocks and not road blocks' working within the Constitution. A delicate balance was necessary between diversity and integration and unity and uniformity. What is important is not the absence of conflicts but the strength and stability of democratic institutions, their resilience to keep changing and adjusting to the needs of society and their conflict-resolution capacity.

Search for a Generative Solution

Ethnicity related problems need multi-dimensional and multi-stage tackling, including tackling on intellectual and human rights front. An attempt has been made to forward certain suggestions to resolve the ethnic crisis within the parameters of constitutional and institutional reform such as –

Firstly, the Central Government should not impose its model of development in a locality rather it should ascertain what the people themselves want. So development should not be centrally sponsored, rather it should be locally initiated. This is possible if the Centre adopts a policy of responding to local needs through decentralization.

Secondly, there should be decentralization and de-privatization of all political power. Mere setting up the Panchayats and providing for their periodic elections is not enough. In fact an attempt should be made for building up of the fullest self-rule and a self reliant economy. With the maximum powers transferred to the grassroot, these can be shared fully with the ethnic groups at that level without posing any threat to the Union.

Thirdly, the political parties and the civil society in the North-East should ensure that the state governments properly perform their activities; stop any sort of blame game; local and intra-regional conflicts are resolved peacefully and democratically with local / regional initiative; ethnic cleansing is stopped and inter-tribal and inter-communal hatred is discouraged.

Fourthly, a strong and stable Union Government is necessary for meeting any challenge posed by separatist or secessionist forces as for protecting the rights of the smaller states and ethnic minorities

and human rights throughout the entire country. At the same time the police forces of the states should play greater and effective role in controlling insurgency and violence so that need for and dependence on army and paramilitary forces is reduced to the minimum.

Last but not the least, political power must be used for public service and not for party or personal ends. It is the responsibility of parties to unite the people on the basis of ideologies and to create harmony between social groups.

Conclusion

Ethnicity continues to be a complex phenomenon in North-East India. The multi-ethnic societies are constantly posing a challenge to the State in the form of political dissent, often expressed in violent terms. The state mechanisms which have been designed to contain dissent either in form of accommodation or coercion have failed to deliver positive result. The coercive measures have, in fact, further aggravated the situation. The ethnic elites have been inducted into the political system mostly by granting them autonomy. However, the aspiration of the common people still left unfulfilled, and the disgruntled lot start asserting their demands using the same vocabulary of ethnicity.

Thus, the North-East is in the grip of two competing ideologies of violent revolution and rapid evolution, amalgamation with constitutional safeguards and alienation due to frustration. Administration, under this situation, must realize its historical role in these areas. It should accept the fact that ethnicity is a revelation of a deeper malaise in the system which could hardly be contained by military or police action. The need is for greater psychological integration of various tribes with the mainland India. The fear that the tribal identity would be lost as a result of integration has to be dispelled through strict enforcement of the existing provisions like Fifth and Sixth Schedule of the Constitution.

Despite the existence of divisive and disruptive elements, the North-Eastern dilemma is not beyond solution. In this respect, we

may well conclude with what Partha S. Ghosh[11] says-".......it may be said that so long as the Indian state vouches in the name of territorial nationalism, that is, civilisational nationalism, and not on cultural nationalism, its ethnic problems would remain manageable and would not probably threaten the territorial integrity of the nation. The matter warrants constant watch and democratic bargaining."

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[10] *ibid*, p60.

[11] *ibid*, p79.

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| 6 | Migration and Conflict: A Case of Bangladeshi Migrants in Assam

Arup Kumar Deka

Migration is an intrinsic component of human behaviour and a natural process and means population movement across places on a temporary or permanent basis in search of better opportunities, greener pasture, to avoid threat to life etc. Migration is complex and vital global issue in today's globalised world. The United Nations Population Division (2009) has estimated the presence of 214 million international migrants (till the mid year - 1 July) of 2010, representing 3.1 percent of the total world population in which 49.6 percent of the total migrants are women. Malthus (1963) views migration as an inevitable consequence of over population. Galbraith (1979) views migration as "the oldest action against poverty". There are several factors; better wages, employment opportunities, escape from poverty, family unification, state repression, invasion, armed conflict, environmental hazards etc. for triggering migration (Castles 2000). These can be termed as *push* (e.g. over population, natural disasters) that led them to leave their place of origin, or the *pull* factors (e.g. better wages, economic conditions, employment) that attract them (Gorter *et. al.* 1998, Skeldon 1997, Portes & Borocz 1989, Lee 1966, Todaro 1969).

Population migration can generate development and conflict in both sending and receiving countries. The development of many countries in the world can be attributed to migrants; countries like Australia and the United States owe their emergence as nation-states to migrants (Siddique 2005). Remittances are considered as important yardstick of migrant's contribution to their countries of origin. The flow of remittances to the developing countries in 2009 reached up to $316 billion from $285 billion in 2007 (Ratha 2010: 1-3). India has received US$ 46.9 billion as remittances during 2008-09 period increased from US$ 22.2 billion during the 2003-04 (Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs 2009-2010: 15 & 54).

Many scholars like Reuveny (2005), Dixon (1995), Pericipal & Dixon (1998), Gleditsch (1998), Brunborg & Urdal (2005), Martin (2005) and Clark (2007) view that high population pressure and environmental degradation can generate migration and has potential to trigger conflict in the receiving country. Reuveny (2005) views the arrival of migrants can be a burden, promoting native-migrant competition for controlling resources in the host country. When economic and natural resources are scarce at the migration's destination and the population pressure is high, people may attempt to secure or sometimes forcefully snatch resources, particularly when there are underdeveloped property right institutions. Secondly, when migrants and natives belong to different ethnic groups, the arrival of many newcomers may upset the ethnic balance. The natives may feel insecure of being outnumbered and may force the migrants to leave the place sometimes generating aggressive nativist response.

Migration into Assam

Assam, due to presence of abundant land, trade and employment opportunities, has long been the destination of East Bengalis/Bangladeshis and people from other parts of India particularly after British annexation in 1826. During British rule, migration to Assam occurred due to establishment of tea and jute industries (Borpujari & Bhuyan 1977, Gait 2005 reprint). Serious

crisis of labour occurred as the native Assamese people having abundance of land showed reluctance to work in these and preferred to remain independent peasants. The Britishers were forced to import *coolies* from the densely populated areas of Bihar - Chota Nagpur, Orissa, Bengal, Central Province, United Provinces and Madras (Weiner 1978).

Other factors such as epidemic and natural disaster occurred during 1881-1901 and 1911-1921 retarded the natural growth of population and a large tract remained vacant and uncultivated (Girin Phukan 1984: 10). Epidemic such as *Kala Azar* during 1881-1901 and 1917-18, earthquake in 1897, universal influenza epidemic - Cholera during 1911-1921 and disastrous Kapili flood in 1917-18 caused heavy loss of population in Assam (Gazetteer of India 1999: 212-214). During 1881-1891, the population of Goalpara subdivision decreased by 18 percent; during 1891-1901, the population of Kamrup decreased by 7 percent, Mangaldoi subdivision of Darrang by 9 percent, Nagaon district by 25 percent and in North Sylhet subdivision by 4 percent. During the decade 1911-21, natural growth of population of Assam was again retarded with the spread of universal influenza epidemic of 1918-19, where 2 lakhs of persons died in the state (Gazetteer of India 1999: 212-213). The Britishers were aware of such development and were keen to fill it up for generating revenue. During 1826-1870, 3 lakhs acres of wastelands were settled and by 1901 it increased to 6.4 lakhs acres and these were granted to the coolies and East Bengali migrants (Guha 1991).

During 1931-1947, Syed Sadullah further encouraged migration of Muslims from East Bengal through his slogan *Grow More Food*. The partition of the country on religious ground and subsequent communal violence resulted in forced migration (Weiner 1993 & Salahuddin Ahmed 2004). By 1952 about .193 million refugees arrived in India particularly in West Bengal and Assam. The communal violence in East Pakistan during 1960-1965 witnessed huge influx of minority communities mostly Bengali Hindus. At least

one million refugees migrated to West Bengal and Assam (Abhijit Dasgupta 2001). Again during Indo-Pak conflict of 1971, about 10 million Bangladeshis migrated to India (Sanjay K. Roy 2002).

However, migration continued even after the creation of Bangladesh. The triggering factors are multi-dimensional and inter-related, e.g. population pressure, economic reasons, environmental disaster, religious, political, state repression etc. (Sarfaraz Alam 2003: 1-2). Bangladesh is facing over-population with a population density of more than 1000 persons per square kilometre with an annual growth rate of 1.5 percent according to the 2001 census. It is expected that the current population size will reach about 190 million by the year 2025 (Barkat & Akhter 2001). The high population indicates the lesser availability of per-capita arable land and almost all arable lands are under cultivation (Ataharul Islam 1999). Thus, over-population is causing out-migration from Bangladesh.

Severe environmental & natural disasters like floods and cyclones in Bangladesh have damaged lives and property. Around 20 percent area of Bangladesh is affected by flood annually and at least 37 percent of the land is affected once every 10 years (Philip Gain 1998). Bangladesh is the breeding point of catastrophic cyclones that occur mostly in the coastal regions of Khulna, Patuakhali, Barisal, Noakhali, CHT and the offshore islands like Bhala, Hatiya, Sandhup, Manpura, Kutuledia, Maheskali, Nizhm Dwip, Urir Char etc. (Brammer 1999). Bangladesh had experienced severe cyclones in 1854, 1876, 1919, 1942, 1960, 1961, 1963, 1965, 1970, 1985, 1988, 1991, 2007 and 2009. Dixon (1994) observes, "Environmental disasters in Bangladesh estimated to have triggered 12 to 17 million migrants to India while the population of Assam has been boosted by at least seven millions." Moreover, widespread poverty is another cause of migration. In 2005 about 40.4 percent of the total population were living below the poverty line (MoF 2010). According to the UNDP Human Development Report-2009, the Human Poverty Index (HPI-1)[1] value is 36.1% for Bangladesh and it is ranked 112th among 135 countries of the world.

Socio-political factors, state repression, communalism, religious persecution, and political instability also caused forced out migration at large number internally - externally (Lama 2000). The Hindus in Bangladesh are the victim of communalism and state repression. The process of Islamisation of Bangladeshi society (through the 22nd amendment which replaced secularism and added 'fatal faith and belief in the almighty of Allah' during General Zia's military rule), communal violence and passing of the Vested Property Act (VPA) are the major factors responsible for forcing minorities to migrate (Afsan Choudhury 2000). The VPA is one of the most inhuman legal instruments having serious impact on the forced out-migration of the Hindu community from East Pakistan and Bangladesh (Abul Barkat et. al. ed. 2000).

State repression has been one of the major factors of generating forced migrants. The problem of CHT and the migration of Chakmas to Tripura and Arunachal Pradesh is one such example. The problem of CHT is one of the legacies of partition where the non-Muslim Buddhists and Chakmas found themselves in Bangladesh. Besides religion, their ethnic root also distinguishes them from the majority Bengali Muslim population. The ethno-linguistic and religious differences assumed a cultural-economic-religious and ethnic dimension when the landless Bengali Muslims from outside CHT were encouraged to settle there. This undermined the demography and cultural life of CHT. A crisis between the indigenous population and the Bengali settlers started. The tendency of the government to resort to military means against genuine Jumma grievances led to their displacement and eventual migration to Indian border states (Shapan Adnan 2003: 52-53).

Evidences of Migration

It is difficult to estimate the number of Bangladeshi migrants residing in Assam. According to the Assam Human Development Report (2003), Assam has witnessed the fastest growing population (over eight fold) during 1901-2001 outpacing the average growth rate of population in the country. The density of population has also

increased from 42 persons per square kilometre in 1901 to 340 persons in 2001. The trends in population growth shows that the decadal variation has been much higher than the rest of the country as a whole, especially in the first half of the century and that was mostly due to the migration (AHDR 2003 & Myron Weiner 1983). The growth rate of Assam's population during 1901-1951 was the second highest (137.80%) in the world exceeded only by Brazil. Monirul Hussein (1993: 60) observes that "in 1921, when the population growth rate was negative for India, Assam had shown a tremendously higher growth rate (20.47 percent). And the gap of growth between India and Assam was as high as 20.77 percent. In 1901, Assam's population constituted only 1.38 percent of India's total population. However, by 1971 Assam's share of population nearly doubled to 2.67 percent."

Table - 1

Population of Assam between 1901-2001

Year	Population (in lakh)	Percentage of Decadal variation	Density
1901	33	-	42
1911	38	+17.0	49
1921	46	+20.5	59
1931	56	+19.9	71
1941	67	+20.4	85
1951	80	+19.9	102
1961	108	+35.0	138
1971	146	+35.0	186
1981	198	+23.4	230
1991	224	+24.2	286
2001	266	+18.9	340

Sources: Census of India 2001 and Various Reports as cited in Assam Human Development Report (2003): 6

Myron Weiner (1993) observes, "According to government estimation the population of Assam increased from 14.6 million in 1971 to 19.9 million in 1981 or 5.3 million (36.3 percent) population in a span of 10 years. Had Assam's population increased at the all-India rate of 24.7 percent, the population increase would have been 3.6 million. Moreover, according to the sample registration of the Government of India, the natural population increase of Assam was .5 percent less than the all-India figures in 1970-72 and 1.2 percent less in 1976-78. On the basis of these figures we can estimate that the migration into Assam from 1971 to 1981 was on the order of 1.8 million. How much of this was migration from elsewhere in India and how much from Bangladesh is purely conjectural, although it is plausible to assume that most of it was undocumented migration".

Going through the Myron Weiner's above mentioned analysis, had Assam's population increased at the same rate as India from 1901-91 at 254.99 % her population would be 8.33 million rather than 22.4 million in 1991, thus the share of migrants and their descendants amounting to 14.03 million (Sanjay Hazarika 1993). The actual growth rate of population (see Table -2) in Assam since 1961 happened to be much higher than the natural growth rate determined by the difference between the birth rate and the death rate. In 1975 alone this difference was 2.18 per cent. The table also shows the natural and unnatural growth of population in the state. This unnatural growth rate has been attributed mainly to the large scale cross border migration from Bangladesh. During the period of 1961 an unnatural 13 percent growth was recorded, during 1971, 14.3 percent unnatural growth was also recorded in the state and it was mainly due to the large scale migration of Bangladeshis during the liberation war.

Based on the 1951 growth rate, the state of Assam should have a population of about 15 million but the state has an extra seven million population. These extra numbers can be accounted for by either migrants or their descendents.

Table - 2
Estimated Birth rate, Death rate, Natural Growth rate and Unnatural Growth rate

Year	Birth rate		Death rate		Natural growth rate (actual growth rate)		Unnatural Growth Rate (Annual)	
	Assam	India	Assam	India	Assam	India	Assam	India
1951	49.0	39.9	31.8	27.4	17.2 (19.9)	12.5 (13.31)	+2.7	+0.81
1961	49.0	41.7	26.9	22.8	22.1 (35.1)	18.9 (21.64)	+13.0	+2.74
1971	38.5	36.9	17.8	14.9	20.7 (35.0)	22.0 (24.80)	+14.3	+2.80
1981	33.0	33.9	11.9	12.5	21.1	21.4 (24.66)		+3.26
1991	30.9	29.5	11.5	09.8	19.4 (52.44)*	19.7 (23.86)	+11.94	+4.16
2001	26.8	25.4	09.5	08.4	17.3 (18.85)	17.0 (21.34)	+1.55	+4.34

Sources: RGI: Census Reports and Sample Registration System Bulletin, 1987 and 2002.

*The figure in the bracket is the growth rate from 1971-91

*The unnatural growth rate for the period 1971-91 estimated as Actual growth rate from 1971-91-Natural growth rate from (1971-81+1981-91) the national, as cited in the report, Archana Sharma, *A Situational Analysis of Women and Girls in Assam*, New Delhi: National Commission for Women, accessed on 15 September, 2008,

URL: http://ncw.nic.in/pdfreports/Gender%20Profile-Assam.pdf, p. 90

The provisional data for the 1991 census puts the overall population of Assam at 22.29 million and the growth rate at 2.23 percent per year, as sharp drop from the 1971 figure of around 3.4 percent. The change in growth patterns indicates, first, a fall in migration from Bangladesh after the beginning of an anti-alien movement in Assam in 1979, and second, a swing in out migration from Bangladesh to West Bengal instead of Assam in the 1960's. Bengali speakers dominate in West Bengal making movements into the area easier for migrants (Sanjay Hazarika 1993).

Migrants in Conflict with Natives

The conflict between natives vs. Bangladeshi migrants in Assam occurred due to several reasons. Firstly, the fear of lossing jobs, economic opportunities and other civic amenities through the competition generated a sense of anger among the natives. Assam has already been facing serious problems of poverty[2] and unemployment for which the presence of migrants contributed further competition generating conflict. Secondly, the fear of lossing the ethnic-Assamese identity in the hands of Bangladeshis is another factor.

The demographic pressure and the presence of migrants are evident when the migrants managed to get their names registered in the electoral rolls. The election officials (20 April, 1979) reported the inclusion of 600000 names in the Mangoldoi constituency out of which 70000 were found to be migrants in that single constituency. This spread fear among the genuine citizens that many constituencies like Mangoldoi still exist. The AASU started their agitation (known as Assam Movement) with the slogans - Detect, Disenfranchise and Deport and mobilised people to boycott the Lok Sabha election in 1980. The demand for expulsion of migrants was justified by arguing that Assam shouldn't take the burden of migrants. The AASU also demanded that the by-election of the Mangoldoi constituency should be postponed until the names of all the migrant nationals were deleted from the electoral rolls (Sanjib Baruah 1999: 115-143).

The movement started peacefully but later it turned into a mass hysteria after 1979 and well organized anti-Bengali riots took place across the state (Amalendu Guha 1980). The violence occurred especially in eight districts; Nagaon, Darrang, Lakhimpur, Kamrup, Goalpara, Sivasagar, Dibrugarh and Karbi Anglong. The gruesome killing of migrants in Nellie, Gohpur, Goreswar, Khairabari, Silapathar, Chamaria and Dhula are well known and thousands of migrants were massacred. The most gruesome was the Nellie massacre (18 February 1983) where an estimated 1700 men[3], women and children were killed (Sanjay Hazarika 1993 & Monirul Hussein 2000). Around 3.28 lakh persons were displaced due to violence during Assam Movement. Many of the displaced people also took shelter in the neighbouring states of West Bengal and Arunachal Pradesh. The Government sanctioned Rs. 5000 as ex-gratia grant to each of the bereaved families for every person killed in the communal violence in Assam (MOLR 1984: 41).

However, the violence came to an end finally after the signing of Assam Accord in 1985 between the government and the agitating leaders (Sanjib Baruah 1986). Three important points were added; firstly, for purpose of detection and deletion of foreigners, 1.1.1966 shall be the base date. Secondly, all persons who came to Assam prior to 1.1.1966 including those amongst them whose names appeared on the electoral rolls used in 1967 elections shall be regularized. Thirdly, foreigners, who came to Assam after 1.1.1966 and up to 24th March, 1971 shall be detected in accordance with the provisions of the Foreigners Act, 1946 and Foreigners (Tribunals) Order 1964.

The Assam Movement has shown the seeds of further strengthening the identity movements engaging other ethnic groups. It prepared the ground for the rise of insurgency in the state. ULFA with the demand of sovereignty of Assam also emerged during this period. The demand for a separate Bodoland through the insurgent Bodo movement generated unprecedented killings and internal displacements occurred as a consequence. (Kotwal 2000 & Hussein 2000).

Implementation of the IMDT Act and Politics of vote bank

The Government of India at the height of the Assam Movement passed the IMDT Act. It was applicable only to Assam. The Act was designed as an instrument for detecting, determining and deporting the migrants. Due to violence and demand for deportation of migrants, the genuine Indian minority citizens were in fear of undue harassment - being deleted their names from electoral rolls and therefore favoured a judicial process for determining, detecting and deporting migrants (S. K. Sinha Report, 1998). The AASU and the allied parties opposed the Act and asked for immediate repeal as they termed it as discriminatory legislation which was implemented in Assam only.

Under this Act, 310,759 enquiries were initiated up to April 30, 2000. While 10,015 persons were declared illegal migrants, only 1,481 illegal migrants were deported. It must be noted that in case of West Bengal, where the Foreigners Act is applicable, 4,89,046 migrants were deported between 1983 and November 1999. The Supreme Court of India struck down the controversial IMDT Act on 12th July, 2005 as unconstitutional (Sarbananda Sonowal vs. Union of India & Anr [2005] INSC 338, 12 July 2005). The cases pending before the IMDT Tribunals were transferred to the tribunals under Foreigners Act. The Court also directed the Governor of Assam to constitute sufficient number of tribunals under the Foreigners Act to deal with the situation (M. S. Prabhakara 2005).

The problem of migration in Assam would not have reached such a grave situation if the political parties had shown some interest in resolving the problem. The political parties were mostly concerned with their power politics and vote banks hence ignored the situation. The Congress Party was quite aware of this grave problem even before independence. Jawaharlal Nehru himself admitted about the large scale migration to Assam. But no steps have been taken to tackle this problem as because of the minority vote bank politics of

the Congress. Opposition parties like BJP and Communist Party, instead of trying to solve the problem were busy in criticizing the Central Government for their incapacity to handle the situation. The Congress and the AGP have been involved in politicizing the issue for their vote banks. Even the AGP which came to power in 1985 and again in 1996 failed to tackle the problem though their poll plank is Bangladeshi migrants (Alaka Sharma 1999: 59-62).

Conclusion

Migration is inevitable in today's globalised world. People will continue to move in search of better opportunities. Bangladesh being a poor country and frequently disturbed by various socio-economic and environmental disasters would continue to migrate to the immediate neighbouring country for enhancing their livelihood opportunities. India being a rapidly developing nation would definitely attract migrants from the poor - neighbouring countries. However, if the destination country's economy is unable to absorb migrants, it will create competition and eventually lead to conflict. The state of Assam is not in a position to absorb large migrants from Bangladesh due to her poor economic conditions. The vote bank politics has further complicated the problem and even the IMDT act happened to be an instrument of politics. It can be suggested that a mutually acceptable work permit system can be initiated at bilateral level where migrants would come, work and then go back. A strict border control is also necessary to prevent illegal migration. The huge amount of money spent on detection and deportation of migrants served no purpose. Rather it can be invested in both sides of the border to generate employment opportunities at the place of origin.

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[1] The Human Poverty Index (HPI-1) focuses on the proportion of people below certain threshold levels in each of the dimensions of the human development index - living a long and healthy life, having access to education, and a decent standard of living. By looking beyond income deprivation, the HPI-1 represents a multi-dimensional alternative to the $1.25 a day (PPP US$) poverty measure.

[2] During 1999-2000, 36.09 percent of the total population was living below the poverty line. However, it decreased to 19.7 percent during 2004-05.

[3] Unofficial sources estimated death of more than 5000 people.

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Immigration and its impact on the Economy of Assam

Dr. Kishore Kumar Sarmah

The debate over immigration to Assam has always been able to occupy a place of importance in any form of media- both print and electronic. All such debates are concentrated mostly to the social, cultural and political aspects with little importance on the socio-economic impact on the economy of the state. The area of the state covers 78,438 sq.km with a population of 2,66,55,528 and annual growth rate of 1.7% in 2001.

A salient feature of the demographic trend of the state is the explosive growth of population over the years. The density of population is considerably higher than the national average with 340 per sq.km since the beginning of the century. The high rate of population growth is solely explained by the influx of population from outside the state. This immigration problem is not a new phenomenon but was started way back during the British rule and it has been going on unabated till date.

With the appropriation of Assam into the colonial fold, the social structure was exposed and the state was no longer the homeland of the Assamese people. Large scale state sponsored migration from different parts of the country as well as immigration from neighbouring countries like Nepal started since then. Millions of Bengali Muslim peasants from East Bengal migrated to Assam under the patronage of the British. It has changed the demographic profile of the state to such an extent that the land has become a fertile ground for ethnic conflict and unrest. As already stated the immigration process was originally linked with the British interest and not for Assam's economic growth. It is observed that migration was very much significant in four major spheres and it resulted in the competition for resources and delineation of entrepreneurial activities.

The four spheres where large scale migration was significant were-

1. Tribal migration in tea plantation
2. Muslim Bengali migration in agriculture
3. Hindu Bengali migration in the service sector and
4. Marwari migration in business and industry

When the British made the attempt to lay the foundation of tea industry in 1835, a huge work force was required. As local labourers were scarce, so labourers from Bihar, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh and Chhotanagpur areas were engaged. Initially they were reluctant to work in Assam due to climatic condition and tough work. But they were forced to migrate with false promises of better future. Gradually these labourers made this land their home and assimilated themselves with the locals and now they are known as the tea tribes.

The long continuous immigration of peasants and farm labourers from East Bengal, then East Pakistan and present Bangladesh is the result of the several push and pull forces. In the early stage of the process, the low density of population in Assam, abundance of virgin fertile land, open uncultivated chars(sand bars) and lack of proper land tenure system acted as powerful pull forces. While the poor living condition, mounting pressure on land, high population growth and harsh Zamindari system were some important push factors. The tagging of Assam to East Bengal in 1905 and the development of rail communication in the state increased spatial mobility and further speeded up the process of migration.

Partition, instead of stopping further movement added new dimensions to the problem converting the case of internal migration to the character and complicacy of international immigration. Whatever might have been the immediate impact of their arrival on the socio-cultural environment of the state, the East Bengal migration brought about an enormous change in the ethnic composition of the population as well as in the economy of Assam. The land of abundant valley became land scarce. The labour shortage economy turned into labour surplus. The relatively ethnic homogeneity of the society was replaced by ethnic heterogeneity.

Migration of Hindu Bengalis who are historically more advanced and educated began as collaborators of the British administration. Their presence also became a cause of tension in later years. The Marwaris, the dominant trading class of North India, entered Assam for trade and business. Besides these four dominant categories of migration, Nepalis from Nepal also migrated in connection with the service in the British Army and also for pastoral activities.

Impact on the Economy

Despite having huge resources in the form of Tea, Textile, Oil and Natural Gas, Fertilizers, Chemicals, Jute, Rice, Mustard and Rapeseed etc. the state fails to generate sufficient wealth. Assam produces half of India's tea. It produces sufficient amount of oil and natural gas, chemicals, fertilizers and textile, jute and other cash crops. Still it is one of the poorest states in the country having 2.6% of India's population with 1.5% share of the national income. The economy of the state has an average growth of just 5.6% per year.

There are many reasons for this. These include immigration, insurgency, lack of infrastructure, poor communication facilities, lack of proper connectivity with the rest of India, overdependence to agriculture, vulnerability to floods, high humidity and water logging which affects the quality of output.

Assam has for over a century supplied the country with oil

and tea to ensure that India did not have to import all its requirements thus saving precious foreign exchange. The result was, a large chunk of economy was siphoned off out of the state. But there was little investment made in the state and as a result, the indigenous people saw very little development. As if this exploitation was not enough, the people gradually became aware of the fact that they were in great danger of being minority in their own state. Continued and unabated migration from Bangladesh was fast changing the demographic composition of Assam. While initially this migration brought in labourers for cultivating the vast tracts of uncultivated lands, in the later years it implied an economic squeeze on the local people as there were no unoccupied lands or jobs any longer.

Another major area of the economy of the state in which exploding population growth took its toll on the natural resources is the forest sector. Once a heavily forested state, Assam has lost its forest cover with rapid shrinkage in its forest area due to encroachment and destruction of forest resources. The area under forest cover has come down to 24.58% of the total geographical area (State Forest Report, Assam, 2003).

Apart from illegal influx from Bangladesh, Nepal has remained another major source of migration to Assam. It is a country with acute economic underdevelopment and industrial backwardness. Most of the people live in rural areas where even the basic amenities of life are not available all the time. As a consequence, the arrival of Nepalese has not brought any positive change in the economy of Assam either in the form of capital formation or accretion of higher skills. Such migration has not been able to contribute to the creation of any environment needed for industrialization and modernization. These people are mostly engaged in cattle rearing and unorganized dairying. Most of them have retained their roots in the country of their origin and as a result, a huge chunk of their savings flows out of the state. What is disheartening is that the price of milk in Assam is one of the highest in the country.

Even the Marwaris who completely control trade and business and thereby maintain a strong hold over the economy of the state has done little for economic development of Assam. No doubt they have patronized several institutions and liberally funded the political parties. But still they have not completely assimilated with the larger Assamese society. In fact they have made it a habit to invest much of their wealth in the state of their origin and other places; but not in Assam.

The problem of immigration has acquired a very complex character. It has become a potent factor for social, cultural, economic and political changes in Assam. Migration has resulted in shrinking of employment opportunities, deforestation, loss of scarce natural resources, outflow of capital and overall economic stagnation. The adverse impact of immigration is clearly visible in the economy of Assam. There is urgent need to check immigration to Assam and proper policy initiatives are necessary for this purpose.

Some suggestions can be put forward to deal with the issue of immigration. These may include-

a) A system of identity card is a must, particularly for those in the border areas.

b) A practical system of visa and passport to check the unofficial border crossing is necessary.

c) Work permits by the Government would allow the migrants to legally enter the state and maintain a check on the negative side.

d) Up-dating of the National Register of Citizens can help in identifying genuine Indian citizens and illegal migrants.

e) Proper registration of birth and death is a must.

f) Compulsory registration of all river crafts operating in the rivers of Assam.

g) More number of border guards and police stations along with floating police stations to be manned by River Police Organization.

h) Verification should be made compulsory against licenses issued to rickshaw pullers, pushcarts and other mode of transports.

Moreover the authorities need to be vigilant because without administrative zeal and dedication, identification and deportation of illegal migrants can never be possible.

i) Demarcation of the border areas and proper fencing.

Over and above consciousness among the people is a must and they should wake up from their slumber of laziness and lack of work culture. It is needless to say that the people must be alert and vigilant and should form a common platform to fight this vexed problem faced by Assam.

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8

Insurgency and Human Rights in the North-East

Dr. Aditya Singh

India is suffering from many maladies and terrorism is one of such maladies that is primarily attributable to religious communities and Naxalite radical movements. Such maladies have created the problem of violation of human rights in the nation. Many areas of the nation like Jammu and Kashmir, Central India and North-Eastern states have been witnessing terrorist activities. As of 2006, at least 232 of the country's 608 districts were afflicted, at differing intensities, by various insurgent and terrorist movements. In August 2008, National Security Advisor M K Narayanan has said that there are as many as 800 terrorist cells operating in the country.

If we talk about the problem of insurgency in the North-East in particular we will find that various groups are involved. North-East India is connected with the rest of India by a narrow strip of land known as the Siliguri Corridor or Chicken's Neck. Much of the region is notably ethnically and linguistically different from the rest of India. In this secluded region, several armed factions operate in which some groups call for a separate state, others for autonomy while some other groups demand nothing but complete independence. As it is well known that study of insurgency in North-East India is expected to be useful to all those who are involved in the peace

because a problem of such magnitude cannot be solved without understanding the root causes. The nature of this problem vary from secessionism to demands for state or sub-state within India, or regional autonomy for ethnic groups within the states, or protection of ethnic interests within the states, or protection of ethnic and cultural identities. The economic and infrastructural backwardness, unemployment and lack of opportunities seemed to be common causes in almost all cases. Besides, another common cause that is emphasized most is the indifferent attitude of the Central Government which failed to tackle the problem of insurgency at its initial stage and allowed the dominant majority to threaten the cultural identity of the ethnic and linguistic minorities, and is responsible for economic and infrastructural backwardness of the region, unemployment and lack of opportunities, frustration and disappointment of the youths, a sense of deprivation in the masses, ethnic discrimination, insecurity and threatened identity among the minorities, and many other related problems. North-East India consists of 7 states also known as the seven sisters: Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, Manipur, and Nagaland. Tensions exist between these states and the Central Government as well as amongst the tribal people, who are natives of these states, and migrants from other parts of India. The North-East has remained a challenge for the policy makers. Keeping together this diverse region and addressing the long drawn conflicts to preserve ethnic identities and control over land and other resources is an arduous task. There is rise in insurgent activities and regional movements in the North-East, especially in the states of Manipur, Assam, Nagaland, Mizoram and Tripura. Demands of the insurgent groups range from separate statehood and increased regional autonomy to complete secession and sovereignty.

There is a need to understand the emotional and psychological aspects of the problems of different states of the North-East. The North-East is not an organic whole but it consists of different states and different regions, each with its own distinctive languages and dialects, culture, its own problems and concerns, its own motivations

etc. Any meaningful policy for the North-East should address the specifics of each state and region. Constantly projecting before the people of the region the model of a 'national mainstream' which they should emulate is unwise and could be counter-productive. The objective should be not to expect them to submerge their regional and individual personalities in the so-called national mainstream, but to work with them in order to find solutions which would make the national mainstream and the regional sub-streams compatible with each other.

Causes:

There are several reasons like poverty, unemployment, lack of connectivity, inadequate health care and educational facilities, feelings of neglect and non-participation in governing their own affairs etc. which have contributed to the insurgency in the region. Inadequacies in governance and administration, public perceptions of widespread corruption and lack of accountability have also contributed in equal measure to the creation of feelings of alienation in large sections of the local population. Policies of the Government often do not reflect the local ground realities and do not adequately address local sensitivities and even the implementation of the policies have not been satisfactory.

Besides, there is a troublesome lack of interest in the North-East, a lack of understanding of the problems of this region and a lack of admiration of its concerns among the general populace in the rest of the country. We need to encourage domestic tourism from other parts of India to the North-East just as we have been encouraging domestic tourism to Jammu & Kashmir. A proper study of the North-East and its people should find an important place in the school curriculum. We need to understand the North-East more. There is a need to demystify the North-East at all levels and remove all wrong perceptions and prejudices about the people of the region from the minds of the people in the rest of India. There is also a need to understand that the people in the region are living with normal

aspirations, normal developmental needs, and normal problems. This can help in the emotional integration of the people of the region with the rest of India. Apart from this, the feelings of alienation and anger in the region are not just against Delhi. There are grievances even against the local political leadership and administration which are corrupt, inefficient and insensitive to the needs of the people.

Suggestions

After a careful scrutiny of the problem of insurgency in North-East, certain suggestions can be made to deal with the problem.

1. One must expedite the opening-up of the economy of this region. It must be opened up towards the rest of India as well as towards the east of India. The North-East should have an important role in India's Look East Policy like South India. There should be active involvement of the leaders, officials and non-governmental intellectuals of the North-East in the formulation and implementation of India's Look East Policy. The idea of opening it up to the East through South-East Asia and Bangladesh has been debated for a long time without visible results on the ground due to lack of follow-up action.

2. Accelerated economic development and the consequent prosperity is an important antidote to the feelings of alienation. Nagaland returned to relative peace after the conclusion of the Shillong Accord in 1975 though the differences with the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (I-M and Khaplang factions) still remain. Mizoram has remained relatively peaceful since the Government of India and the Mizo National Front reached an agreement in the 1980s. We missed a wonderful opportunity of helping these two states to develop rapidly so that we could project them as show cases of the peace dividend if alienated people and insurgent groups give up recourse to violence.

3. We have neglected even the basic infrastructure development in the region for decades. For example, even

the roads built during the Second World War in this area have not all been made usable, let alone constructing new roads. Even now, it is not too late to draw up time-bound plans for rapid economic development of the region and implement them energetically to convince the people that peace pays.

4. No doubt Central Government has taken some laudable initiatives in recent years and thousands of crores of rupees are annually sanctioned for the North-East now. But due to corruption and lack of transparency, most of such funds are being misused and these do not reach the intended beneficiaries. Administrative accountability and good governance is a must if insurgency is to be uprooted.

5. Factors like improvement of healthcare and education are also equally important. Redesigning a ferry into a floating hospital that will take health services to the people in times of floods is an innovative idea. One has just started building this at Dibrugarh, a part of which is complete. More such simple but innovative ideas that can touch the hearts of the people are essential.

6. For eliminating insurgency we have to check ad-hocism in dealing with matters and problems in the region. There has been lack of consistency in policy-making, whether it relates to counter-insurgency, economic development, redressing of the local grievances etc. Such tendencies should be avoided.

7. For elimination of this malady, a holistic and consistent policy is essential. It would be possible only if it is based on national consensus and the leaders and intellectuals of the North-East can play an important role in the formulation and implementation of such a policy.

8. There cannot be an exclusively security-oriented solution to a complex problem involving aspirations, emotions, fears, feelings of neglect and non-participation, pride in one's own identity and culture etc. At the same time, without security and law and order, there will be political instability and all plans for economic and social development will remain non-starters.

9. Furthermore, misconception at conceptual level with regards to the construction of nationalism is also important to deal with. Why do some groups recognize with a particular nation- state and some do not? This is an important question to be pondered. For a county like India where there are many groups that have so many aspirations, conflicting ideas of nationalism are a problem.

10. The police should have effective counter-insurgency capability. One of the Task Forces set up by the Group of Ministers after the Kargil Conflict to revamp the internal security had reportedly recommended that the CRPF should be nominated as the national agency to counter insurgency and enforce internal security.

Thus, the problem of human rights that born in the absence of peace in the North-East India has disturbed the serenity of the state by violating the common tenets of human rights. The entire nation is suffering from the ailment. If Government as well as common men take initiative in this field, it is certain that something fruitful will come up. To maintain peace in the region, measures like academic discussion that may probe the root causes of the problem and suggest remedies are also necessary.

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9 Discourse of Insurgency in North-East India : A Human Rights Perspective

Pankaj Kumar Sarmah, Jahnabi Devi

Introduction

The concept of 'Human Rights' is the most important one in contemporary world. All those rights which are essential for the protection and maintenance of dignity of individuals and create conditions in which every human being can develop his personality to the fullest extent may be termed as human rights. But in India, especially in the North-East, there is gross violation of human rights due to the problem of insurgency. Insurgency, as an organised form of violence, cuts the root of human rights. It has also undermined human security. In fact, in North-East India insurgency has created a culture of violence because of which people have to live in constant anticipation of trouble, be it threats from insurgent groups or harassment by security forces. Humanity has been the worst victim at the hands of both state and non-state actors in this region. The denial of human rights creates conditions of social and political unrest in North-East India.

Despite having a democratic structure of governance, we have failed to evolve the kind of norms, values, attitude and style of conduct conducive to the functioning of a healthy democratic system and observance of human rights. The working of the Indian democracy

in the North-East needs to be rigorously re-examined in the context of violence where human dignity is being undermined. In fact, establishment of a human rights culture in North-East India demands elimination of all kinds of violence and oppression not only by the non-state actors, but also by the state machinery.

Concept of Human Rights

Human rights are those rights which every individual in any society requires as a consequence of being human. The concept of human rights is basically concerned with the right to life and liberty of individuals. The philosophy of human rights is based on the inherent dignity and equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family. Human rights allow us to develop fully and use our human qualities, our intelligence, our talents and our conscience to satisfy our spiritual and other needs. They are based on mankind's increasing demand for a life in which the inherent dignity and worth of each human being will be respected and protected. In simple terms, whatever adds to the dignified and free existence of a human being should be regarded as human rights. Human life and human dignity cannot be restored if human rights are taken away. Human rights are vital for a democratic society. Respect for human rights makes freedom meaningful. These rights are the sign and symbols of human development and peace. The whole fabric of the society depends upon human rights.

Concept of Human Security

The concept of 'human security' was introduced by United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). UNDP defines human security as the 'legitimate concern' of the 'ordinary people' in their daily lives, for whom security symbolises 'protection from the threat of disease, hunger, unemployment, crime, social conflict and political repression.' It focuses on overall growth, development and security of individual. Human security is achieved when individual and communities have the freedom to identify risks and threats to their well-being and the capacity to determine ways to end, mitigate or

adapt to those risks and threats. Human security is an all comprehensive concept which includes security of both men and women. Individual is at the centre of the concept of human security which indicates that there must be recognition of his or her capacity to cope, resist and create security. Human security is also concerned with the prevention of conflicts and protection of civilians during armed conflict. It is also concerned with fostering improved accountability of public and private sector institutions in terms of established norms of democracy and human rights.

In North-East India, there is gross human insecurity. The problem of insurgency has put question mark on the whole issue of human security in North-East India. Geo-political setting of the region and Indian state's obsession with 'territorial security' has also resulted in growing militarisation at the cost of human security.

Relationship between Human Rights and Human Security

Human security is indebted to the human rights tradition. The development of human security model can be seen to have grown upon ideas and concepts fundamental to the human rights tradition. Both approaches use the individual as the main referent and both argue that a wide range of issue i.e. civil rights, cultural identity, access to education and healthcare are fundamental to human dignity. A major difference between the two models is in their approach to addressing threats to human dignity and survival. While the human rights framework takes a legalistic approach, the human security framework, by utilizing a diverse range of actors, adopts flexible and issue-specific approaches, which can operate at local, national or international levels.

The nature of the relationship between human security and human rights is contested among human security advocates. Some human security advocates argue that the goal of human security should be to build upon and strengthen the existing global human rights legal frame work. However, other advocates view the human rights legal framework as part of the global insecurity problem and believe that a human security approach should propel us to move above and beyond this legalistic approach to get at the underlying sources of inequality and violence which are the root causes of insecurity in today's world.

The Problem of Insurgency in North-East India

India's North-East region is in flames of insurgency. Insurgency in this region is as old as the end of colonial rule. According to the Concise Oxford Dictionary, insurgency means rising in active revolt, obviously against an established government. Insurgency is a circuit of reciprocal violence where the main players are the state establishment and the challengers of the same. It is a process of violence where one or more groups aim at overthrowing the existing system in accordance with some ideology. It is an act of resistance and transformation. Actually insurgent movements are an expression of the failure of the process of nation-building. The root causes of insurgency are acute socio-economic problems which the state and its political elites have, for long, ignored. Insurgent movements reflect the fragmentation and breakdown of the state structures, economy and the society as a whole.

The political history of North-East India since independence is characterised by the assertion of various ethnic groups. Based on their separate ethnic identity and out of the feeling of deprivations, these groups have resorted to armed struggle to assert their right to secede from India and to form separate sovereign states. In Assam also there are demands for either separate states or for political autonomy by various ethnic groups. Assam is a miniature of India where there are various groups which are different from each other either linguistically or culturally. In recent times there has emerged self-consciousness among these groups of being different and these groups have come up with their demands for separate identities.

The birth of the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) in 1979 marked the beginning of insurgency in Assam which aims at establishing a sovereign independent Assam. In addition to the ULFA insurgency, the largest plain tribe in the state, the Bodos started a

violent movement to protect their ethnic identity in late 1980s. In 1986 the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) came into existence with an objective of an independent Bodo country. Apart from ULFA and Bodo insurgency, Assam has also been affected by insurgent movements initiated by Karbis, Dimasas, Adivasis etc.

Insurgency and Status of Human Rights in Assam

The problem of insurgency has resulted in gross human rights violation and human insecurity. National oppression, insurgency, military repression and gross human rights violation for half a century have characterised the society and polity of North-East India. Both insurgency and counter insurgency methods adopted by the state have affected human rights and human security of people in varying degrees. During conflict between the state and non-state actors, civilians living in the conflict zone are frequently used as pawns and asylum-givers at gunpoint by the non-state actors and as formants and collaborators by the security agencies. In situation where insurgent movements have affected 'the way of life', local communities are forced to devise their own strategies of living and copying with such reality at enormous costs to their mind and body. The trauma of exposure to violence and brutal death has emotionally affected generations of young people, growing up in brutal conflict situations, for the rest of their lives.

A recent study on 'Mapping Human Security in Conflict Zones: The case of North-East India' reveals that in the insurgency prone areas, 67.1% of the population is affected by insurgency in different ways. People have to suffer from killing, displacement, loss of home and property, loss or involuntary disappearance of close relatives, poverty, family separation and disintegration, rape and sexual abuse and many others. Insurgency has affected the lives of the people in their day-to-day activities like normal movement, movement of women etc. People are constantly living under fear, anxiety and suspicion.

In the name of 'armed struggle', insurgent groups use its arms mostly against the unarmed and innocent people which lead towards human rights violation. Some insurgent groups unleash a reign of terror in North-East in the name of self determination. In Assam militants belonging to the outlawed outfits like ULFA, NDFB etc are indulging in activities which violate the basic human rights of the people. Senseless killings, cold blooded murders, mass homicides in bomb explosions etc have become the order of the day in the state. Extortion, abduction, harassment to the civilians is contemporary basic human rights problem in Assam. Factional fighting between breakaway groups has drawn civilians into its crossfire. Again retaliatory killings of family members of surrendered insurgents have also been taken place. The irony is that those very people who claim the human right of self-determination have refused to respect the human rights of the innocent and common people living in the society. On 15 August, 2004, ULFA killed innocent children and women by a bomb blast at Dhemaji. Till date, more than 5000 families have been directly victimised by ULFA's terrorism. On October 30, 2008, NDFB killed 89 people in nine coordinated bomb blasts in the districts of Guwahati, Barpeta, Bongaingaon and Kokrajhar. Between 1992 and 2009, 3,867 civilians and 778 security personnel were killed in insurgency related violence. On the other hand, the number of militants killed in Assam during the same period is 2,621 (Source: www.satp.org).

In the name of countering insurgency the Government has deployed huge number of security forces in Assam. The security forces including the army do indulge in activities which are gross violation of human rights. They often detain persons on suspicion, torture them to extract confessions or kill them in fake encounters which are definitely violation of human rights. Excessive use of force during counter-insurgency operations and law enforcement has led to the extra-judicial killing of many people in Assam by the security forces. The activities of the security forces indicate a fragrant violation

of Article 3 of the UDHR which states that everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.

The operation of a number of oppressive laws like National Security Act 1980 (NSA), Armed Forces Special Powers Act 1958, section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code have been curtailing the human rights of the people in Assam. AFSPA allows security personnel to arrest anybody on the basis of suspicion and on the other, denies people the space to air their grievances to be heard. Those who are captured by the army, mostly civilians, are victims of so inhuman treatment that many a times lead to the death of innocent people. Many innocent persons have lost their mental balance because of the inhuman torture by the security forces. Inhuman torture also led to dislocation of normal life, fear psychosis among people. Counter insurgency methods have also created great insecurity for women. Many women are being raped by the army in the name of search operation. The violent acts like sexual harassment, physical abuse have resulted in deep psychological and emotional trauma.

Development activities have also been severely affected as the State has been preoccupied with counter insurgency. Money originally meant for developmental activities are diverted to be spent for armed forces and hence there is little economic progress.

It is disheartening to note that the Protection of Human Rights Act does not empower the National Human Rights Commission and State Human Rights Commission to take up complaints of human rights violation caused by army and paramilitary forces. In fact it is a serious blow to the human rights movement in India.

Conclusion

The human rights situation in Assam is far from being satisfactory. To improve the situation, there is an urgent need to solve the whole issue of insurgency. The state has to address the root causes of insurgency and offer a political solution. The state must take people into confidence and should try to bridge the huge gap that currently exists between the state and the people.

Violation of human rights should be dealt with according to the laws of the country and the spirit of the Human Rights Declaration whether such violation are inflicted by the army or by insurgent groups. The protection of Human Rights Act, 1993 should be amended to bring the human rights violation by armed forces under National Human Rights Commission's purview. Again there is a need for proper training on human rights during combat for security personnel. They should be taught what human rights stand for. Until and unless human rights of the people are respected and protected, rule of law, in real sense, will not prevail in Assam.

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10. Insurgency and Human Rights Violation in Assam with special reference to Armed Forces Special Powers Act

Kalyan Bora, Smarajit Ojha

The human rights situation in Assam deteriorated rapidly after the Indian Army was deployed in November 1990 to fight against secessionist insurgents. To contain the insurgents and to diminish the support they enjoyed, especially in rural areas, security forces indulged in extra-judicial executions, custodial deaths, torture and rapes on many occasions. On one hand, common villagers are intimidated and terrorized to divulge information about insurgents and on the other, insurgents are physically eliminated. The security operations, conducted under the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958, gave soldiers blanket immunity against any legal interference and have reduced the region to a killing field. Strangely, even though the security actions were initiated to tackle growing insurgency, the subsequent period witnessed an increase in insurgent activities and mushrooming of insurgent outfits.

The situation, especially the human rights conditions are not well known outside the region. National media has not given the region (Assam and adjoining areas) due coverage. In order to avoid a popular protest against the present policy by the more articulate urban population, the security operations have been confined mainly to the rural areas. The local media, which is more sensitive to the

situation, has also come under government attack sometimes. The groups involved in human rights activities too have come under repeated attacks.

Insurgency in the state of Assam rose in a political context, as has happened in the other adjoining states. But the Government has chosen to view it solely as a security problem, and has adopted policies to root out insurgency militarily. Not only has it borne no fruit, but it has also aggravated the human rights situation drastically. Here, an effort is made to paint a non-official picture of the human rights situation in the state of Assam, with information regarding human rights violations and the context in which this has been happening.

Methods of Human Rights violations

Human rights violations in Assam and the adjoining region are due to a pre-meditated and systematic state policy to contain insurgency. Since independence in 1947, the North-East, one of the most backward regions of India, has seen uprisings and secessionist activities and as a remedy to that the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) was enacted in 1958. Armed activities spread to Assam and increased in the late 1980's. Insurgent groups managed to increase their local support and stepped up fund raising activities by extortion and intimidation of economically advanced groups. In 1990, Surender Paul, an influential tea-planter was killed by insurgents. Soon after, the army was deployed to flush out the militants.

Army operations began as 'Operation Bajrang', and have been finally given a more institutional framework under the Unified Command in 1997. The Army operations started with extensive search and arrest operations in the villages. Villagers were required to line up in a nearby field, usually in the dead of night, and questioned. Some were taken to Army camps for further questioning, which generally include torture. Many innocent persons have either lost their lives or have been maimed for life. Villagers have been threatened, harassed, raped, assaulted and killed by soldiers attempting to frighten them so that they help in identifying suspected insurgents. These exercises became more intensive if insurgent activities occur in the

neighborhood. As a result, in the villages of Assam, any insurgent activity signalled mass exodus of villagers for fear of Army operations. Since insurgency has an ethnic component, members of particular communities were targeted.

Besides, rapes also took place during search operations on many occasions. There are well documented instances of security personnel forcibly entering a house and committing the crime while conducting raids. This is the most unfortunate part of the entire process.

In those operations, almost all persons picked up for questioning, whether belonging to any insurgent group or not, whether combatant or non-combatant, were tortured for information. Some of the methods include: electric shocks to genitals, cigarette burns, pulling out finger nails, dunking the head under water repeatedly, hanging upside-down for prolonged period etc. A favorite method of beating is wrapping the victim in a quilt and hitting with a thick bamboo stick. These beatings are difficult to prove as they leave no signs on the outside, though they cause severe internal injury.

In general, intransigent members of insurgent groups are eliminated outright. Sometimes when the conditions of torture victims deteriorate, the victims are killed and branded as killed in encounter. A standard story put out is that, during a swoop on a militant hideout on the basis of the information provided by the victim, a shoot-out took place in which the victim was killed.

Vigilante Groups

Apart from these, a number of vigilante groups are active in the region. Parag Kumar Das, a well known human rights activist and journalist, was killed by unidentified gunmen, suspected to be members of a vigilante group in 1996. Many such cold blooded murders continued to take place during next few years when sympatheisers of ULFA as well as kith and kin of its leaders were targeted. The entire episode came to be known as *'Gupta Hatya'* or *Secrete Killings* and is a dark episode in the history of Assam.

Specific Information

It is indeed a deep concern that an unrestrained and trigger-happy security force can be used by vested interests to settle personal scores. In a number of instances, the Army acted on 'specific information'. But the victims often turned out to be innocent civilians without having any relation with any insurgent group. The Army was misguided by so-called informers. Moreover most of the operations are conducted by security forces either in civil dress, or with identifying insignia missing from their uniforms. They used to park their vehicles away from sites of the operation to avoid identification.

Disappearances

In certain cases, persons picked up by the security forces have simply disappeared. The army denies having arrested them. Insurgent outfits have also continued political killings and kidnappings. One particular concern in the recent year has been ethnic killings in certain regions of Assam, which often leads to mob executed, instigated by either armed opposition or vigilante groups. These killings have increased in recent times and they have given the security forces reasons for continued operation.

The Law and Human Rights Violations

The Unified Command was instituted in the early part of 1997 and all anti-insurgency operations are conducted under this. But the restriction imposed on the security forces is commonly flouted. It is mandatory to conduct search operations in the presence of a judicial magistrate, a rule which is hardly ever followed. On the arrest of a suspect, it is mandatory for the armed forces to hand over him to nearest police station, a practice which is never followed.

The Army operations in Assam are conducted under the infamous Armed Forces (Special powers) Act as amended in 1972. Under section 4 of this act, any personnel of the Armed Forces, above the rank of jawan, can shoot to kill, destroy property, search without warrant or arrest anyone, who has committed, is suspected of having committed or about to commit, a cognizably offence. To

invoke this provision, the officer need only be 'of the opinion that it is necessary to do so'. This, in effect, gives the Indian Army the right to kill anybody at will. Under section 6, no legal proceedings can be brought against Army personnel without the permission of the Central Government. This section effectively shields the Indian Army completely from any responsibility for its actions. In other words, with this act, the Government of India has imposed an undeclared emergency in the state.

In 1995, though the infamous Terrorist and Disruptive Activities Act (TADA) lapsed, prisoners arrested under this act still languish in jails. Among various other powers, this act conferred on the security forces the ability to detain prisoners without any trial for up to one year. There is a plethora of preventive detention laws which allow the security forces to curtail the fundamental rights of life and liberty. Another frequently used law in the state of Assam is the National Security Act (NSA), 1980.

National Human Rights Commission

Under pressure for such dismal human rights records, the Indian Government set up the National Human Rights Commission under the protection of Human Rights Act 1993. But it is a body without adequate power to enforce human rights. Clause 19 of this Act prevents the Commission from investigating any complaint against the armed forces, thus reducing it to a toothless tiger.

International Convention/Law

The Government has been a flagrant violator of human rights norms. India has signed the International Covenant on Civil and Political rights (ICCPR), which along with the Universal Declaration on Human Rights form the backbone of International law and convention on human rights. According to this Covenant, under Article 4, State Parties can derogate from certain articles in times of emergencies, but not the most central ones like right to life (Article 6), and has to inform other State Parties. With the promulgation of Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, the Government has derogated

from the right to life, but failed to inform the State Parties of an emergency situation in the Northeast. This was pointed out in the Report of the Human Rights Committee to the General Assembly of the UN in its 52nd session, September 1997. The Report says that terrorism and armed insurgency are essentially political in character and that the approach to resolving such problems must also essentially be political. Terrorism should be fought with means that are compatible with the Covenant.

Since India is yet to ratify the First Optional Protocol of the ICCPR, victims of human rights violations cannot make individual submissions to the Human Rights Commission. This means a victim of army atrocity has little chance of obtaining justice within the domestic or international legal system.

It has been observed that, human rights have been violated both by state and non state actors in Assam. The situation continues to get worse. Even the National Human Rights Commission does not have any power to investigate complaints against the Indian Army, which is a major hindrance. Security forces continue operations in a manner which is at variance with both local laws and international norms. Since, insurgency in Assam has a political root the Government should view the problem from this angle and formulate its policies accordingly.

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11 | Issues of Insurgency and Human Rights in Northeast India and Resolution by Government and Civil Society

Achyut Kumar Das, Birat Kumar Panyang

Introduction

Ethnicity is physical and mental common traits of a social group or category of population that is set apart in a larger society and bound together by commonalities of language, believe, nationality or culture. According to Glazer (1975), the term ethnic refers "to a social group which consciously shares some aspect of a common culture and is defined primarily by decent."

Broadly speaking ethnic group may be a symbolic expressive group identified in connection with the place of birth, language, kinship relation, social practice and religion or an instrumental group formed for certain common interest, specially material.

Ethnic Insurgencies in Northeast India

Northeast India has been a melting pot of different races since ancient times. It has been considered as the gateway of commerce and culture that linked India overland to East and Southeast Asia.

During British period undivided Assam was considered as the Northeast Frontier of Bengal, and its politics and economy were largely dictated from and linked to Bengal. The British followed the policy of progressive separation of tribal population into virtually reserved territories called *non-regulated, backward, excluded and partially excluded areas* at different times. These areas were administered under separate statutes since 1874. These provisions excluded the tribal areas from the pattern of administration that prevailed in the rest of British India. Such isolationist policies persisted in the post independent period under the mistaken motives of protecting the tribal population against exploitation by outsiders. The cumulative impact of these policies later became evident in the form of conflict between tribal groups and homogenizing State and also between tribal and non-tribal people of North-East India.

The North-East is geo-ecologically a part of the Eastern Himalayas known for richness in natural resources, biodiversity and ethnic as well as cultural diversity. This region comprises of eight states- Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura, and Sikkim. North-East India shares border with four countries, namely, Bhutan, Bangladesh, China and Myanmar and almost 99% of its boundary is international. The region has immense geo-political significance.

Over the years Northeast India has witnessed growth of insurgency and violent conflicts of different magnitude. These issues may have different dimensions. But most of the insurgencies in this region are based on ethnicity.

The Nagas were the first to take up arms against the Government soon after independence. The differences between Naga National Council (NNC) and Government of India over their future led to the longest insurgent movement in the sub-continent. Though some efforts were made to solve the Naga problem in the form of creation of Nagaland in 1963, Shillong Accord (1975) etc. these failed to bore fruit. National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) continued its subversive activities for years.

The Mizos also revolted under the banner of Mizo National Front (MNF) in 1960s. The Mizo Accord of 1987 ended Mizo

insurgency and at present Mizoram is one of the most peaceful states of Northeast India.

In Tripura, indigenous Tripuris became minority in their own state due to migration. It led to a violent insurgent movement by Tripura National Volunteers (TNV) in 1980s. The TNV movement ended with an Accord which provided creation of Tripura Tribal Autonomous District under Sixth Schedule of the Constitution. But soon two other insurgent groups All Tripura Tiger Force (ATTF) and National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT) emerged with the demand for secession from India.

Manipur has the dubious distinction of being the most violent and troubled state of the region. Its merger with India is viewed as illegal by many and insurgency erupted in Manipur out of this feeling. Several insurgent groups like People's Liberation Army (PLA), United National Liberation Front (UNLF), PREPAK, KCP etc. are active there.

In Assam, the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) was established in 1979 to liberate Assam from Indian Union. Army operations were started against ULFA in 1990. But even after 20 years of military operations, ULFA is not finished.

The movement for a separate Bodoland state soon turned violent with the formation of Bodo Volunteers' Force (BVF). Another militant outfit Bodo Security Force (BSF), later renamed as the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB), was also formed in 1988. The BVF laid down arms with signing of Bodo Accord in 1993 and establishment of Bodoland Autonomous Council (BAC). But one section of BVF rejected the Accord and formed The Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT). Though BLT also came over ground with second Bodo Accord in 2003 and NDFB is under cease-fire with Government, the anti-talk faction of NDFB is still active in many areas.

The peaceful movement of Karbi people for autonomous state was also turned violent in later years. United People's Democratic Solidarity (UPDS) was formed with the merger of Karbi National Volunteers (KNV) and another group. When talks between UPDS and Government started, a section opposed it and formed Karbi Longri NC Hills Liberation Front (KLNLF). This group also came over ground in 2010. But again another insurgent group Karbi People's Liberation Tigers (KPLT) has been formed recently.

The Dima Halam Daoga (DHD) was formed with the objectives of creating a Dimaraji or Dimaland for the Dimasas. When DHD militants surrendered, another group Black Widow emerged. It unleashed reign of terror in the hill district of North Cachar for quite some time. Of course this group has also come forward for talks with the arrest of its Chairman Jewel Garlosa.

Several other insurgent groups are also active in different parts of the region like Kamatapur Liberation Organization (KLO), Adivasi National Liberation Army (ANLA), Bru National Liberation Front (BNLF), Kuki Liberation Army (KLA), People's United Liberation Front (PULF), Hawnitrep National Liberation Council (HNLC) etc.

It appears that insurgency has gradually become a lucrative business for many and there is no end to insurgent activities in this region. In the name of liberation struggle many groups are earning easy money and have degenerated into groups of criminals without having any political ideology.

Human Rights Scenario in the Northeast

The Indian state claims to be the largest democracy of the world. It is also claimed that Indian democracy has guarantees for human rights. Human rights mean those rights which every human being should enjoy by mark of being human, and hence they are inviolable and inalienable. Nobody can give or take away human rights under any pretext. This is an essential characteristic and requirement of the modern concept of human rights. But such concept of human rights and a democracy based on such a conception is constantly beset by the reality of human beings asserting their rights, individually and collectively.

For example, the Nagas never submitted to others in pre

colonial period. They never stopped asserting their rights, either before or after 1947. The Indian state justified the armed suppression of the Naga people in the name of the unity and integrity of India. Today, this treatment, along with the same justification is extended to the whole of Northeast.

To deal with armed insurgencies in the Northeast, the Government has deployed its armed forces. But the presence and activities of the armed forces have, in no way, improved the situation. It is found that the armed forces often treat the people in inhuman manner. Arbitrary arrest, detention, torture, rape and even killing on mere suspicion by armed forces are very common. But unfortunately such human rights violations are justified on the ground that some people and groups have taken up arms against the State and its armed forces. It has to be remembered that state terrorism is not and can not be an answer to insurgency.

Another disturbing aspect of human rights scenario in the Northeast is the mushrooming of insurgent groups and increase in their activities. These groups also frequently kill those who oppose them, forcibly collect money, kidnap persons for ransom etc. In last few years many groups have resorted to bomb blasts in public places, massacres as a means of ethnic cleansing and other brutal techniques to discard the State. All these are also glaring examples of violation of basic human rights of people.

Since 2000, a new dimension was added to the conflict dynamics of Assam with Hindi speaking people being targeted by terrorists. Thus, 16 persons were killed by suspected ULFA terrorists in two separate incidents in Tinsukia and Dibrugarh Districts on October 23, 2000. In another incident nine people were massacred and 12 injured on October 27, 2000 in Nalbari District. On November 16, 2000, 10 more Hindi speaking migrants were killed in Sibsagar District. 22 non-Assamese were killed in three separate massacres in Bongaigaon on November 30, 2000. On December 7, 2000 28 Hindi-speaking petty traders and farm workers were killed by ULFA near Sadiya. Earlier, on November 8, 2000, eight civilians,

including seven migrants were killed by suspected NDFB terrorists in Barpeta District.

Table 1
Insurgency related Deaths in Northeast India, 2002-2007

Year	Assam	Manipur	Tripura	Nagaland	Meghalaya
2002	445	190	175	36	64
2003	505	198	295	37	58
2004	354	218	167	58	35
2005	242	331	73	40	29
2006	170	285	60	92	24
2007	201	125	15	59	01
Total	1921	1347	785	322	211

Source: South Asia Terrorism Portal (www.satp.org)

Role of Government in Resolving Insurgency

The role of Government is very crucial in maintaining peace and tackling insurgency in Northeast India. The Government should frame policies and strategies for lasting solution of this problem. The Constitution of India provides high quality norms of constitutionalism and structures for participatory democracy. But still more changes may be necessary. For resolving insurgency Government should take into consideration all relevant aspects and must be ready to make amendment in the Constitution if necessary in order to accommodate hopes and aspirations of people of the Northeast in general and different ethnic groups in particular.

Serious negotiation with insurgent groups must be the priority of the Government. No doubt the Government has been negotiating with some groups and many groups are in cease-fire with the Government. But due to lack of any genuine desire for political solution, such negotiations often backfire with some others taking up arms again.

The framers of the Indian Constitution tried to ensure development and protection of tribal identity in the hills of Northeast India through the Sixth Schedule. But the provisions and institutions created under Sixth Schedule have not been successful in fulfilling their hopes and aspirations. So some devices must be created by the Government for smooth functioning of these institutions. Otherwise lack of faith on the existing system will continue to persist.

Unemployment, poverty, corruption, underdevelopment– all are important factors in insurgency. So these issues must be addressed properly. The Northeast with its rich bio-diversity and natural resources has huge potential for tourism, hydro-power generation, cultural tourism etc. If these opportunities are properly tapped with Government support, there is possibility of turning this region into a developed one.

Migration from rest of India and outside has substantially altered demographic composition of several states of the Northeast. It has created a sense of insecurity and identity crisis among indigenous population giving rise to insurgency. There is urgent need to prevent illegal influx from foreign soil. The issue of migration from other parts of India has also to be tackled judiciously in the best interest of people.

The Government should look at all these matters seriously and formulate its policies accordingly. Without addressing these aspects, peace and development will remain elusive in Northeast India.

Role of Civil Society

The idea of 'civil society' has got greater attention in recent years all over the world. Civil society commonly embraces a diversity of spaces, actors and institutional forms, varying in their degree of formality, autonomy and power. Civil societies often refer to organizations such as registered charities, non-governmental organizations, community groups, women organizations, faith-based organizations, professional associations, trades unions, self-help groups, social movements, business associations etc.

The role of civil society is very important and it can help in a big way in fostering change from emotive and troubled psychological syndrome to constructive forms and developmental process in Northeast India. Civil society groups can help in channelizing local resources by connecting various projects with national and international agencies.

Human security, peace and development are the major thrust areas in Northeast India. In this regard civil society can play a major role in initiating multidimensional peace building process in this region. For example, the positive role of Naga Hoho in initiating peace process with NSCN (I-M) and NSCN (K) can be mentioned. Even women's groups like Naga Mothers' Association (NMA) have showed keen interest in peace process.

In Assam too, the People's Consultative Group (PCG) and Sanmilita Jatiyo Abhibarton (SJA) have initiated steps to bring ULFA to the negotiation table at different times. Though the efforts of the PCG failed due to rigid stand of Government of India, present initiative of SJA is expected to bring some respite as ULFA has already positively responded to this effort.

The role played by religious institutions and groups in Karbi Anglong District during Karbi-Dimasa clashes is an example how civil society can help in mutual confidence-building and trust-building exercises. The formation of Bodo National Convention for solution of Bodo problem and to bring NDFB to the negotiation table is another laudable civil society initiative.

Human rights groups like Naga People's Movement for Human Rights (NPMHR), Manab Adhikar Sangram Samiti (MASS) etc. are working tirelessly to highlight human rights abuses by the security forces. However the abuses perpetrated by the insurgents are often ignored by such groups.

Conclusion

In brief, the prospect for peace in India's Northeast remains mixed. There has been steady erosion of the support base of insurgent

groups in the region and there is growing public pressure for a peaceful resolution of grievances. Significant declining trend of violence can also be visible in most of the states of Northeast. There are signs of limited consolation of a 'peace constituency' in some of the states.

Continuous demographic destabilization as a result of migration, both from other parts of the country and illegal population flow from Bangladesh remains a major challenge. Without resolution of such issues, prospect of peace will remain elusive.

A number of cease-fire agreements are already in place between militant groups and the Government. But one very serious obstacle to peace in the region is the crisis of good governance and wide spread corruption. Good governance and administration responsive to the needs of people can come a long way in improving the situation in the Northeast.

Though some efforts have been made by some civil society groups for peace-building but those are not enough. The present scenario of Northeast India shows that neither Government nor the civil society has done enough works for resolution of insurgency and improvement of human rights scenario. Serious engagement of both Government and the civil society can offer a lot in terms of creating positive atmosphere— an atmosphere of mutual trust, understanding and respect for human rights.

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12 Plain Tribes of Assam and the Provision of the Sixth Schedule

Dr. Manoj Kumar Nath

Six plain tribal groups of Assam, namely Mising, Tiwa(Lalung), Rabha, Deori, Thengal Kachari and Sonowal Kachari, have been given the provision of self rule through Autonomous Councils (Not under the Sixth Schedule). These Autonomous Councils were created by the Government of Assam to bring about a mechanism for empowering the plain tribes of Assam. However, almost all the plain tribes under this scheme of self rule are not satisfied with their Autonomous Councils and they have begun to demand for Autonomous District Councils for their respective tribes under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution. The Government of Assam created Lalung, Rabha and Mising Autonomous Councils in 1995 and the remaining three Autonomous Councils in 2005. These Autonomous Councils have remained examples of government inaction and negligence since their creation.

The idea of self rule for the plain tribes of Assam to safeguard the unique culture of the plain tribes and to bring about fast economic development to them originated with the creation of Bodo Autonomous Council (BAC) in 1993 by the Government of Assam. Bodos, the largest plain tribe of Assam, had been demanding a separate state for the community since the end of 70s of the last

century. The Central Government and Government of Assam entered into an agreement with the leadership of the Bodo Movement and created BAC in 1993 to give the Bodos a system of self rule. In 1995, the State Government created three more Autonomous Councils for Lalung, Rabha and Mising tribes. However, the Government of Assam did not show any seriousness to turn the system of plain tribal self rule acts into reality. Government did not take any step to demarcate the boundary of these Autonomous Councils and to hold elections for these Councils.

As a result of this negligence of the State Government towards the Autonomous Councils, the Bodo Movement for a separate state was resumed and became violent. Ten years after BAC was created. Government of India and Government of Assam again entered into an agreement with the Bodo Liberation Tigers, which spearheaded the violent Bodo Movement in late 90s of the last century, to bring about a permanent solution to the Bodo problem. Under this agreement, the Bodos were granted self rule under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution and Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) was created.

The Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution was originally meant for the hill tribes. However, the provision of this Schedule has already been extended to the plain tribes as evident from creation of the BTC for the Bodos. It has been noticed that though the Government of Assam failed to fix the boundary of BAC in ten years, it clearly demarcated the boundary of BTC just after it was created under the Sixth Schedule and election to the BTC was also held immediately after the demarcation of its boundaries. On the other hand the State Government could hold the elections for the Tiwa and Mising Autonomous Councils only in 2010, after one and half decades of their creation. Autonomous Councils created by the Government of Assam in 2005 also had to wait for almost five years for having their elected representatives. Till the first elections were held for these Autonomous Councils in 2010, the Government had been running

these Councils through some nominated members. This has turned these Councils only into platforms of corruptions and the Councils have failed to do any good to the common people under the council areas. During this period, these Autonomous Councils have become an insult to the democratic principles and structures of our nation.

Because of the benign negligence showed by the Government towards the Autonomous Councils, the plain tribes of Assam have begun to believe that their Councils can get the importance of the Government only after they come under the Sixth Schedule. So they are now demanding Sixth Schedule status like the Bodos.

Under the British rule, a system of frontier administration was applied to most of the hill areas of the British Province of Assam. The Government of India Act, 1935 grouped the backward hill tracts as 'excluded' and 'partially excluded' areas. Under this new administrative arrangement, the Governor was to administer the excluded areas himself in his discretion, while administration of the partially excluded areas became his special responsibility. The powers of the provincial legislature, thus, were not extended to the excluded or partially excluded areas.

After India got independence, to rule the previously excluded and partially excluded areas emerged as a challenge before the new interim government. The mainstream leaders of the new government had little knowledge of the society and politics of hill areas of Assam. Against this backdrop, the Constituent Assembly formed North-East Frontier (Assam Tribal and Excluded Areas) Sub-Committee under the chairmanship of Gopinath Bordoloi to suggest the mechanism to administer the hill areas of Assam. The Bordoloi Committee tried to reconcile the aspirations of the hill people for political autonomy with the Government's drive to integrate them with the plains, and suggested a mechanism of self-rule through Autonomous District Councils for the hill tribes. Bordoloi Committee recommendations were passed by the Constituent Assembly with certain modifications and it constitutes the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India.

However, Rohini Kumar Chowdhury and Kuladhar Chaliha, members of Constituent Assembly from Assam, opposed the recommendations of Bordoloi Committee in the Constituent Assembly. Chowdhury said that the self rule system for the hill tribes would create a Tribalistan like Pakistan.

In this whole process of the self rule for the hill tribes, the interests of the plain tribes of Assam were ignored. Bordoloi Committee simply transferred the issue of plain tribes to the Minority Rights Sub-Committee under the Constituent Assembly. Bordoloi Committee was of the view that the problems of the plain tribes of Assam were not different from other people living in the plains and so they did not deserve any separate constitutional safeguard. The Minority Rights Sub-Committee also did not take the issue of the plain tribes of Assam seriously for some kind of special measures to empower this segment of underdeveloped population.

The main objectives to formulate a separate constitutional safeguard (Sixth Schedule) for the hill tribes of Assam were: to preserve the unique culture and tradition of the hill people, and to bring about fast all-round development to the already marginalized hill communities. Bordoloi Committee was right in saying that the plain tribes of Assam did not want any constitutional arrangement to protect their tradition and culture as they had been living in the plains of Assam with other communities for centuries. However, the economic underdevelopment of plain tribes of Assam was not different from their hill counterparts. All the plain tribes of Assam were backward and underdeveloped in every aspect of social life. So there was an urgent need to consider this aspect by the Constituent Assembly. But that did not happen in reality.

The creation of Autonomous Councils for the plain tribes by the Assam Government in 1990s and the extension of the Sixth Schedule status to the Bodos (a plain tribe) prove that the plain tribes of Assam also deserve separate constitutional safeguards. If the Constituent Assembly would have formulated some kind of institutional arrangement for upliftment of the plain tribes of Assam, the present ethnic unrest would have never emerged in Assam. If it would have done, the Government of Assam would also have not got the opportunity to temper with the democratic principles in the name of self rule to the plain tribes.

How the District Councils in Assam under the Sixth Schedule have been functioning is a different matter. The Sixth Schedule is an organized mechanism and if followed properly, it can be a strong weapon to empower the already marginalized tribal groups of Assam.

Against this backdrop of the plain tribes of Assam vis-à-vis the provision of the Sixth Schedule, we have the following observations-

The Sixth Schedule of the Constitution is only for the hill tribes. The extension of this provision to the Bodos, a plain tribe, is against the constitutional spirit of the Sixth Schedule. However, if the Government is really interested to extend the provisions of the Sixth Schedule to the plain tribes, then other plain tribes of Assam should also be provided the facility of the District Councils under Sixth Schedule. Other plain tribes of Assam, namely, Lalung, Mising etc. are not different from the Bodos socially and economically. If Bodos can qualify for the provisions of the Sixth Schedule, then the other plain tribes of Assam also deserve to have this provision.

The provisions of the Sixth Schedule should not be provided to the plain tribes at gun point. In case of the Bodos, the provision of the Sixth Schedule was provided to bring an end to the militant struggle of the Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT). Because of the armed struggle of the BLT, the Governments at the Centre and in Assam easily conceded the Sixth Schedule status to the Bodos. This can inspire the other plain tribes of Assam also to wage armed struggle in the demand for the Sixth Schedule.

If the Governments at the centre and the state are not ready to concede the provision of the Sixth Schedule to other plain tribal groups of Assam, the State Government should try to strengthen the

mechanism of Autonomous Councils which it has already created to empower the plain tribes. The State Government should negotiate with the Central Government to allocate more funds to these Autonomous Councils so that these Councils do not remain merely a political slogan. The Government should not use the provisions of Autonomous Councils to satisfy the rising expectations of the emerging political elites of the plain tribes.

The provisions of the Autonomous Councils should not be used by the political parties as a political weapon for winning elections. Autonomous Councils should be a policy based on the principle of social justice. The Lalung, Rabha and Mising Autonomous Councils were created in 1995 by then Congress (I) Government of Assam as a policy to win the 1996 Assembly elections. Again, Deori, Thengal Kachari and Sonowal Kachari Autonomous Councils were created in 2005 just months before the 2006 Assembly elections. Use of self rule provisions as a political tool to win elections can damage the whole issue of tribal autonomy– both ideologically and structurally.

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13 The Destination Sixth Schedule : Aspiration and Dilemma of the Tiwas

Manoj Kumar Das, Himangshu Sarmah

Introduction

Assam and surrounding areas came under British rule during the nineteenth century. These areas were attached to the Province of Bengal for quite some time. Undivided Assam was the home of different tribes living both in the hills and the plains. There were frequent interaction and interdependence among the people of hills and those of plains. But in 1882, the British enacted Inner Line Regulation which empowered the Lt. Governor to prescribe the Inner Line in each of the tribal areas. Rules were laid down regarding trade, possession of land beyond the line and other matters. Any non-tribal seeking to go beyond the Inner Line was to obtain a pass from the Deputy Commissioner, who could lay down conditions that he thought necessary. This regulation by the British was imposed in the name of helping the tribal communities from the problem of exploitation by the traders of plain areas and non-tribals. But, many believe that it was actually created to stop the tribal people from participating in the freedom movement of India. The tribal areas of the hills of Assam were again classified as excluded and partially excluded areas by the Government of India Act of 1935. Thus the tribal groups of present North-East India were artificially separated from people of the plains.

Ethnicity and the Tiwas

The term 'ethnic' is derived from the Greek word 'ethnos' meaning heathen; but the noun form 'ethnicity' is comparatively a new concept in social science research. According to Glazer, the term 'ethnic' refers to "a social group which consciously shares some aspects of a common culture and is closely defined primarily by descent." Further he adds that the term is closely related to minority group, race and nation and it is not easy to make sharp distinction between them. The classical concept of 'ethnic' tends to focus on ostensibly closed and isolated tribal and aboriginal societies. Now-a-days, this notion has undergone considerable change. Ethnic comes to refer to group(s) that live in mutual contact, rather than in isolation, but are largely different from each-other. An 'ethnic group' then becomes a relative concept, depending on the perception of differences. Ethnicity may be defined as a self conscious or projected group identity that emphasizes one or a number of specific attributes, such as biological features, language, religion, place of origin, ancestry, descent or territory. Ethnicity is a matter of degree on two counts; first, the degree to which the people themselves have a sense of common identity, and second, the degree to which surrounding groups perceive them to be different.

Assam is an abode of various tribes and one of the worth notable tribe of Assam is the 'Tiwas'. They are also known as 'Lalungs'. Most of the Tiwa people dwell in the plains of Morigaon, Nagaon, Eastern Kamrup (Metro) and 'Aamri' and 'Dwoar Aamla' mouzas of the hills of West Karbi Anglong. This tribal community of Assam can easily be defined as an 'ethnic group' because of their self consciousness and their projected identity such as biological features (short-statured, gold-coloured, shaven headed, rough skinned), language (the Tiwa language of great Tibeto-Burman language family), religion (Traditional customs and deities; now Vaishnavism or Christianity has been accepted) and territory (Central Assam). All these distinctive features of Tiwas or Lalungs lead them to a degree

of common identity and again, because of this identity surrounding groups perceive them to be different.

The Sixth Schedule

Para (6) of the resolution adopted by the Constituent Assembly of Independent India proclaimed that "adequate safeguard shall be provided for minorities, backward and tribal areas and depressed and other backward classes...." The vision of one of the architects of the Constitution of India Dr. B.R. Ambedkar was reflected in his speech "As far as the ultimate goal is concerned, I think none of us need to have any doubt. Our difficulty is not with regard to the ultimate; our difficulty is with regard to the beginning. Our difficulty is how to make the heterogeneous mass that we have today to take decision in common and march on the way which leads us to unity." The framers of Indian Constitution were concerned about ethnic pluralism and cultural diversity of India and therefore they tried to unite all of them through proper justice, education and administration. So the Advisory Committee appointed a Sub-Committee on Assam (the North East Frontier) with Gopinath Bordoloi as its Chairman and J.J.M. Nichols Roy, Rupnath Brahma, A.V. Thakkar and Aliba Imti as members.

The Sub Committee visited all the hill areas of undivided Assam and gathered opinion of all sections of people. The Committee observed that people of the hills of Assam need separate administrative arrangement and larger autonomy. Hence the Sixth Schedule was drafted and incorporated in the Constitution of India as a special measure to administer the hill areas through Autonomous District Councils. However the tribal groups of the plains were kept outside the purview of the Sixth Schedule. Rather the Sub Committee favoured integration of the plain tribes with non-tribals.

The Aspirations of the Tiwas

The identity of the Tiwas is reflected through their cultural heritage, the language they speak, by tradition, their land ownership pattern etc. When there is threat to some or all these aspects, it can be marked as a crisis of identity.

The Tiwas or Lalungs possess own culture and tradition, dress habit, dormitory system for bachelors etc. which are rich enough. But due to co-existence and high influence, Tiwa culture and tradition had largely been acculturated with the Assamese culture. The Tiwas of plain practice patriarchal system and do not wear traditional dresses on non-festive days. Though the Tiwas have a vibrant culture, the youths particularly the elite section of the Tiwas does not like to maintain and follow their own culture and tradition. It has happened due to too much assimilation with the Assamese society. Consequently a crisis of culture and identity of the Tiwas has emerged.

The Tiwas belong to the great Tibeto-Burman races of Tibeto-Burman Language Family. Their ethno-tongue is called 'Tiwa'. Though the Tiwas of the hill have retained their language, but their counterparts in the plains hardly use the language. Only a few old men and women can speak Tiwa language. All others speak Assamese. The new generation of the Tiwas is reluctant to speak their language. It is another crisis of serious nature.

During the period from 1881 to 1960, the Tiwa or Lalung population decreased because the Tiwas were converted to Hinduism due to high influence of Assamese culture. The Tiwas of plain accepted Vaishnavism while the Tiwas of hills followed Christianity. During the middle part of the 20th century, there had been a great deal of conversion of the Lalungs to Hinduism to end their inferior status. They felt proud to be called themselves as 'Na-Koch' after their conversion into Hinduism. But, after the independence, these 'Na-Koch' Tiwas failed to avail the reservation facility guaranteed by the Constitution of India. So they had to take the reverse path and realised the importance of tribal identity.

The principal means of livelihood of the Tiwas is agriculture and paddy is the main crop. Most of the Tiwas are cultivators and agricultural labourers. Their economy is agro-based rural economy with indigenous cultivation method. Very few Tiwas are engaged in business and in public/private sector jobs. Thus, economic condition of the Tiwas is not satisfactory. There is acute economic

backwardness among the Tiwas. Moreover the encroachment of land by non-tribal people and migrants has created further crisis.

These are some of the crises of the Tiwas which motivated them to demand autonomy under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution and safeguard their rights.

The Tiwas had their own system of political set-up in the form of few small principalities, namely Gova, Nelliee, Khola and Chahari. These four original vassals of the Jayantia king later came under the Ahoms who allowed them to enjoy the political right to govern those kingdoms according to their own traditions. But, in 1835, Tiwas lost their sovereignty and their kingdoms came under British control. In 1951, though the tribes of the hills (Khasi, Jaintia, Garo, Mizo, Mikir and Naga) of Assam got autonomy under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India, the tribes of the plains including the Tiwas were kept out of this scheme. On the other hand, after formation of Mikir Hills and North Cachar Hills Autonomous District in 1951, a controversy arose about the status of the Tiwas of hills. At that point of time, the idea of demanding a separate autonomous district for the Tiwas of the hills was raised. But the Tiwa dominated areas of hills were included in Mikir hills by submitting manipulated population data of Tiwas.

The language controversy in 1960s also brought a sense of uncertainty among the Tiwas and other ethnic groups as well. The Official Language Act made Assamese the official language of the state. To safeguard their language, culture and tradition, the Tiwas resorted to political movement. They progressively became more and more tenacious. They started articulating their identity to gain political power and overcome their socio-economic backwardness. The Tiwas have tried and are trying to organize themselves in different fronts to compensate the crisis of their identity. Many socio-cultural and political organizations have come up demanding one or other form of autonomy among the Tiwas. Some of these are-

(i) The Lalung Darbar

(ii) All Assam Tiwa Sanmilan (Previously known as Tiwa Yuba Chatra Sanmilan)

(iii) Lalung Darbar Youth Front

(iv) Autonomous Lalung District Demand Committee (ALDDC)

(v) Tiwa Mathanlai Tokhra (previously known as 'Tiwa Vasha Unnayan Samittee')

(vi) All Tiwa Students' Union (ATSU)

(vii) All Tiwa Women Association

(viii) Tiwa Cultural Society

(ix) Autonomy Demand Struggling Forum (ADSF)

Since inception, all these organisations have been working for all round development of the Tiwas through raising various demands. To achieve the goal of autonomy, they choose democratic path of agitation. The Tiwas submitted several memorandums to the Government of Assam and Government of India and took agitational programmes like bandh, strike, dharna, rail roko, National Highway blockade, cycle procession, public meetings etc.

Till 1992, neither the Government of India nor the Government of Assam responded to the demand of autonomy of the Tiwas. On the contrary, the Government tried to suppress it by applying divide and rule policy. But finally an agreement was signed between ALDDC and the Government of Assam on 13th April, 1995 and the 'Lalung Autonomous Council' (LAC) was formed. Later it was renamed as 'Tiwa Autonomous Council' (TAC).

Dilemma of the Tiwas

Though the Tiwas achieved an Autonomous Council, it is under state laws and not under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution. It does not have constitutional status. So the type of autonomy granted to the Tiwas has failed to satisfy many. It is opposed by many organizations of the Tiwas. Though a small section of the Tiwas are happy with the present arrangement, others are still struggling for autonomy under Sixth Schedule. Such diverse views have put the common people in a dilemma.

Though the Government of Assam has conferred autonomy to the Tiwas, the demarcation of boundary of the TAC has not been possible till date. Some major Tiwa dominated areas are still outside the boundary of TAC. On the other hand, inclusion of some areas of Kamrup (M) District in TAC has been strongly opposed by another ethnic group called Amri-Karbis. Moreover, there was no election of TAC till 2009. It was run by nominated members which also created resentment among the people. All these added to confusion and dilemmas of the Tiwas.

The nominated members and even present elected members of the Tiwa Autonomous Council have failed to ensure socio-economic development of the community. Rampant corruption and mismanagement of funds have created the dilemma among the Tiwas whether to support such autonomy or not. In fact the TAC has become a hotbed of power politics instead of an agency for development.

Suggestions and Conclusion

From the forgoing discussion, it is clear that the Tiwas are in dilemma regarding their future and also because of divergent views regarding autonomy. The autonomy provided by the Government of Assam has failed to make radical changes and to bring prosperity among common people. Moreover the conflict between supporters of present scheme of autonomy and those demanding Sixth Schedule has only confused common Tiwa population.

There is urgent need to resolve the boundary issue amicably. There should be attempts to rebuild mutual trust and understanding between the Tiwas and Amri Karbis. Civil society can play the role of catalyst in this regard.

Government should refrain from unnecessary interference in the activities of TAC. It should not be used as a tool for political gains. More powers and responsibilities should be entrusted on it. At the same time strict vigil should be maintained to prevent corruption and misuse of public money.

Introduction of the Tiwa language at primary level is necessary. It will help to reduce the feeling of identity crisis to a great extent.

Finally, the issue of encroachment of land of tribal blocks and belts by non-tribals and illegal migrants in Central Assam should be resolved. It has to be remembered that land is a precious economic asset as well as the centre of people's culture and identity.

Whatever crisis or unrest may be there, one point of satisfaction for all is that the Tiwas have so far followed the path of democratic and non-violent agitation. The Tiwa movement for autonomy has remained by and large peaceful and not turned violent till date. If their tolerance is ignored for long, vested interests may take advantage of the situation and create chaos. So, both the State and Central Government should show their goodwill and come forward to resolve the issues as early as possible.

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Manuj Kumar Chutia, Shewali Changmai

Introduction

Since the first part of the twentieth century autonomy has become one of the major concerns of our social and political existence. Right to autonomous life is now a political, cultural and social call for both individuals and the groups. It is a rare conformity that points to the critical importance of autonomy in the agenda of critical thinking[1]. Autonomy in the North-East is perceived mainly in ethnic terms. This results in an inevitable conflict between autonomy and over-dependence on the centre because of poor economic base. It also changes the real issues of isolation and socio-economic development rather the focus of attention is shifted towards the accommodation of competing ethnic claims.

The demand for autonomy among diverse ethnic groups has been a major political issue and problem in India in general and the North-East in particular. It has been playing a significant role in the political scenario of North-East India. It implies the expression of distinctiveness in respect of race, culture or language. It also indicates a concern to protect and preserve one's identity. Since there is wide diversity in the North-East in terms of ethnicity, urge for autonomy is bound to occur among different groups. It is an aspect of political

development with a universal bias. It is present wherever diversity exists.

The North-East India is a land of diverse ethnic groups, such as Naga, Karbi, Dimasa, Bodo, Mising, Kachari, Kuki, Mizo, Khasi, Garo, Rabha, Ahom etc. It consists of tribes and races that remain distinct by their language, culture, traditions and customs. The terrain of the region is a combination of hills and plains. However, there has been a clear distinction between the people living in the hills and the plains. Therefore, since India's independence the entire region has been witnessing movements, both peaceful and violent. This distinction has been one of the major factors which resulted in the creation of new states in the region. Different ethnic groups living in this region have launched movement for autonomy from time to time for their upliftment and to preserve their ethnic identity[2].

The Sonowal Kachari is a major section of tribal population in the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam with their distinct identity. They had their origin in the Tibeto-Mongoloid stock. During the post-colonial period, like other non-dominant ethnic groups, the Sonowal Kacharis remained backward economically, educationally, socially and even politically. The emerging educated elites began to feel that they are markedly different from the caste-Hindus who have been the dominant community in Assam. They felt the need of a platform among them to fight for the upliftment of the community.

Even after decades of independence, the same feelings and sentiment of the Sonowal Kacharis have been continuing. They increasingly feel that they remain more backward then other sections of the Assamese society. Indeed they had not only been experiencing the problem of land alienation, unemployment, economic and political oppression under the existing socio-economic system but also discrimination in achieving their rightful place in the Assamese society. In view of these factors, the Sonowal Kachari elites began to organize the community to press for the creation of separate autonomous state on the basis of their distinct identity. Thus, a strong sense of deprivation and neglect began to haunt the minds of the elites of the Sonowal

Kachari and therefore they demanded separate political arrangement of their own. The formation of All Assam Sonowal Kachari Students' Union (AASKSU) in 1968, All Sonowal Kachari Autonomy Demand Committee (SKADC) in 1994, All Sonowal Kachari Mohila Santha (ASKMS) in 2000, All Sonowal Kachari Yuba Parishad (ASKYP or Youth Council) in 2002 are the outcome of such sentiments.

Historical Background of the Sonowal Kacharis

The Sonowal Kacharis who dwell in the Brahmaputra Valley belong to the great Bodo group. They nostalgically trace their close relationship with the Bormans of Cachar, Dimasas of North Cachar, Bodo Kacharis of Goalpara and Hojais of Nagaon. They had their origin in the Tibeto-Mongoloid stock who had settled in Assam in the Pre-Christian era[3].

The Kacharis and the Bodos are the earliest known aborigines of Assam. They have been described as 'the original *autochthones*'[4] of Assam by Rev. Sidney Endle. In Upper Assam they are known as Sonowal after the Bodo term "SONOLANYA" and so on[5]. In the early stage, various factors like war, natural calamities and the urge for better living and accommodation forced them to migrate from place to place exercising sovereignty in different regions in the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam. In this regard Edward Gait rightly states:

> "The Kacharis called themselves Bodo or Bodo Fisa (son of Bodo) and in the North Kachar hills they called themselves Dimasa, corruption of Dima Fisa or sons of the Great River."[6]

The Sonowal Kacharis have two principal groups, viz Ujani Kuchia and Namoni Kuchia. They have as many as seven clans and fourteen sub-clans. The significance is that they derived their names not from the division of functional specialization but from the designation of the chiefs who headed their respective sub-clan.

There is hardly any evidence of the history of Sonowal Kacharis prior to 830 A.D. But there is evidence of history of the Sonowal Kacharis from the year of 830 A.D. It is said that they moved from

one place to another on the north bank of the Brahmaputra and settled in the area of present Sadiya. The Kingdom Kundila was known at that time as Halali Kingdom. The meaning of Halali is bright (dazzling) soil[7]. The Sonowal Kacharis had ruled the Kingdom of Halali of Sadiya from 830 A.D. to the days of Sadiyakhuwa Gohain of the Ahoms[8]. So it is clear that till the Ahom rule in the Brahamaputra Valley, the tribal areas were under the control of the Kachari chiefs[9].

Socio-Economic Status of the Sonowal Kacharis

The natural process of evolution of tribes specially the Sonowal Kacharis was affected by the changed economic and political conditions under the colonial regime. Because of their non-industrial background they looked for administrative services rather than to compete in industrial and commercial activities. This brought them in direct competition with the advanced Assamese elites who already occupied the privileged positions and power in Assam under the British rule. They did not want that their distinct tribal identity be completely submerged by the Assamese Caste Hindu culture[10]. The Sonowal Kacharis strongly felt that they were markedly different from the high caste Hindus. It appeared to them that they remained economically, educationally and even politically much more backward than the dominant section of the high caste Hindus.

Nevertheless, the growing sense of negligence and deprivation among the tribals led to the formations of the All Assam Plain Tribal League in the thirties of the last century. The tribal leaders realized the necessity of such an organization to put pressure on the government so as to fulfill their long pending needs and aspirations. Like other plain tribals such as Misings, Deoris and Bodos, the Sonowal Kacharis also believed that they were the original inhabitants of Assam. But the dominance of caste Hindu Assamese middle class has disappointed them time and again. As a result they became increasingly conscious of their distinct identity. They felt the need of political autonomy where they will be able to protect and develop their own culture and other distinctiveness.

At the same time it may be noted that the Sonowal Kachari elites were not only afraid of the dominance of caste Hindu Assamese elite but also apprehensive of the possible danger from the non-Assamese of the Province. The encroachment on land by migrants has not only devastated their economy, but also adversely affected the socio-political life of the community. In many places, the encroachers and immigrants outnumbered the Sonowal Kacharis. In such cases they have turned into an ineffective minority exploited and discriminated by the outsiders[11]. As a result protection of tribal lands from the outsider became an important matter for the Sonowal Kacharis and other plain tribes. The Tribal League, a political party of the plain tribes of Assam took the matter to the floor of the Assam Assembly. In its attempt to protect the tribal lands, the Tribal League entered into an agreement with the Muslim League in 1939. The Tribal League made another attempt in 1946, when it concluded an agreement with the Assam Congress Committee and succeeded in getting certain provisions of the Assam Land and Regulations Act 1886 amended[12]. According to the new provisions of this Act, as many as 37 tribal belts and blocks were formed and no land could be possessed by or transferred to outsiders including non-bonafide Indians in these belts and blocks.

But despite all these pious intensions, the implementation of the provisions of this Act as amended up to date and the administrative orders made from time to time has been miserable and total failure. The illegal transfer of land through sale, mortgage and lease from the hands of the poor tribals to the non-tribals continued unabated and unchecked for decades. Unauthorized occupation by migrants, Government acquisition for distribution among refugees coming from Bangladesh and de-scheduling of large tract of land have rendered many tribal people landless.

Autonomy Movement of the Sonowal Kacharis

However the socio-cultural distinctiveness from the other communities of Assam has developed awareness towards autonomy

among the Sonowal Kacharis. They have been able to maintain their traditional socio-cultural traits unimpaired of the changes that have taken place in the socio-political and religious life of Assam.

The main occupation of the Sonowal Kacharis is agriculture. But it is still mainly at the subsistence level. They produce rice, mustard seeds, black pulses and some other items such as jute, potato, vegetables etc. Since rice is the staple food, it is their first concern to produce enough rice to subsist from one harvesting season to the next. But unfortunately production of these crops have been declining as a result of changing nature of soil in the area due to the great earthquake of 1950 and subsequent flood and erosion. Now there is hardly any suitable land available for cultivation of these crops in the vicinity of the villages.

Social stagnation and backwardness of cultural linguistic group are the main criteria that determine the identity of a tribe. The tribal people in general and the Sonowal Kacharis in particular are victims of retardation and have lost occupational mobility to respond to the fast changing production relation. The Sonowal Kacharis are still suffering from the Hindu caste system like other brethren and underprivileged lot as they are at the bottom of the Hindu caste hierarchy despite their attachment to Vaishnavism[13].

Moreover, the employment position of the Sonowal Kacharis as well as other tribals of Assam presents a dismal picture. Both the Government of Assam and the Central Government have failed to meet even a fraction of the claims in terms of their population as revealed by the annual report of the Commissioner of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Government has not shown any interest to clear the backlogs of the reserved communities. Since 1984 the employment position in the state regarding the reserved posts for the tribals and the existing backlogs in different departments is a guarded secret. The people are in the dark as to how the Government is implementing the provisions of the Assam Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes ((Reservation of Vacancies in Service and Posts)

Act, 1978 and rules made thereof. The Committee on Welfare of Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes appointed by Assam Legislative Assembly has not been able to make much headway despite its recommendation for taking necessary steps to remove backlogs in service and posts of reserved communities.

Table 1
Comparative Employment Position of SCs, STs and OBCs

Caste/Tribe	Gr I	Gr II	Gr III	Gr IV	Total	%
SC	336	249	12456	5497	18538	6.48
ST(H)	63	64	2647	1134	39081	1.44
ST(P)	387	213	14403	4359	24362	8.99
OBC	1322	1983	72955	13706	88966	32.48

Source: N. Doley., Ethnicity and Youth Activities in Assam, M. Phil Dissertation, D.U., 2003.

Table-1 reveals that despite having statutory guideline in terms of reservation in government posts, employment scenario of tribals including the Sonowal Kacharis is not satisfactory at all. The situation will not improve so long as there is educational backwardness. For long, education was not a priority for the Sonowal Kacharis. They were not conscious of usefulness and benefits of education. The backwardness of the Sonowal Kacharis has been aggravated by the lack of higher education coupled with mass illiteracy and ignorance due to discriminatory approach of the ruling class. Till 1997, neither any person of the Sonowal Kacharis was able to get Ph. D. degree in any field nor was anybody who occupied any post having medical and engineering degree[14].

The Sonowal Kacharis remained educationally backward. But the statistical data will give a different picture. As regards to literacy rate, tribe-wise break up shows that the Sonowal Kacharis are in the 4th place. The literacy rate of various plain tribal groups as recorded in the Census Report 1971 is shown in table-2.

Table: 2
Literacy Rate of Different Tribes

Sl. No.	Name of the Tribe	Percentage (%)		
		Total	Male	Female
1	Mech	30.57	39.50	21.61
2	Barman of Kachar	30.42	37.97	22.56
3	Deori	27.72	39.58	15.10
4	Hojai	27.72	36.56	19.08
5	Kachari including Sonowals	27.33	35.56	18.77
6	Rabha	22.24	37.23	12.66
7	Bodo Kachari	20.51	29.73	11.06
8	Mising	18.20	28.54	7.54
9	Hajong	10.88	14.48	5.03

Source: Census report, 1971

Table: 3
Number of Posts allotted under Tribal Sub-Plan

Sl. No.	Category of posts	No. of posts allotted	
		T.S.P.	S.C.
1	Office asst. in secondary schools	Nil	Nil
2	Science graduate teachers	Nil	Nil
3	Grade IV	Nil	Nil
4	Music teachers	Nil	Nil
5	Addl. Post graduate teachers	Nil	Nil
6	Addl. Posts of subject teachers	Nil	Nil
7	Addl. Posts of Assamese/ Bodo	50	Nil
8	Hindi teachers in graduate scale	65	Nil
9	Under graduate Hindi teachers	10	Nil

Source: Memorandum to the President of India by Sonowal Kachari Jatiya Parishad, 1994

In the absence of official data as regards to employment position of Scheduled Tribes notwithstanding, the above instances will serve as sample as to how injustice has been done to the unemployed educated tribal youths by blocking the employment avenues created under the laws of the land.

The autonomy movements are essentially the outcome of the intense desire of ethnic groups for the recognition that they have a distinct identity. The Sonowal Kacharis demand for autonomy is not different from this basic idea. The demand of various ethnic groups for autonomy raised in Assam has a historical background. The Constitution of India has provided two schedules for administration of tribal areas i.e. 5th and 6th Schedule. The 6th Schedule provides for formation of Autonomous District Councils in the tribal areas of North-East. But the tribal areas in the plains of Assam and the hills of Manipur have been left out of the Sixth Schedule. This lapse in the 6th Schedule is described as quirk of history. It remains the root cause of tribal agitation in Assam in general and the Sonowal Kacharis in particular.

Besides, there is a feeling of deprivation among the Sonowal Kacharis of legitimate share in the administration of the state. As a measure of removing their economic backwardness and oppressed status, the Sonowal Kacharis started a movement demanding autonomy. Another section of the Sonowal Kacharis started a separate movement for Sixth Schedule status comprising the core areas and satellite areas inhabited by the Sonowal Kacharis and with all the tribal belts and blocks and existing tribal sub-plan villages of the districts of Dibrugarh, Tinsukia, Dhemaji, Lakhimpur, Sibsagar, Jorhat and Golaghat.

It may be mentioned here that, the Congress Government led by late Hiteswar Saikia promised to confer autonomy to the plain tribes of Assam. Accordingly separate Autonomous Councils were created for four plain tribes of Assam- Bodo, Mising, Tiwa and Rabha. But the boundaries of these councils were not delimited. On the other

hand, the Sonowal Kacharis and other plain tribes were left out of this scheme. Though the Tiwas and the Rabhas were smaller groups than the Sonowal Kacharis in terms of population, they have already been given separate autonomous status[15]. The Sonowal Kachari leadership was very critical of the false promises made by the Government for autonomy. They pointed out that the Government of Assam has the responsibility to confer autonomy to all other ethnic groups including the Sonowal Kacharis. But they have been deprived of special privileges and status.

It appears to Sonowal Kachari elites that in a separate administration, they would be in a better position to prevent the economic exploitation and political dominance over them by others. Moreover they would be in a position to preserve and develop their own language, culture, customs and traditions. In fact, cultural identity of the Sonowal Kacharis is sought to be utilized for political and economic advantages.

Therefore, it is evident that maintenance of distinct socio-cultural identity has been linked with the realization of political and economic benefits like other ethnic groups. The emerging Sonowal Kachari middle class started realizing that without political power they cannot solve their problems. Therefore, the increasing political mobilization has been aimed at overcoming their socio-cultural problems and economic backwardness and achieving adequate share in political power in the form of autonomy. With this growth of political consciousness among the elite section of Sonowal Kacharis, they started active political demand for autonomy. On 11th June 1994, the All Sonowal Kachari Jatia Parishad (ASKJP) and the Sonowal Kachari Autonomy Demand Committee (SKADC) were formed with a view to demand autonomy status for them. In the year 1994 the ASKJP submitted a memorandum to the then President of India Dr. S.D. Sharma and the Chief Minister of Assam Mr. Hiteswar Saikia respectively demanding a separate autonomous administrative agreement that fits the existing situation so that their rights and interests are better assured and protected. The memorandum maintains –

"The Sonowal Kachari wants to see the end of all forms of socio-economic inequalities, exploitations and above all the intolerant views of the high caste society towards the tribal people and not the exacerbation of ethnic conflicts in their backward state in the name of identity of ethnicity, language and religion. Nevertheless the Sonowal Kachari demand for autonomous administrative arrangement in new form and context that fits in the present situation in other that their rights and interests and way of life are better assured and protected. What they want to stress upon is that no autonomy should be created that undermine the basic unity of the greater Assamese society, or works as through it is pitted against other community or communities for that matter, turns out to be freedom under vested interests in the name of particular tribe or community leading to the balkanization of Assam."[16]

In 1994, again SKADC and ASKJP jointly submitted a memorandum to the then Chief Minister Hiteswar Saikia demanding autonomy status for them[17]. In response to the memorandum the Govt. of Assam assured the leadership of granting autonomy soon.

The study of the history of the world with reference to movements and agitations show that the youths and the students play vital role in the mobilization of all movements. This is also true in case of the Sonowal Kacharis. They organized All Assam Sonowal Kachari Students' Union (AASKSU) in 1968[18]. The Sonowal Kachari educated youths and students have played a major role in organizing the movement for autonomy. They played very active role to generate a sense of political consciousness among the masses. From the beginning of the demand for autonomy to the Sonowal Kachari Accord of 4th March, 2005, the students and youths have actively participated in every agitational programme. In fact they were the backbone of the movement for autonomy.

The Sonowal Kachari autonomy movement grew stronger and popular with the passage of time. The mass people of Sonowal Kacharis started to support the movement morally and emotionally. As a result a new batch of young political leaders emerged within the community. This wing is known as All Sonowal Kachari Youth Council or Yuba Parishad (ASKYC or YP) which was formed in 2002. This Parishad forcefully raised demand for autonomy like other organizations of the Sonowal Kacharis. Since then the movement became stronger with democratic agitational programmes like bandhs, picketing, mass mobilization, strike, road blockade etc.

At last after a threadbare discussion, the Sonowal Kachari Accord was signed between the Sonowal Kachari leadership and the Government of Assam on 4th March, 2005. It is worth mentioning that other ethnic tribal organizations of Assam extended moral support to the movement of the Sonowal Kacharis for autonomy. Thus it seems that due to mounting pressure and compelling political situation, the Government of Assam ultimately had to agree to grant autonomy, a long pending political demand of the Sonowal Kacharis. Finally the Sonowal Kachari Autonomous Council (SKAC) was constituted on 19th September, 2005.

Conclusion

The Sonowal Kachari Autonomous Council is still in an infant stage. It will be too early to comment on the success or failure of the Council. So evaluation and assessment of the working of the SKAC will need some time. Till now it has taken up some schemes and programmes for the upliftment and welfare of the Sonowal Kachari community. Since SKAC reflects the hopes and aspirations of the Sonowal Kacharis, it must work to fulfill those. It can be concluded that the formation of Sonowal Kachari Autonomous Council has been a landmark event in the history of autonomy movements of Assam. It has unfurled a new horizon in the political scenario of the state.

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■■■■■

15. Conflict, Conflict Resolution and National Integration in India

Sanchita Bora, Ranjana Borah

I

Basically conflict means disagreement. A conflict is an opposition of people, forces, or other entities. It is actual or perceived opposition of needs, values and interests. A conflict can be even internal (within oneself) to individuals. In several cases, conflict seems to be a fact of life. "Conflict is a theme that has occupied the thinking of man more than any other, save only God and Love."(Rapoport1960:12). It is an antagonistic state or action which usually contains substantive, procedural and psychological dimensions. We all have seen situations where different people with different goals and needs have come into conflict. A conflict is more than mere disagreement - it is a situation in which people perceive a threat (physical, emotional, power, status, etc.) to their well-being. Conflicts occur when people (or other parties) perceive that, as a consequence of a disagreement, there is a threat to their needs, interests or concerns. Although conflict is a normal part of organizational life, providing numerous opportunities for growth through improved understanding and insight, there is a tendency to view conflict as a negative experience caused by abnormally difficult circumstances.

Conflict can exist at a variety of levels:

- intrapersonal conflict
- interpersonal conflict
- group conflict
- organizational conflict
- community conflict
- intra-state conflict
- international conflict and so on.

II

Conflict resolution is a process of working through opposing views in order to reach a common goal or mutual purpose. It is about how to deal with conflicts among people. Conflict resolution indicates a range of methods of eliminating sources of conflict. The term 'conflict resolution' is sometimes used interchangeably with the term dispute resolution or alternative dispute resolution. Processes of conflict resolution generally include negotiation, mediation and diplomacy. The processes of arbitration, litigation and formal complaint processes are usually described with the term dispute resolution, although some refer to them as conflict resolution. Processes of mediation and arbitration are often referred to as alternative dispute resolution.

Historically conflict resolution evolved during 1950s and 1960s as a result of the development of nuclear weapons. The conflicts between superpowers at the height of Cold War very often used to threaten human survival. So, different scholars from different disciplines move towards the study of conflict as a general phenomenon. Conflict resolution relates to all domains of conflicts, whether within or between families, organizations, communities or countries. It is a broad and fast growing academic field. "Conflict Resolution is about ideas, theories and methods that can improve our understanding of conflict and our collective practice of reduction in violence and enhancement of political processes for harmonizing interest".(Bercovitch J, Kremenyuk VA, Zartman IW, 2009:1)

We are not going to give either any particular list of prevalent conflicts or detailed exposition of the theories of conflict resolution. Accepting conflict as a fact here we try to understand the idealistic milieu of conflict resolution and its relation to national integration. The philosophy behind it is that we should not let the conflict to control us. If conflict is not handled effectively, the results can be harmful. Conflicting goals will quickly turn into personal dislike. Teamwork breaks down. Talent is wasted as people extricate from their work. Then it becomes easy to end up in a vicious descending. Preventing and resolving conflict before it results in violence is far less costly, both in human and financial terms. Actions to address the underlying causes of conflict include strengthening governance, improving access to human rights, economic and social development, destruction of weapons and developing a culture of peace.

"Any conflict is like a cancer. The sooner it is resolved the better for all the parties concerned in particular and society in general. If it is not resolved at the earliest possible opportunity, it grows at a very fast pace, and with time the effort required to resolve it increases exponentially as new issues emerge and conflicting situation proliferate. One dispute leads to another. It is essential to resolve the dispute the moment it rears its head."(Anurag K Agrawal, 2005:3) Four key components of conflict resolution are: controlling emotional responses, seeking understanding, identifying needs and common interests and seeking mutual benefit or purpose.

III

"National integration is not a house which could be built by mortar and bricks. It is not an industrial plan too which could be discussed and implemented by experts. Integration, on the contrary, is a thought which must go into the hearts of all the people. It is the consciousness which must awaken the people at large"(S Radhakrishnan). National integration has a positive aspect. It is primarily a political concern. It reduces socio-cultural and economic differences or inequalities and strengthens national unity and solidarity, which is not imposed by any authority. Thus national integration is not something that can be achieved merely by enacting a law. Emotional attachment is much more important in this regard.

India got independence on 15th August, 1947, but it was 'broken Swaraj' parting India and Pakistan. Since partition both the nations have witnessed three bloody wars (in 1948, 1965 and 1971). The newly independent India was itself at calamitous strait of consolidating its own post-independent position during the decades to follow - trauma of blood bath during the partition, wars with two neighbouring countries, and creation of Bangladesh. Till that time India has been craving for national integration. But the cyclone of violence has today taken its own course affecting not only the normative fabric of social lives, but has also jeopardized the democratic practices in India in general and the Northeast in particular.

Territorially we have been integrated. India is politically integrated through the various constitutional bodies. It is also judicially integrated from the village court to the Supreme Court. Educational Councils also brought out educational integration. Administrative integration is also achieved through the system of Civil Services. Still the question of national integration remains unsolved as the psychological integration is lacking. "Sadly what is lacking in the whole process of psychological integration is the imperative of mutual recognition and respect for the value system of communities other than one's" (Malla, N 1998:21)

Communalism, lingual conflict and regionalism are the main challenges to national integration. Even if we put a casual eye on the socio-political scenario of Northeast India, we witness frequent inter-ethnic or inter-community rivalry, hatred and bloodshed. Naga insurgency, which started in the 1950s, known as the mother of the Northeast insurgencies, is one of the oldest unresolved armed conflicts

in the world. Insurgency and violent conflicts emerged in other states like Manipur, Assam, Mizoram and Tripura. Currently, most of the states in the region are affected by some or other form of violent conflicts.

At another level, conflict in the region has been an all pervasive phenomena, and in its violent form, it has not only threatened the territorial integrity and political sovereignty of the Indian state, but also affected the life of the various people living in the region in incomprehensible and inexplicable terms. Let us say in the words of Clemens Spiess, the various problems and conflict constellations in the Northeast "represent(s) durable challenges to the integrative and accommodative capacity of Indian democracy".

Since independence, the Indian State and society has constantly been challenged by forces of fundamentalism, violence, conflict and terror. Even today ethnic and communal crises are not extinct. Currently these conflicts have got very popular and new terms such as 'Identity assertion', 'Ethno-nationalism movement', 'Freedom movement', 'Self-determination movement', 'Homeland demand' and the like. The rising ethnocentrism becomes the biggest challenge ever faced by the human society today. We may say that the conflicts and tensions we experience now can be considered as the outcome of ethnocentrism. This is true in case of Northeast India too. Again the growing insurgency is a major problem for the Indian Government. For example, in 2003, the Maoists had influence over 55 districts in 9 states. It is now estimated that they have established their writ over 223 districts in 20 states in India. All these conflicts pose internal security challenges waging war against national integration.

Indian Constitution has defined and declared the common goal as 'to secure to all the citizens of India Justice- social, economic and political, liberty, equality and fraternity'. The notion of national integration denotes that all citizens irrespective of caste, creed and colour are equal and are free to adopt any economic profession and

mode of worship and should respect the mutual rights and independence of their fellow country man. India has been trying to resolve conflicts through her secular ideology. Diplomacy is an effective tool of conflict resolution. But it should rest on a norm of co-existence allowing to live and let live. Co-existence means equal rights. The norms of co-existence smooth the progress of conflict resolution. Conflict Resolution is commitment to peace. Peace-building is a term used to describe the processes and activities involved in resolving violent conflict and establishing a sustainable peace. It is an overarching concept that includes conflict transformation, restorative justice, trauma healing, reconciliation, development and leadership, underlay by spirituality. Peace-building includes promoting conflict resolution and reconciliation techniques. Chic Dambach, President & CEO, Alliance for Peace-Building once said that "the ultimate objective of peace-building is to reduce and eliminate the frequency and severity of violent conflict."

Negotiation would ensure a platform where voluntary and non-pressured dialogue could be initiated. It is extremely important to have an open dialogue where contending parties are relatively at ease. The idea of reconciliation as moral initiative can be successfully initiated only when the moral agents who are party to the negotiations are free from constraints. Conciliation and reconciliation are moral concepts and can be meaningfully engaged only through morally free actions. The idea is to suggest for morally driven political choices and actions. Now-a-days alternative dispute resolution has become a global necessity. In recent times this type of resolution has emerged as a significant movement in conflict management. The main methods of alternative dispute resolution are negotiation, mediation, conciliation and arbitration.

Successful conflict resolution may ensure certain benefits that might not been expected at first. The significant effects of conflict resolution can be:

i. *Increased understanding:* The discussion needed to resolve conflict expands people's awareness of the situation, giving them an insight into how they can achieve their own goals without undermining those of other people.

ii. *Increased group cohesion:* When conflict is resolved effectively, team members can develop stronger mutual respect and a renewed faith in their ability to work together.

iii. *Improved self-knowledge:* Conflict pushes individuals to examine their goals in close detail, helping them understand the things that are most important to them, sharpening their focus, and enhancing their effectiveness.

IV

Conflict is normal, ever-present, unavoidable and useful on occasion. The fact that conflict exists, is not necessarily a bad thing. It is an inherent feature of human existence. It is difficult to conceive of a situation which is conflict free. But conflict refers either to a violent dispute or to an incompatibility of positions. Therefore it should be resolved. If it is resolved effectively, it can lead to personal and professional growth. This notion cannot be eliminated from the heart of human societies. The only thing that can be eliminated is the violent expression of conflict.

The concerned national and state authorities should readily attend the feeling of neglect and deprivation, the substantial regional imbalance, economic inequalities in the Northeast India to strengthen the spirit of integration. Effective conflict resolution is a process of cementing ties to feel oneness as equal members of one great family. Today's nationalism of India revolves around the moulding of diverse nationalities, language and culture groups into one great country. Even after 64 years of independence we are still looking forward for the process of national integration to be completed. We should learn to appreciate and respect beauty of diversity in order to achieve unity and national integration.

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■■■■■

16 An Analysis of Armed Forces Special Powers Act for Conflict Resolution

Ranjit Barua

North-East India is a region which has been suffering from prolonged conflicts and has become a perpetual conflict zone of India. According to the Report of the 2nd Administrative Reforms Commission the North-East represents a state of stable anarchy[1]. In different states of the region, conflicts have different causes and objectives and involve different set of actors[2]. But the predominant kind of conflict in the region has been between the State and a section of the people who oppose the authority of the Indian State. Present conflict situation in the region has, in a variety of ways, led to violation of human rights and fundamental freedom of people. In fact the people of this region have to suffer a lot due to the armed conflict involving government agencies and armed insurgent groups. One of the greatest institutional hurdles in this regard is the Armed Forces Special Powers Act of 1958 (hereafter AFSPA).

I

North-East India is a conglomerate of seven states[3] : Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura and lies between 22° and 29° North latitude and 89°46 and 97°5 East longitudes. It has an area of 2.6 lakh sq. km. (7.6% of India's land area) while its population is 39 million plus (3.6% of India's population). It covers an area of 255083 square kilometer (sq. km.)[4]. It has over 4,500 kilometers (kms) of external frontier with Bhutan, China, Myanmar and Bangladesh, making this region geo-politically and strategically significant. Only 2% of the landmass is connected with mainland India[5]. Under a nation-building process that emphasizes on territorial integrity as the most crucial objective, this region has been treated as a security zone by the Indian State[6]. The national security-centric discourse about the North-East shaped mostly by former bureaucrats and retired army, police and intelligence officers is heavily pro-state and insensitive to the vulnerabilities of the common man and dismissive of the frequent transgression of rights of its own citizens by the State. The tendency to view the conflict situation and insurgencies merely as law and order problem and subsequent military intervention has complicated the dynamics of conflict, its management and resolution.

Internal conflicts in India's North-East are overwhelmingly conceptualised within the framework of unique identities that are threatened by, and in confrontation with, homogenising State[7]. While most of the conflicts certainly fit into this general framework of interpretation, some cannot be explained by this. Many conflicts are among different ethnic groups who have been sharing the same territory and resources for centuries.

One of the first major challenges to the nation-building process in independent India was posed by the struggle of the Nagas which took an insurrectionary form in the early fifties[8]. The refusal of the Nagas to accept and recognize Indian authority and control led to the first major armed conflict in the region. As the conflict deepened and the situation worsened, the Government responded with the enactment of the AFSPA in 1958. The AFSPA has been a contentious one since its very inception. Its application and justification in the North-Eastern states of India has put it under the scanner time and again bringing with it the debate on human rights, their nature and the question of violation of such rights.

A close analysis of the provisions of the AFSPA raises many serious questions. Section 3 of this Act (as amended in 1972) grants the power to declare an area 'disturbed' to the Central Government and the Governor of the state. But it does not describe the circumstances under which the authority would be justified in making such a declaration. Section 4(a) empowers even a non-commissioned officer *to fire upon or otherwise use force, even to the causing of death based on mere suspicion that it is necessary to do so in order to maintain the public order.* It provides special powers to the investigating agency to elicit confession and to arrest[9] and to conduct search operations[10] without warrant. Section 5 states that after the military have arrested someone under the AFSPA, they must hand that person over to the nearest police station with the *'least possible delay'.* There is no definition in the Act of what constitutes the least possible delay. Even while the Act provides the Armed Forces with such absolute powers, it also provides them with impunity from any legal accountability. No legal proceedings can be initiated against the Armed Forces without prior permission of the Central Government[11].

The AFSPA, by its form and its application, violates the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the Convention against Torture, the UN Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officials etc. it violates even many non-derogable rights which can not be suspended under any circumstances. Some of these are right to life, freedom of thought and conscience, freedom from torture etc. What makes the AFSPA so offensive is because it gives such overriding powers to the man in olive green to shoot, arrest, search individuals and homes with brutality written all over their faces, on the plea of 'aiding the civil administration'[12]. Thus the harsh nature of the provisions of the AFSPA is clearly visible. It is one of the reasons for large scale violation of human rights in the North-East India. Wherever the AFSPA is in operation, enforced disappearances, extra-

judicial executions, torture, rape and arbitrary detention are routinely reported. In fact history of the AFSPA is also history of violation of human rights of people. In the name of tackling insurgency, security forces frequently violate human rights of civilian population.

II

In 1958, the AFSPA was promulgated as a temporary measure to tackle a small group of Naga hostiles. After 52 years of its operation, it is still there in the North-East and now has been extended to Jammu and Kashmir. Had the AFSPA been effective, insurgency would have been contained only within the Naga Hills. The fact that it has spread to nearly all the seven states tells us that the Act is a failure and that it needs to be reviewed immediately[13]. Despite the impunity provided by this law, the armed forces are not successful in solving armed insurgencies and on the contrary it has been escalated. At the time of enactment of this Act, conflict was limited to a small area inhabited by the Nagas. But the atrocities committed under this Act have further alienated the people and it is also one contributory factor in accelerating conflict in the North-East. The AFSPA has weakened civil space and undermined space for democratic and peaceful dissent. It, therefore, rather than curbing political disturbances, has actually added to it.

Many incidents of fake encounters, killings, rapes and forced disappearances have occurred in this region. Some of the most infamous incidents include Oinam incident of 1987 (15 civilians killed and 3 women raped), Deepila Chowk Massacre (1991)[14], Mokokchung incident of 1994[15], Kohima Killings of 1995 (7 killed and 22 seriously injured)[16] and Malom Massacre (2000)[17]. It was after this Malom Massacre that Irom Chanu Sharmila started her 'fast-unto-death' demanding repeal of the AFSPA. She has been continuing her strike for more than a decade and has become a symbol of resistance against the AFSPA. She is now regarded as 'the Iron Lady of Manipur' who has become the voice of democratic dissent

against excesses committed by armed forces under the AFSPA. An editorial of the highest circulated English daily from North-East wrote:

> The AFSPA has been a draconian piece of legislation widely being used as an instrument of state oppression. The widespread opposition to the Act- as symbolized most poignantly by Irom Sharmila who completed ten years of fasting- is understandable, as the AFSPA has a history of glaring misuse resulting in large-scale human rights abuse.[18]

Justice Jeevan Reddy Committee, formed by the Government of India to look into 'legal, constitutional and moral aspects' of the AFSPA after gang rape and extrajudicial execution of Thangjam Manorama by armed forces in 2004 and subsequent mass protest movement, found that 'the Act, for whatever reason, has become a symbol of oppression, an object of hate and an instrument of discrimination and highhandedness. The Act is too sketchy, too bald and quite inadequate in several particulars.'[19] It is worth mentioning that several petitions were pending before the Supreme Court of India challenging the constitutional validity of the AFSPA. All these petitions were combined into Naga People's Movement for Human Rights vs. Union of India[20]. The Supreme Court in its verdict in 1997 held that the Act was valid given the context in which it was enacted and where it was implemented, it was a reasonable and justified means even though it may appear to be harsh. On the face of it, it was necessary. The Court also held that the deployment of the army is mean to supplement and not to replace the existing state machinery[21]. Though the Court in its wisdom chose to declare the law to be good but sought to impose some checks. It cautioned that the Act must not be imposed for an indefinite period.

Recognising that the Supreme Court has upheld the constitutional validity of the AFSPA [22], it maintained, 'that circumstance is not an endorsement of the desirability or advisability of the Act... The Court does not- it is not supposed to- pronounce upon the wisdom or the necessity of such an enactment.'[23] It suggested

that 'the AFSPA should be repealed. Therefore, recommending the continuation of the present Act, with or without amendments, does not arise.'[24] The Second Administrative Reform Commission, in its report submitted in 2007, also recommended withdrawal of the AFSPA.

Various national as well as international civil society and human rights groups like People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL), Asian Centre for Human Rights (ACHR), South Asia Human Rights Documentation Centre (SAHRDC), Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International etc. have been repeatedly demanding repeal of the AFSPA. The UN Human Rights Committee is also critical about the provisions of the AFSPA. The UN Commissioner for Human Rights also asked India to repeal the AFSPA. She termed it as 'out-dated and colonial era law that breach contemporary international human rights standards.'[25] However, because of the opposition of the Army and the Defence Ministry, the Government of India has not taken any step towards scrapping of the AFSPA. They argue that any dilution or withdrawal of the AFSPA would seriously jeopardize the safety and credibility of the forces engaged in anti-insurgency operations in hostile environments.

III

That the AFSPA has failed in its objective is a stark reality.[26] The tension has only further escalated because of the harsh nature of this Act. Because of gross violation of human rights by armed forces, the people have become all the more hostile to them. The behaviour of the Indian Army while conducting counter-insurgency operations in the North-East has a direct bearing on the legitimacy of the democratic political structures under which it functions. The disproportionate use of violence affecting civilians directly and restraining their movements results in increased legitimacy of the insurgents.[27] On the other hand, the legitimacy of the State has eroded to a great extent in the eyes of people. The demand for separation and autonomy from the regime of what they conceive to be an

apathetic and vengeful state has only grown since the inception of the Act.[28] The excesses of armed forces have propagated further violence and resentment towards the state structure. Rather than achieving public order, the Act has contributed to public enragement. The non-state actors, particularly insurgent groups, have exploited the situation and taken full advantage of this. As a result, the conflict situation in the North-East has further deepened creating more trouble. This complex matrix of multi-pronged conflict situations in the region reached a kind of equilibrium to qualify to be considered as 'durable disorder'[29].

Basic human rights including the right to live are something that cannot be allowed to be stamped upon under any circumstances. While it is the bounden duty of the Government to protect civilians from militant attacks, any attempt to ensure that by brazenly violating the fundamental rights of the people- to the extent of causing deaths of innocents- would amount to gross injustice and therefore untenable[30]. The experience with the AFSPA for over five decades has shown it to be counter-productive, as abuses perpetrated under it tend to alienate the people from the Government and make them sympathetic towards the insurgents.

Any genuine attempt to redress the problems cannot be sporadic, piece-meal and one-dimensional. There is paramount need to understand the complexities involved in the conflicts of this region. Neither 'national security' centric discourse reflected through the AFSPA and other coercive mechanisms nor 'developmental perspective' as advocated by some can be an answer. The AFSPA creates 'India' and a 'Not-India'[31]. There are other areas in India where extremism is growing alarmingly. Spread of Naxal Movement and Maoism in many states is a clear indication of this. But it is pertinent to note here that the Government of India is not at all prepared to use Indian Army in those areas. It has never even talked of invoking AFSPA there. It is clear that the response of the State to the conflicts in the peripheries is different from its response to those in heartland.

If armed resistance in Indian heartland can be faced and mitigated without the AFSPA, it is difficult to understand why and how AFSPA becomes essential and sacrosanct in the North-East.

IV

Though the process of state-building has been successful in North-East India, the process of nation-building is neither over nor successful. The homogenizing attitude of the Indian State has faced only with resistance and opposition. What is required in the region is a nation-building exercise in the true sense of the term and that too with due respect to the ethnic, cultural and other diversities of the people of this region.

There is no doubt that the armed forces operate in difficult and trying circumstances in the areas afflicted by internal armed conflicts. It is in this situation that the primacy of rule of law and supremacy of judiciary need to be upheld. It should be remembered that the State has the responsibility and obligation to honour and comply with the internal and international human rights standards in all shifting circumstances[32].

The people of North-East India are not aliens or enemies. They are the citizens of India. As such Government of India has legal and moral responsibility to protect their interest and rights. Since it has been proved beyond doubt that AFSPA is a bad law which violates human rights of its own people and is a contributory factor of ongoing conflict between the State and its adversaries, it should be repealed. Repeal of this Act can be considered as the first step towards conflict resolution. If this Act is repealed, it will send a positive signal to all concerned. It will show the goodwill of the State and will certainly help in creation of a congenial atmosphere. Civil society groups may play their part by putting pressure on the insurgents to shun violence and come forward for negotiation and peaceful settlement of their grievances. No doubt mere scrapping of AFSPA cannot end all conflicts. In fact the AFSPA is only a small part of a

larger problem. Moreover there is no guarantee that even if AFSPA is withdrawn, the security forces will stop acting in irresponsible and brutish manner. The possibility of state terror will still be there. However, the withdrawal of AFSPA is of course the first minimum requirement for any attempt at conflict resolution in the North-East India.

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17 Conflict Resolution for Nation-Building and National Integration

Karabi Devi, Prasanta Kumar Sharma, Pradeep Dey

Introduction

The North-East India comprising of eight states is a region connected to the Indian mainland by a small corridor and surrounded by four countries viz. Bhutan, Myanmar, Bangladesh and China. It is the centre of multitude of conflicts that undermine the idea of India as a prosperous and functioning democracy. Over 30 rebel groups are active in this region. The region is most commonly studied by outsiders as a theatre of insurgency and counter-insurgency. For more than half a century, the North-East has witnessed an unending cycle of violent conflicts dominated by insurgencies with demands ranging from outright sovereignty to greater political autonomy. Diverse groups inhabiting this region have been pressing either for the creation of separate states on the basis of their lingo-cultural identities or for special constitutional safeguards of their respective identities. This issue has led to several significant questions like whether ethnic identity and nation-building are compatible factors in a multinational state like India, whether professing ethnic identity and value system have resulted in conflict and how all these would affect the pattern of nation-building process in the region.

The conflict between the indigenous groups and the migrants has also created a new dimension to the problem of identity. Insurgency has taken toll of hundreds of lives of security forces, insurgents and innocent civilians. Colonial attitude of rulers at the Centre, nativism, relative deprivation and cultural nationalism have sparked violent conflicts in the North-East. Continuous inflow of migrants from across the borders and from other parts of India poses a serious challenge to the existence of indigenous people. The Naga insurgency, which started in 1950s, is one of the oldest unresolved armed conflicts in the world. Currently most of the states in the region are affected by some form of conflict or other. The types of conflicts are wide ranging from separatist movements to inter-community and intra-group conflicts. Unfortunately the data and information of the region is not sufficiently communicated between the region and the Centre contributing to further misinformation, mismanagement, alienation and parochialisation.

Historical Background of Conflict

North-East India is ethnically, linguistically and culturally very rich and distinct from the rest of India. It is territorially organized in such a manner that ethnic and cultural specificities were ignored while drawing the boundary lines- both state as well as international. It took nearly a century to the colonial rulers to annex the entire region. They administered the hills as loose 'frontier areas' and people of those areas never came in touch with central administration. The dichotomy between the hill people and the plains people has been a persistent feature of the life of the North-East since then. Indeed the North-East is considered as an area of great and continuous civilisational intercourse and a complex transition zone of linguistic, racial and religious streams. The cultural mosaic was made more complex as a result of the British policy of 'importing' large numbers of administrators, plantation workers and cultivators from other parts of British India. This region was neglected right from the very beginning. Nothing important was done during British rule for many

reasons; because it was a partially annexed territory and the tribals were never fully integrated. Real development works started in 1970s much after independence when the new states came into being. The North-East region has critical strategic importance as almost 99% of its borders are international.

Causes of Conflict

Economic development of the North-Eastern region has lagged behind the rest of the country due to lack of major capital investment. There has been very little investment by the private sector or in the form of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). Only the budgetary support given by the Union Government is spent on infrastructure development, education and health services with little scope for productive employment generation.

The multi-ethnic and multi-cultural setting of India and its attempt to attain nationhood provided a fertile ground for the development of ethno-nationalism and other forms of identity quest. An intensifying crisis of identity is most evident in the North-East. Many insurgent groups argue that the political integration of the region to India was done without the approval of people and hence lacks legitimacy. Moreover the racial and cultural differences of this region have also created multiple identities and shaken political loyalty to the nation-state.

Illegal migration from Bangladesh into this region and use of Bangladeshi and Bhutanese territory by insurgents of the North-East pose a grave security concern for the region. Networking among the militant groups of the region has also grown quickly leading to further trouble.

Circumstances in the theatres of conflict in India's North-East go against the general presumption of a direct and self evident conflict of interest between the government and its various agencies on one hand and the terrorist groupings on the other.

Though conflict in the region is mixed with complex political economic issues such as control over natural resources, migration related issues, social exclusion and so on; but politics of identity lie at the heart of the bigger part of the current conflict constellations in North East. For example, the recent Garo-Rabha conflict in Assam-Meghalaya border is the outcome of Rabha demand for autonomy under the Sixth Schedule which is not favoured by the Garos who already enjoy the said benefits.

Regional inequalities have been another source of conflict. The centralizing tendency of the Indian state is somehow responsible for identity assertion and ethnic conflict in the North-East.

Measures to Resolve Conflict

The modes of conflict resolution in the North-East have been basically through security forces and police action, providing more autonomy through mechanisms like conferring statehood and creating autonomous bodies, negotiation with insurgent groups and development activities including special economic packages. Some of these have proved successful in the short term. But resolution and prevention of conflict in the North-East would require a judicious mix of various approaches on the basis of the experiences of success and failure of the past.

There is need for urgent and innovative efforts to build capacity in different wings and levels of governance. Few specific areas which need capacity building are administration, police, local government institutions and regional bodies.

At the political level, strengthening of the rule of law and constitutional politics is required. This would satisfy the need for introducing accountability and democratic practices into conflict resolution machinery in the North-East.

There must be active promotion of 'culture of peace' that rejects legitimization of violence as a means to represent political problems and grievances. Moreover instead of trying to solve ethnic insurgencies by military means, more emphasis should be laid on political dialogues on a sustained basis. Civil society has also an important role to play in such efforts to address legitimate grievances and concerns of the

people of this region. Participation of civil society is also required for formulating and executing developmental plans. People's control over natural resources should be recognized.

Moreover the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) which has been in operation in the North-East for last five decades should be repealed. Though the Act is a powerful measure for the Government to counter insurgency, it has resulted in widespread opposition due to its harsh nature.

There is need to improve political representation of this region in Indian parliament as small representation has resulted in utter neglect of the issues concerning this region. Moreover infrastructure development, employment generation, vocational training etc. are also equally important. Tourism in North-East has great potential and it can also provide employment to many along with revenue collection.

There is need to build multi-stakeholders platforms or similar participatory processes that can bring all stakeholders together. Inclusive frameworks- both institutional and administrative within which people with divergent interests and aspirations can discuss, exchange their ideas and coordinate their actions are necessary.

In internal conflicts, nations generally try to avoid 'full scale' war and to evolve coercive conflict resolution methods. The opponents also develop 'sub-conventional and irregular warfare'. This has happened in India's North-East too. But such tendencies must be discarded.

In an attempt to bring an end to the conflicts, several peace accords have been signed with insurgent groups by the Government. Though there have been several governmental peace initiatives, multi-track diplomacy and civil society initiatives are at incipient stage. Government does not encourage international interventions in any conflict resolution process. It is even skeptical about the role of local civil society groups and does not want to involve civil society in peace-building. Such attitude has to be changed. Until and unless the role of civil society is actively encouraged, the prospect of end of insurgency and return to peace is quite remote.

India is facing the challenge of nation-building. To face it effectively, the youths must be involved in the nation-building process. The ethnic, linguistic and cultural identities of all communities must be mutually respected and allowed to flourish in their respective traditional areas. All these measures will contribute significantly to elimination of mutual distrust as well as sense of exploitation and frustration.

There is need to understand the structures of a conflict to decide how to resolve it successfully. Unfortunately, for last six decades, no responsive and accountable political structure has been created either for conflict resolution or for governance itself.

All conflicts are borne out of certain factors. One is insensitivity of the Government and lack of tools to govern multi-ethnic territories. Another major factor is the fear of smaller ethnic groups of being overwhelmed by 'others' and their attempt to protect identity and interest.

Ethnic unrest or even demand for autonomy is not necessarily threat to unity and integrity of the nation. To meet the challenge of ethnicity there must be rearrangement of centre-state relations, hopes and aspirations of smaller groups should not be ignored and rights of minority groups must be safeguarded.

Of late there has been talk of turning North-East India from a conflict ridden region to a region of immense economic potential by opening the historic 'Stilwell Road' and 'Look East Policy'. However this requires not only massive efforts towards infrastructure development but also improvement in the security situation.

Conclusion

It is hoped that shared vision of a peaceful and prosperous North-East can bring all stakeholders together on this collective quest for resolving the differences peacefully as a part of nation-building process. To conclude, it must be admitted that protracted conflict diminishes the prospect of peace as vested interests are created in continuation of conflict. So we can merely manage conflict but can not achieve peace. Perfect conflict resolution or perfect peace settlements are virtually impossible.

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18 | Assam in Conflict: Reason and Redemption

Muni Kakati

'North-East' was first applied as a geographical directional name to a frontier of British India as perceived from a colonial power base, and then as an area to be differentiated racially and culturally from India or rather from a Sanskritized India.

This politics of differences has played a role so big in the North-East that conflict resolution, national integration and nation-building are some of the vital questions that it faces right now.

When in the light of Sino-British relations in the 19th century the British rulers in India wanted to safeguard the British interest, Alexander Mackenzie wrote about this north east frontier (first in 1869) in a report titled 'Memorandum on North-East Frontier of Bengal'. The area that we now understand as the North-East was then perceived as the north-east frontier of British India's easternmost province of Bengal. And gradually, beginning with the Treaty of Yandaboo in 1826, the entire North-East including the hills of Naga, Jaintia, Garo and Khasi was brought under the British rule. The term 'North-East' first applied as a 'geographical directional name', as Harekrishna Deka states in his seminal article *From India's North-East: A Historical Perspective*.

Years later, there seems to have been little change in the idea of the North-East apart from, of course, a better territorial perspective owing to the addition of the Assam valley to the North-East Frontier tract by the British Empire for its expansionist policies and later on, recognition of the entire area as a part of India post independence. Also, the initial practice of keeping the plains and the hills of the area separate, which the British did with the surface motive of 'better' administration and the hidden one of avoiding tribal and peasant uprisings still seems to be prevalent. Even though the governments in power every now and then talk about bringing the hills into the plains mainstream and the North-East in its totality into the central mainstream, there seems to be a strong undercurrent against this. Epithets and nomenclatures like 'the seven sisters' have been given to the North-East and very quickly lapped up by the media and the literature. Yet there seems to be only a very nominal degree of sisterly affection amongst the seven (now eight) states.

The psycho-social separation that the British so well played upon remains even today. According to Ajai Sahni, the dichotomous administrative system both in the pre and post independence era produced wide variations between the pace of development in the hills and the plains, with the latter dominating the economic profile of the region, and the tribal areas lagging far behind. More than a hundred and sixty scheduled tribes and possibly more than four hundred other ethnic groups and peoples stay in this area, all with their own sense of identity and culture, with more than a majority harbouring feelings of neglect from both the centre and their plains counterparts, and sometimes from one another. The idea of ethno-nationalism, which had worked to unite many a tribe sharing their traditions and customs during the years of struggle for independence towards a common cause, seems to have lost its charm in the absence of a common enemy. Now, the cause is sovereignty and the enemy is *'anyone that is not me'*. Militant outfits, secessionist groups and ethnic communities all want greater political power relative not just to the Indian state but also to each other. Thus, in such a condition the best that we can hope for is a peaceful status quo of the tribes and groups present in the area. It is towards this goal that peace talks, negotiations and other efforts have been directed for last three decades.

Insurgency in Assam reared its head in 1980s. Illegal migration was one major issue which contributed to the growth of extremism and insurgency in Assam. A very strong and popular movement started under the leadership of the All Assam Students' Union and the All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad for detection and deportation of illegal migrants. In the mean time, the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) was established with the declared aim of secession from the Indian state. ULFA also aided these two groups in this cause. The movement was fuelled by the political parties who believed that the presence of the immigrants was significantly altering the demography of the state and thereby altering the results and outcomes of elections. Such a sentiment is still very strong in the state and many people still feel that the sole reason for the economic underdevelopment of the state is the immigration problem. Back in 1979, due to the strong public uprising, talks were held between the government and the concerned parties in order to devise a solution. But all hell broke loose over the decision of the cut-off date to determine the status of the immigrants. President's rule was enforced but like it happens with movements of such sentiment, the business took a violent turn by the end of the year. The Assam movement reached its peak during 1983-84 and ended in 1985 with the Assam Accord and the formation of Asom Gana Parishad which won the election of 1985 and came to power.

But as was predictable, the situation always looks different when one is in power to when one is on the other side of it. The ULFA in alleged association with ISI, insurgents from Nagaland and Kachin Independence Army (Myanmar) wreaked havoc in the state with kidnapping, murder and extortion. The number of insurgency

related killings had increased day by day. It was only after the President's Rule in 1990, Operation Bajrang (1990) and Operation Rhino (1991) that a certain nominal amount of normalcy was restored. Many militants surrendered with the declaration of amnesty by the Government. ULFA remains to be a formidable force in the area, but with a clear loss of the initial idealism due to the mix up of the organization with petty criminals. There seems to be a loss of identity of the ULFA members with severe inconsistency in their ideological framework and petty criminal activities.

The immigration problem is still to be solved. It continues to be one of the main reasons for continued violence in the state and it is probably destined to be so for the profit of the nexus that controls the benefits of it. A clear example is the fact that the ULFA which maintains deportation of the illegal immigrants as one of their main issues has taken shelter and training in Bangladesh.

Assam remains torn on the basis of another major issue. This issue arises out of the clash with the tribal versus the homogenizing state and the tribal versus the non tribal immediate periphery. Under the leadership of Upendra Nath Brahma, the Bodo Movement was started for a separate 'Bodoland' in late 1980s. The period was one of increased strife and tension between the Assamese and the Bodos who have lived together peacefully for centuries. More than that, the psychological barriers had increased so much that even after the signing of the Bodo Accord in 1993, BLTF (Bodo Liberation Tiger Force, now the BLT) was formed, which rejected the Accord and declared separation from the state of Assam as their aim. Another group NDFB (which had been formed in 1988 as the Bodo Security Force) raised the issue of an independent Bodoland outside the Indian Union. The conflict between these two groups resulted in much bloodshed among the Bodos.

The later half of 2000 rocked Assam with another streak of mad violence, this time against the non-tribal, non-Assamese speakers of the area- the migrants from the Hindi speaking belt of the country.

Examples of the most gruesome scenes of man's ability to be cruel to another man was seen when irrespective of gender or age, people from Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and other Hindi speaking areas were slaughtered across the state.

Besides these, several Muslim militant groups with the objective to curve out an 'Islamistan' are active in Assam. Many other groups like Kamatapur Liberation Organisation (KLO), Dima Halam Daoga (DHD), Adivasi National Liberation Army (ANLA) etc. are active in different parts of the state.

In spite of so many major political turmoils, the situation is not as bleak as it may appear. Strong military action has largely hampered the workings of ULFA. The desperate need to study and understand the deep-rooted causes that divide groups of people who inhabit the same land have driven both the people and the government into taking steps that have worked towards the issue of conflict resolution. There have been two major initiatives as far as ULFA is concerned– the PCG (People's Consultative Group) and the Sanmilita Jatia Abhibartan (SJA).

The PCG, a citizens' group was formed by ULFA for negotiation with Government of India in 2005. Through the PCG, the ULFA entered into talks with the Government, which was unprecedented, for the ULFA so far maintained that any talk without the core issue of sovereignty was impossible. The PCG was a very commendable initiative for it represented the people of the state and is comprised of members outside of the political circle of profit and who at least, appear to be genuinely interested in the welfare of the state. It advocated the stoppage of all military operations against the group and also vouched for a certain level of trust and belief in the innate goodness of the human being. There were serious derailments in the peace process initiated by the group, but the last straw on the camel's back came with the successive failures of peace talks between the Government and the insurgent group with the severe shortsightedness of the former leading to a refusal to stop army

operations against the insurgents, at least during the time of dialogue. There was no other way but for the PCG to pull out of the peace talks with the clear question posed by the Centre towards its validity.

The Sanmilita Jatiya Abhibartan attempted to take off from where the PCG left. It carefully avoided the pitfalls of the later. The group with the leadership of Dr. Hiren Gohain and the membership of eminent authorities like Dr. Indira Goswami, Hiranya Kumar Bhattacharya, Harekrishna Deka, Dr Nirmal Kumar Choudhury, Prof Khorshed Alam, Ratneswar Basumatary, Dr Rohini Barua, Indibar Dewri, Dilip Patgiri and Lachit Bordoloi believes that all the issues, including sovereignty, should be discussed across the table and the ULFA should be allowed to explain their concept of the term. For this an All Assam Convention was set up.

With an idea to find a broad consensus, the all Assam convention attempts to disentangle certain contentious issues. With representatives of different socio-political and cultural organizations, social activists, intellectuals and thinkers from different fields of life, it has tried to provide the platform for resumption of talks between the two parties. The SJA believes that the mutual talk is the only way that should be pursued for the greater good of the state and its people. The stalwarts of the ULFA movement including its Chairman Arabinda Rajkhowa have already been released from jail and formal talks between the ULFA and the Government of India is expected to begin soon. However, Paresh Baruah, the elusive Commander-in-Chief, is forwarding some fresh conditions for talks. Although such development seems to be non conducive for congenial peace talks or conflict resolution, the people of Assam are still hopeful for a political solution with dignity and honour. With the idea that 'sovereignty can exist even without secession', the SJA remains one of the strongest hopes of peace in the state.

The Bodo problem has reached a peaceful limbo with cease-fire agreement between the BLT and the Government of India on March 29, 2000. Subsequently, tripartite talks involving the BLT,

State Government and the Central Government provided for the creation of a Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) comprising the Bodo dominated areas of North Assam.

This apart, for all the other incidents of terror that occasionally rock the state, one can only appeal to the innate humanity of those who indulge in such violence. Development and economic parity does not come by eradicating those who are lucky enough to enjoy the luxuries of it. Many feel that the enmity against the non-Assamese migrants settled in the state is misplaced. We must realize that violence against people just on the basis of the language they speak is unforgivable. Every human being has the right to earn his living from the state where he stays. The North-East is an integral part of India and all of us must realize that development comes from working hard. Any kind of violence will obviously not serve the purpose.

But was this the situation always? Was the so called North-East of India so distinctly divided, the people so separated in their own little worlds that they undermined the connection that comes with living in close proximity for years together? Were they so shortsighted that their contributions in each other's history escape their notice?

No, it wasn't. But ever since the British Raj, there has been a tendency of blaming all of India's misfortunes on it. The fate of the North-East is no different. Of course there were other reasons, like potent differences amongst the tribes and ethnic groups that otherwise increase the flavor of living together and decorate the mosaic of culture and tradition, which were highlighted and played upon in order to serve petty political and administrational needs of the British first, and then any power/authority that came to rule. Even now, all that the common man wants is to live peacefully. Yet, there is a constant fear of death, economic deprivation and curbing of basic rights. The groups that are waging war against the State are probably not as formidable as they are made out to be. But with the latest arms and ammunitions, even a small group has begun to pose serious threat to

life. Sustaining such fear is a profitable situation now, for the nexus of all those who reap the benefit of it. Ajai Sahni rightly talks about the 'underground economy of terrorism', a clandestine power arrangement between each state's legitimate power elites and various terrorist groupings. Somehow the purpose of insurgency now, is not the upheaval of the established political order, or even the once 'noble' idea of independence, but the development of a system of free flowing corruption that benefits all at the cost of the life of the civilian, the armed forces and the youth disillusioned by unemployment, economic disparity and blinded by the fervor of ethno-cultural identity.

What is needed today is not just a strong citizens' initiative in the state to curb the problem but also a massive awareness drive that tells the people of the unholy nexus and makes them able to differentiate between the genuine efforts of the Government to maintain peace in the area and the sham ones. What more is required is a revolution, a revolution of the sentimental nature, humanistic nature, one that reminds everyone that deep down, we are all the same- human beings capable of probably more love than we are capable of hatred and violence. We need a renaissance, an ideology that we can believe in, the commencement of an era that will herald a new dawn for Assam and a new dawn for the North-East– the dawn of tolerance and holistic development.

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UNDERSTANDING
CONFLICT SITUATION IN NORTH-EAST INDIA
FOR NATIONAL INTEGRATION

The present volume is the outcome of a National Seminar on 'Understanding Conflict Situation in North-East India for National Integration' held in Nowgong Girls' College on 31st January – 1st February, 2011. The seminar was an attempt to understand conflict situation in the North-East in its totality. It focuses on different aspects like -

☐ Ethnic Resurgence, Migration and Ethnic Conflict

☐ Ethnic Insurgency and Human Rights Scenario

☐ Autonomy Movement with special reference to the Sixth Schedule

☐ Conflict Resolution, Nation-building and National Integration.

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