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**HIMALAYAN  
AND  
CENTRAL ASIAN STUDIES**

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Vol. 5 Nos. 3-4

July - December 2001

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***NORTH EAST SPECIAL***

**Mountain Commons in the North East**  
*Mahendra P. Lama*

**Migration, Identity and Conflict in Assam**  
*Anindita Dasgupta*

**Small Wars and Insurgencies in the North East**  
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**Whither DGHC**  
*D. Bhaumik & Dilip K. Sarkar*

**Toy Train of Darjeeling**  
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**Food Culture in the Eastern Himalayas**  
*J. P. Tamang*

**The United Nations Commission on Human Rights  
(56th Session): A Report**  
*Sharad K. Soni*

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## HIMALAYAN AND CENTRAL ASIAN STUDIES

**Editor : K. WARIKOO**

**Guest Editor : MAHENDRA P. LAMA**

**Assistant Editor : SHARAD K. SONI**

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## **Sikkim Human Development Report**

**Mahendra P. Lama**

(Text in two colours)

ISBN 81 87358 04 1, 277x212 mm, 127 pp., Rs 495.

Very little is known about Sikkim. This book outlines its development since it became a part of the Indian Union in 1975.

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## *Editor's Page*

The Eastern Himalayas constitute one of the most critical and significant regions of the Indian-subcontinent in terms of its crucial role in conditioning the climatic situations, as custodian of extra-ordinarily rich bio-diversity, as the origin of many a lifelines including the river system and as provider of one of the most extravagantly beautiful panorama. There are core strategic issues in the management of the Eastern Himalayas as it is interspersed by very ancient civilizations including that of India and China. It incorporates in it the very basis of border configurations that determine the national identities and the nation building process of the countries located in and around it.

This issue of *Himalayan and Central Asian Studies* is, however, devoted only to some very specific regions of the Eastern Himalayas that primarily fall in the North Eastern regions of India. The North Eastern parts of India including Sikkim and Darjeeling have been the most potential areas in the development agenda of the country. Despite this popular belief that has characterised the political economy of India, most of the region remained underdeveloped and unharnessed in all sense of the term. Sikkim has of course been an exception in many respects both because of its political history and the development orientation. There are several factors that can be attributed to the present state of affairs in the north-eastern region.

Firstly, the very development orientation has been based on a visible mismatch between the thinking of the planning agencies, deployment of resources and institutional back up. Development *per se* has always been regarded as the pure game of money and finance. The Centre only pumped in money without thinking about the needs and priorities, institutions and development managers. Since the development institutions were never set up in a planned manner, the related issues always remained in the arena of ad hocism, departmentalism and marginalism. There has been no cohesive and scientific attempt to build institutions which could provide

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continuance, consistence, effectiveness and sustainability to development actions.

Secondly, the entire development issues have been handled in such a way so as to give an instinctive impression that development is a prerogative and duties of only the government and the state machineries. It made people too dependent on the government in every aspect of life. It confiscated their creativity and satiated the existence of traditionally voluntary societies. The community based development ethos which had been the strongest pillar of the North East was thus gradually eroded by the actions of the governments. Therefore, in the daily life of a north-eastern today the government is 90 per cent and his/her own contribution is only 10 per cent. More acutely the modern system of governance backed by better technology and technical inputs were never taken to the North East. On the other hand, the private entrepreneurs and parties also started devouring the public funds for private gains. This ultimately built an unholy nexus between the politicians, some rent seeking bureaucrats and private parties. Every one knows this nexus today, let alone the insurgents.

Thirdly, in a society for which the embryo of governance has been the voluntariness based community actions, the modern type of governance based on poor and slow trickle down never suited the people. This became more adversely serious as the transparency and accountability became more and more far fetched. There has been no trace of monitoring and evaluation of any development projects. Once the earmarked fund is spent, it is something like pouring it into a bottomless pit. The other States in India are no less. But the deepening and spread of this problem has been relatively much sweeping in the North East. The total absence of accountability both political and societal is the key issue in the development governance of the North East today.

Fourthly, people from outside the North East have always tended to treat the North East as a temporary resort for their rent seeking activities. Private sector participants and merchant capitalists have made maximum returns in the fertile development expenditure in the North East.



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However, most of them have siphoned off the returns to their so called home states and many a times to the safe heavens. Even the well established private sector investors and entrepreneurs including in the plantation sector have never ploughed back even a small portion of their profit into the North East. This is more so in case of world famous Darjeeling tea. All these have kept the North East high and dry in terms of further generation of income and employment. Most interestingly out of all the much required institutional interventions, this process of siphoning off has been institutionalised to a great degree. The consequence of all these are now manifested in violent movements and ethnic cleansing.

Expectedly all these have generated an all round discontentment and frustration in the North East. The insurgency, anti-social activities and other forms of extraction and violence thrive on these fertile emotional but substantive grounds only.

North East remains unexplored in many ways. Tourism, energy, bio-diversity, market and human resources and its importance as a gateway to the entire East and South East Asia have never been effectively debated. The present discourse on all these issues including making the North East themselves. How do we go about it? Who will bell the cat? Very few studies have been done assessing the real impact and implications of opening the North East both through Bangladesh and to the other parts of Asia. However, no one really questions the long term transformation in the development agenda and content of the North East to be brought about once this sub-regionalism among Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal and North East parts of India is realized.

The second generation reforms and the globalisation process cannot really leave the North East untouched. Besides both positive and negative economic impact, the challenge is significant as the sinews of globalisation process push forward the case for a borderless regime particularly in the economic spheres, whereas the North East region is fighting a case for more stricter and regulated border regimes to contain the migration from across the borders. We can then expect a frontal war between the forces of globalisation and the indigenous resistance.

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Migration from Bangladesh has been a very critical issue and is likely to acquire more deleterious dimension in the face of erosion in the carrying capacity of both Bangladesh and the North East. The security trail of migration could have much larger implications hitherto not discussed. The balancing act is to be done by the State by way of both strengthening the development process in Bangladesh and the North East and by designing a sound migration related policy regimes at the national level.

The development issues in the North East therefore need to be reassessed and re-examined by bringing in newer definitions and paradigms including the Human Development approach. Sikkim has already produced Human Development Report and is far ahead of many of the North Eastern states in the arena of bringing about structural changes and fiscal disciplines in its economy.

North East is one region where there is least debate on the technology front despite it being in the hub of many activities that generate newer technologies. For instance, the entire question of genetic and bio spheres related resources has generated least debate and discourse in the region thereby disregarding the naked fact that many of its vanishing genetic varieties have already been pirated to acquire intellectual property rights. The surreptitious trade in medicinal plants is only a tip of ice berg. This also highlights the emerging environmental concerns.

Equally noteworthy aspect has been the unharnessed hydro resources. Planners and development thinkers located in Delhi did not give a consistent thinking on the need to exploit the hydel resources in a commercial manner. They found it diplomatically much more convenient and rewarding to do the same in Bhutan (Chukha and Tala projects) and import the power to the North East. Of late only the thinking seems to be changing. North East India requires a leap forward in the very development philosophy. It needs a big jump in the development intervention and institutional provisions. The continuing marginalism in both thinking and action would be very detrimental to the nation as a whole.

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Darjeeling, the most magnificent organ of the Eastern Himalayas has witnessed the most unprecedented deterioration in socio-economic system. The steady erosion in its environmental surroundings is a major concern. The alternative development path provided after the violent Gorkhaland movement has been an absolute failure in Darjeeling both because of the continuing internal colonialism practiced by the West Bengal Government and the poor understanding and utter disregard to the development issues by the present dispensation that has been at the helm of affairs in Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council since its very inception. It is in the interest of the Kolkata dispensation to keep the hill areas as backward as possible regardless of cost to the nation in future. The union Government by carving three new States of Chattisgarh, Uttarakhand and Jharkhand have only added to the agony of the hill people in Darjeeling which has been demanding a separate State within the constitutional provisions for last almost 100 years now.

In other words, the Eastern Himalayas at the moment appear to be the most fragile region both in geo-political and development-environmental terms. This region requires a very systematic and planned intervention if it has to be taken out of the present vortex of tension, violence, underdevelopment and ecological disaster. There has to be a total reconstitution of the institution like North Eastern Council to make it more need based, dynamic and effective. The inclusion of Darjeeling in the new NE Council is necessary to complete the process of geographical, cultural and socio-ecological affinity and contiguity.

**Mahendra P. Lama**

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## **Mountain Commons, Underdevelopment and Socio-Political Concerns in the North East**

### *A Policy Perspective*

*Mahendra P. Lama*

The North East region of India comprising eight constituent States (Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura) has been of critical importance to the management of mountain commons and other strategic resources in the Eastern Himalayan regions of India (Table 1). With significantly a rich biodiversity, the north-eastern economies are heavily based on traditional agrarian practices and the societies with tribal culture and ethos. Several development interventions in the past both from the Centre and at the State level aimed at bringing these economies to the core development stream have somehow failed to give them a distinct growth orientation and path. Though the facets of first generation of economic reforms have not really percolated down to this group of distant States, the proposed second generation reforms are likely to have far reaching impact on these economies thereby changing the very nature and content of traditional management of natural resources.

Though there is tremendous scope for the optimum development of the region based on varied and rich natural resource endowments, the growth regime has been relatively dismal and lacklustre. Huge amount of funds has been pumped into these states during last five decades by the Central Government regardless of size of the state and population.

The inter-community and intra-community diversity of practices in major economic activities and in the custodianship and distributive pattern of commons make it very complex for any “uniform policy intervention” to be effective and meaningful in the North East. This is expected to be more so in the context of economic reforms and globalisation process which essentially target at homogenising the so far

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typically heterogenous. The policy interventions and institutions, therefore, need to be made more focussed and selective in its penetrative capacity.

**Table 1**  
**North East States : Population, Per Capita Income and**  
**Illiteracy rate**

<b>States</b>	<b>Full Fledged Statehood</b>	<b>Population# (million)</b>	<b>Per Capita Income*<sub>(US\$)</sub></b>	<b>Illiteracy (%)</b>
Arunachal Pradesh	1987	1.091	250	58
Assam	1947	26.63	171	47
Manipur	1972	2.38	153	40
Meghalaya	1972	2.30	175	50
Mizoram	1987	0.891	215	17
Nagaland	1963	1.041	190	38
Sikkim	1975	0.540	164	43
Tripura	1972	3.91	121	39

*Sources : (#) Registrar General of India (2001), Provisional Population Totals, Census of India, Paper-1 of 2001.*

*(\*) Computed from Per Capita Income (Rs.), Ministry of Finance, Economic Survey, 1996-97, Government of India.*

The adoption, implementation and impact of the proposed second generation reform measures are likely to vary across the North East region in terms of i) time schedule, ii) sectoral coverage, iii) intensity and iv) sustainability. It will essentially depend upon the nature of political regimes and outlook of the politicians holding key positions, degree of robustness of the economy in question, size and outlook of bureaucracy and other organs of governance, articulation by pressure and interest groups including the private sector and the trade unions and more critically the perception and relative strength of local communities. Some of the emerging areas of concerns which have far reaching

policy implications are highlighted below :

### **Land Resources**

In most parts of the North East, the land tenure has been a complex system with: i) absence of any legal instrument defining the ownership or rights in land i.e. the customary laws are the principal sources of guiding norms related to land rights, ii) socially sanctioned complete hold and command over land, hills, forests and streams within the respective village jurisdiction, iii) rights to practice shifting cultivation on the village land (the jhummed land could be converted into permanently held property of an individual by developing land into terraced fields or orchards through using their own family labour continuously for three years), iv) no landlords and no landless, v) tenure free land, vi) no permanent ownership and no individual possession (in some categories of land) and vi) alienation to any person who is not native of the area is not allowed. All these practices and customary norms have been provided statutory safeguards under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution.

On the other hand, in some other parts because of the dominant habitation by the tribals, there has been distinct patterns of inequitable land ownership leading to unproductive and uneconomic use of land. Further because of the increasing expropriation of customary land rights in the last many years, one can also notice an increasing concentration of land among the village chieftains thereby leading to imposition of land rent and privatisation of village commons.

The privatisation of village commons has led to thriving land market in many parts of the region thereby accentuating inequality. This has increasingly brought in issues of landlessness and tenancy arrangements. Interestingly in some parts of the North East the non-tribals have also acquired land through the system of *Paikas* (on hire from the tribals against cash and kind). This has been an irreversible transfer.

Therefore, there could be a situation of extreme scarcity if there are no land reforms. The pressure on land both because of natural

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population growth and migration are further leading to scarcities of arable land and growing strains on subsistence communities. If, on the other hand, the land distribution pattern is changed with the onset of globalising agents it may improve the situation in terms of providing larger space of cultivable land and therein the productive capacity.

The issues involved are rather very sensitive. For instance, the clash between the state and the traditional land holders is unavoidable, if the state tries to act as the interface (agent of change) between the traditional land holders and agents of globalisation. The state must have to play an interfacing role as the tribal lands cannot be alienated to any one other than the governments.

### **Ban on Tree Felling**

About 49 per cent of the total geographical area of the North-Eastern region is covered with forest, although there are sharp inter-state variations. The ownership pattern of forests also differs in different states of the region. In the hilly region, the ownership rests with the local communities and, therefore, the proportion of reserved forests in those hilly states is quite small. The utilisation of forest resources in the region is maximum in Assam where there are over 40 plywood producing units besides a large number of saw mills.

The forests and foothills of Assam produce over 300 varieties of plants and herbs which can be used in the manufacture of medicines and cosmetics. A study done by the Department of Life Sciences, Manipur University, has made a detailed inventory of 333 medicinal plants of North East region along with the names of plant species, local names, parts used and medicinal uses. This study also lists 103 important medicinal plants of this region, utilised in pharmaceuticals. These plants can be cultivated extensively on plantation basis. At present, most of the oils are sold in the crude form.

Forest resources have been depleted very alarmingly in the past few decades. The primary agents of deforestation have been i) the commercial logging agents including the forest contractors, ii) forest clearance for Jhumming, iii) development projects including roads and

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dams and iv) encroachers in the forest land. All these have sharply brought down the forest covered area exposing the traditional common users to forces that are inimical to their very existence. The clandestine trafficking of the medicinal plants and other valuable biological reserves has been another area of concern. There are studies conducted by TRAFFIC-India which show the illegal trafficking to be of very high order. More crucially, the revenues generated from the exploitation of forest resources are mostly siphoned away to the areas outside the States.

There have been a lot of protest movements against the timber barons and the traders in non-forest products also. This ultimately led the Supreme Court to ban all the tree felling activities in the North East States. This ban has raised a number of issues which are vital to the management of commons in future. This is because, in some States the forest is very much related to the land commons.

These call for an urgent actions in the following areas :

- i) Mapping out the bio-diversity of the entire North East region.
- ii) Establishment of a gene bank
- iii) Model legislation for protection and preservation of bio-diversity. This should safeguard the rights of those who have played a key role in the evolution of bio-diversity to the present form and stage and who are also the richest repository of knowledge about it.
- iv) Study on the possibility of commercial plantation and production of medicinal and aromatic plants and using them as raw materials for producing a whole range of medicines, pharmaceutical products, cosmetics, herbal teas and natural health product.
- v) Study on the possible application of bio-technology to develop industries in the region. This is an imperative sequence to the research and application of bio-technology for extracting maximum advantage for the region from its bio-resources.



**IPRs and Indigenous Practices**

i) The variety of indigenous food has always been a rich ingredient to the North Eastern culture. These food habits are based on socio-economic development status, religious sanctity and cultural practices. What is widely accepted is the suitability of these food and beverages to the hill people as they have nutritional value, ethnic flavour, easy palatability and fabulous texture as basic components. They are also used for a large variety of purposes and serve as a major food base depending upon a particular time in a day or night and also a season.

It is interesting to note that these food items and their preparations may give major scientific lead to many large scale commercial openings. They are already a part of deep rooted consumptive habit of a large section of population in the eastern region. Since there has been no systematic institutional intervention to study, document and conserve these traditional food habits and practices, there is a simmering fear among the enlightened lot that this entire rich heritage may also soon be a part of the international commercial foray.

More than this is the question of patenting the technology used in the preparation and preservation of these food items. The technology is widely known and owned by the community. The large scale commercialisation based on the “no-single ownership” based technology may ultimately snatch away the patent rights of the indigenous people on this significant sphere of their livelihood. This concern has to be taken up at the institutional level and the process of patenting of these food preparation and preservation techniques and technologies has to be initiated as early as possible.

ii) The North East region is famous for all kinds of practices related to traditional medicines both because of the strong socio-religious fervour and the availability of a rich variety of plants and animals. However, very little attention has been given to the importance of protecting the intellectual property rights of the indigenous peoples, whose traditional knowledge has often been the source of products introduced into the

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international market. The “bio-partnership” for sustainable development is, therefore, very critical in this region.

The economic reforms led pressure on the bio-diversity brings us back to our fundamental surroundings and interactions. In the new scenario, however, the villains are bio-technological companies having very scanty respect for sustenance of any traditional practices and occupations. Most of the rural folk and a significant proportion of educated people living in urban areas have persistent faith on herbal charms that are indigenous. Local plant-based drugs can easily be seen in most of the rural houses and rural markets.

More pertinently, in all these practices the rural folks with well founded technological experiments and bases are engaged. These practices have in fact been the source of many unknown medical practices today across the world. In the absence of any monitoring of the flow of knowledge from these remote areas to the pharmaceutical laboratories in the cities, one really does not know what innovations were introduced to make these practices commercial and popular. This brings in larger question of at what stage the intellectual property rights of a Naga faith healer were supposed to have been infringed upon.

Many of the environmental activists seem to know the quiet way these medicinal plants are exported to different cities of India and abroad by some known and unknown syndicate sometimes with tacit connivance of the people in the helm of affairs. This phenomenon is silently eating away the sinews of bio-diversity in the North East, yet very few in the civil society and the government seem to be bothered. This is going to be more serious as the world is gradually turning to traditions, old practices and so called “ethnic orientation” where the pressure on bio-diversity is going to be unprecedented.

The sustainability of the the North East economies and societies is likely to be increasingly eroded by a variety of this phenomenon in many spheres of critical resources. Therefore, the prime need of the time is (a) to develop a well planned strategy to explore medicinal plant-wealth of the State; (b) to find out the method of propagation and (c) to conduct

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phyto-chemical, pharmacological and pharmacognostic studies on the commercially exploitable species. This can be done at all levels. And if this scientific temper and awareness come into foreplay in the traditional practices, this may bring about a major transformation in the socio-economic profile of the villages and *bustees*.

There are primarily three routes to face the challenge brought forward by the opening up of new vistas in pharmacology by the S & T and its impact on the North East States. Firstly, it is the regulatory route under which clutch of legislations and executive fiat are used to mitigate these problems. This traditional approach has contributed to the alienation of the rural masses, thus compounding the tragedy of the commons. Secondly, it is the economist route under which there are limits to the exploitation or use of public goods like air, water or land. This is done through imposing a fine on activities that lead to over exploitation or the abuse of the good or by offering a subsidy to those who desist from such activities. Thirdly, the peoples' participation approach in fact goes to the heart of the problem as well as a part of the solution. The groups are of course, rural communities whose activities lead to degradation of the local environment and who would be the beneficiaries if such degradation were arrested and reversed. Here comes the importance of 73<sup>rd</sup> amendment and the peoples' participation. Besides, The challenge to cultural heritage has been immense. For a society which has been culturally rather sensitive, the governmental efforts alone will not do in the conservation effort.

### **Royalty on Minerals**

The North East States particularly Assam and Meghalaya have very huge deposits of mineral resources including oil, gas, coal and limestone. Assam has over 1.3 billion tonnes of proven crude oil and 156 bn.cu.mt of natural gas reserves. The prognosticated reserves are estimated at 3.1 billion tonnes. Approximately 58 per cent of these hydro-carbon reserves are yet to be explored which offer tremendous scope for exploitation. Whereas in Assam, there are 320 million tonnes of estimated coal reserves, in Meghalaya the rich coal occurrences are found in Garo,

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Khasi and Jaintia hills districts.

Geological investigations have revealed that there are extensive deposits of lime stone, lignite, clay and limited occurrences of sillimanite, corundum, graphite, nickel ferrous ores, chromite, zinc, copper and iron ore in the North East region. Assam's huge reserve of minerals is in a way reflected in income from mining and quarrying in the State's Domestic Product which was 4 per cent in Assam as against 2.01 percent for all India in 1988-89. Most of these minerals have so far been used by the public sector units like ONGC, GAIL and Coal India Limited.

Here again the people in the North East have been raising the question of common benefits. Many communities, political parties, pressure groups and sometimes even the governments have been asking for an adequate compensation for the extraction of these minerals in the State. In fact, the violent political movements in the 1980s and 1990s had in their agenda the royalty as one of the most crucial issue. The royalty which is now paid for the extraction and export of these minerals, has been insignificant.

On the other hand, the major industrial activities that have come up in the states like Assam are essentially resource based viz, oil and plantation. The backward linkages of these industries are rather limited while their forward linkages are with industries located in the big metropolises elsewhere. The result has been the emergence of an enclave type economy, i.e., a few modern industries in the midst of traditional industries having very little or no interactions between the two.

The ongoing liberalisation and privatisation to allow the private sector participation in the extraction and commercial use of mineral resources could change the entire management of the commons in the North East. This may bring about fundamental changes in and unprecedented challenges to the functioning of both traditional societies and the development agencies.

**Governance and Poverty**

There are a number of indicative parameters to show how poor governance of the State is related to the protracted and deepening level of poverty and acute social problems like drug abuse.

Firstly, the resources allocated for both plan and non-plan expenditures were not utilised for the purposes they were allocated for. Even if they were targetted to these objectives including poverty alleviation, public distribution system, health, education, drinking water and rural electrification, these resources did either not reach the target groups or did have a huge leakage in the delivery mechanism. In the absence of any monitoring and evaluation of these projects and related use of resources, the leakage and diversion of funds became a regular feature and gradually got institutionalised. Meanwhile, the resources kept floating from the Union regardless of how they were utilised. This continuous flow of resources in fact did consolidate the institutionalised corruption.

The issue is how and where to use the money amassed through corruption and leakage . It is a common feature in the North East India that the earning of money is quickly reflected in the apparent consumption made by these people. This is indicated by buildings, cars and other modern gadgets at home. More dangerously, it is reflected in the behaviour of the youngsters and the abuse of drugs they resort to. Once they are in the chain of drug abusers then it is very difficult for them to get disentangled and to carry on, they will have to resort to anti-social activities and some times insurgency.

Secondly, despite so much of pumping of resources the state of poverty in the North East continues to remain dismal. Though the percentage of population below poverty line has steadily gone down in most of the North East States during the twenty years period of 1973-74 to 1993-94, the figures in absolute terms have in fact sharply increased. For example, in small states like Arunachal Pradesh and Meghalaya also though the percentage of people living below poverty line have come down steadily from 51.93 to 39.35 per cent and from

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50.2 to 37.92 respectively during the period 1973-74 to 1993-94, the actual number of people below poverty line have increased from 2.66 lakh to 3.73 lakh and from 5.52 lakh to 7.73 lakh respectively during the same period. In other words, the total number of persons below poverty line in all the North East States including Sikkim has increased from 10.9 million in 1973-74 to 13.49 million in 1993-94. This means that 4.2 per cent (3.39 per cent in 1973-74) of the people below poverty line of India is concentrated in a land area of 7.97 per cent of the country. (Table 2)

**Table 2**  
**Number and Percentage of Population below Poverty Line by States 1973-94 (Modified Expert Group)**

States	1973-74		1983		1993-94	
	No. of persons (In lakh) (1)	% of persons (2)	(1)	(2)	(1)	(2)
Arunachal Pradesh	2.66	51.93	2.82	40.88	3.73	39.35
Assam	81.83	51.21	77.69	20.47	96.36	40.86
Manipur	5.36	49.98	5.65	37.02	6.8	33.72
Meghalaya	5.52	50.2	5.62	38.81	7.38	37.92
Mizoram	1.82	50.32	1.96	36	1.94	25.66
Nagaland	2.9	50.81	3.5	39.25	5.05	37.92
Sikkim	1.18	50.86	1.35	39.71	1.84	41.43
Tripura	8.54	51	8.95	40.03	11.79	39.01
All India	3213.36	54.68	3228.97	44.48	3203.68	35.97

*Source:* Government of India, Perspective Planning Division, Planning Commission, *Report of the Expert Group on Estimation of Proportion and Number of Poor*, Government Press, Faridabad, 1993.

More alarmingly, extreme concentration of the people below poverty line in rural areas shows that the rural development programmes particularly the poverty alleviation measures have not really benefitted the rural poor. This does not augur well for the States which have put in so much of resources under the planned development process.

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In the absence of reliable income distribution data, one can roughly check the equality/inequality of income distribution by checking indices like per capita ranking, per capita income growth rate and poverty estimates. In case of the North East States, though their per capita rankings have generally gone up over the years, their poverty ranking has sharply gone down. For example, out of the 25 States in the country, Nagaland had the 9th highest per capita income and ranked as the 13th most poor State in the country in 1983-84. By the year 1993-94, though its per capita ranking remained unchanged at 9th position, its poverty ranking slipped down to 9th position. This means that in 1983-84, Nagaland was better than 12 States in the country in the poverty management which deteriorated to a position where it was better than only 8 States in the percentage of people living below poverty line in 1993-94.

Similarly, Sikkim had the 12th highest per capita income in the country and it also ranked 12th position as far as the people below poverty line were concerned in 1983-84. Over the years, it has been able to improve its per capita income ranking to 10th position, whereas its ranking in the poverty status has very sharply gone down to 4th position. That means Sikkim is the 4th most poverty-ridden State in the country today which is a worse position than all the North Eastern States and only better than Bihar and Orissa (Table 3).

This can be interpreted in very many ways:

- i) the high per capita income vis-a-vis a very high poverty status implies that the income is very skewedly distributed in the state. This means that the top echelons of the society must be getting an overwhelmingly high percentage share of the income thereby indicating a significant concentration of income. This has been so for many of the States in the North East.
- ii) since most of the poverty-stricken people are concentrated in the rural areas, it could also mean an increasing urban-rural gap in terms of both distribution of income and asset creation. This in the long run may go against the environmental security and sustainability of the State; and

**Table 3**

**Ranking of the North East States in terms of Per Capita  
Net State Domestic Product at Current Price (Rs.)**

	1983-84*		1987-88		1993-94	
	Per Capita Rank	Poverty Rank				
	(1)	(2)	(1)	(2)	(1)	(2)
Arunachal Pradesh	6	8	8	8	7	7
Assam	19	9	19	9	19	5
Manipur	16	16	12	17	18	13
Meghalaya	18	14	16	14	17	9
Mizoram	22	17	6	18	11	17
Nagaland	9	13	10	13	9	9
Sikkim	12	12	7	10	10	4
Tripura	24	11	22	11	24	8

\* Out of 25 states

*Notes:* Per capita income rank is in the ascending order, i.e., Arunachal Pradesh's per capita income was the 6th highest in the country in 1983-84. Poverty ranking is on the basis of descending order (from the highest to the lowest) i.e. Arunachal Pradesh's position in the list of people below poverty line was 8th in 1983-84.

- iii) this syndrome of income concentration also indicates the deviation in the fundamental principle and objective of governance and the management of the economy wherein the guiding philosophy has been to distribute the national wealth across the state in an increasingly equitable manner.

Both the persisting syndrome of poverty and skewed distribution of income have played a very critical role in shaping the future of youth in these states. This has far reaching consequences in the increasing number of unemployed people in these States and could lead to a generation of frustrated lot. In fact a study carried out by the Ministry of



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Welfare in 1989 found that 88 per cent of the sampled drug addicts in Guwahati cited “frustration” as the reason for them to go for drugs.

Given their history of poor inter-state mobility particularly to regions other than the North East, these poverty stricken and unemployed youth have tended to resort to various activities which give them quick income and instant success. And in most cases these activities relate to drug trafficking and abuse, arms and bootlegging and other smuggling activities. This is further, encouraged by the impunity provided by the local political leaders for their petty political gains.

Finally, the poor governance of the state has led to two very significant consequences .

- i) The corruption has been rampant and at times blatant. Accountability has been totally absent in many of the States. This has led to exploitation of these corrupt officials by the militants in a very visible manner.
- ii) There has been a near anarchy situation in some places particularly in the arena of maintenance of law and order. This has been a major factor in the forced support to the insurgent groups extended by very well known private agencies. It has in fact been the second stage of chaotic situation.

Initially, because of certain state actions including inappropriate economic, unsuitable political policy intervention, and the resulting protracted confrontation with the state forces both at the Union and the state level, the insurgency operation tends to appear. For them to sustain such operation, they have to go for weapons hitherto unknown. This in turn prolongs the conflict. This brings in instability in the system and weakens the sinews of state controls particularly on law and order area. When the state fails to protect the general people particularly the one with economic clouts, the ‘insecure’ lot tends to organise their own security system sometimes by succumbing easily to the financial and other

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demands of the insurgents. This more often institutionalises friendly extortion. This directly goes against the state as it literally gets sidetracked in the business of running administration. Here the role and grip of the state over certain administrative areas like law and order maintenance gets vastly eroded.

This is what has been happening in the North East. The most vital examples are of business community and industrialists including those dealing in tea, jute and timber indirectly and tacitly supporting the insurgent activities by extending them money which is extorted in a friendly manner. A very crucial example is that of the Tata Tea Company's case of 1997 which came to the limelight very prominently.

**Energy Scenario**

In the pattern of energy consumption in the North East region, the traditional sources of fuel wood, agriculture residue etc. have been the major source of energy. Fuel wood continues to be the main source of energy accounting for more than 85 per cent of total energy consumption. The major biomass based industries in this region are paddy processing, tobacco curing, tea processing, gur making and bakeries. The per capita electricity consumption of 70 kWh in Arunachal Pradesh, 85 kWh in Assam, 83 kWh in Manipur, 117 kWh in Meghalaya, 80 kWh in Nagaland, 67 kWh in Mizoram, 50 kWh in Tripura and 109 kWh in Sikkim are much lower than the all national average of 252 kWh.

In the North East region, the hydro potentials remain far more unexploited (endowed with an estimated 67,000 mw). On the other hand, all the North East States are net importers of power. In the last few years, the major source has been Chukha project of Bhutan (Table 4).

In order to commercialise the hydel potential of these States, the Governments have constituted Power Development Corporation Ltd. These corporations are meant to implement hydro power projects including associated transmission lines in the respective States. Eight new

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power projects (2,845 mw) are proposed to be taken up in the North East region. These are:

- Loktak Down Stream (Manipur): 90 mw
- Kopili State II (Assam) : 25 mw
- Lower Kopili (Assam) : 150 mw
- Tuirial (Mizoram) : 60 mw
- Tuivai (Mizoram) : 210 mw
- Kameng (Arunachal Pradesh) : 600 mw
- Teesta - III (Sikkim) : 1,200 mw
- Teesta V (Sikkim) : 510 mw

**Table 4**

**Actual Generation and Utilisation of Power in North East India  
(in mw)**

	<b>Net Generation</b>	<b>Net Import</b>	<b>Net Consumption</b>
Arunachal Pradesh		44.22	44.22
Assam	875.1	1169.85	2044.95
Manipur	275.78	275.78	
Meghalaya	577.1	278.44	298.66
Mizoram	90.12	90.12	
Nagaland	124.7	124.7	
Tripura	142.11	102.15	244.56
NE Region	3083.21	92.97	3176.18

*Source : Basic Statistics of North Eastern Region 1995, North Eastern Council, Ministry of Home Affairs, Govt of India, Shillong.*

The economic development –environmental degradation dualism particularly in the context of development project like hydro power has been a major debating issue in the North East region also. This is likely to intensify as the globalisation led economic reforms become more pervasive. Some of the development projects have led to huge displacement over the years. Many of them have gone unresolved. The displacement has been silent but acute and frequent. The unnoticed

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character of development projects as they are located in the remote villages, hills and forests has been another critical feature as they tend to displace the indigenous people who have been the traditional agents of conservation.

In the North East region, the displacement has meant loss of livelihood, habitat and assets, social disruption and disorder and severance from an eco-system which had sustained its population earlier. Most critically these displacements threaten the poor and the weak with greater impoverishment. Only those cases of 'involuntary resettlement' where the civil society including the social and environmental activists are actively present, are highlighted and some measures of State interventions are made.

Rehabilitation which is primarily the process of reconstruction of the livelihood of displaced persons has never been the guiding principle in the still existing Land Acquisition Act of 1894 as it emphasises more on cash compensation for loss. There has been no national policy and legal institutional framework to deal with these internally displaced persons in India. In the absence of national policy on resettlement and rehabilitation, there has only been a piecemeal and ad hoc initiatives at the project and State level. More importantly, government accountability in this State-imposed displacement phenomenon has been virtually absent. Whatever little Government is seen to be doing, has all proved to be largely ineffective, inadequate and discriminatory and even harmful in some cases.

While the States have aggressively clamoured for more benefits from the development projects, they have consistently haggled over their share of rehabilitation costs totally disregarding the plights of the oustees. Therefore, the concerned citizens and the oustees have been demanding total repeal of the 1894 Act both on grounds of its historical context as well as its inadequacy in meeting the multiple dimensions of dispossession, resettlement and rehabilitation. For example, in Sikkim even after the Rathong Chu project (run-of-the-river) was shelved half way through primarily on environmental and eco-cultural grounds, there are quite a few development projects which have been lined up for its implementation

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in near future. Among them are the Teesta III and V hydro power projects. People have already started raising questions on its physical impact, displacement effect, ecological impact, veracity of river flows, rehabilitation and resettlement data.

One can see a lot of apprehension and rumblings at this juncture in other ongoing projects like Tipaimukh. However, the Governments have not been able to communicate to and share with the people even the finer elements of these projects. People are at a loss, as they do not know the implications of these projects. Many of the enlightened citizens, are of the opinion that the people are all for these projects as they will bring prosperity to these States. They also want their natural and renewable hydel potentials to be harnessed.

But what they are perturbed with is the way Government imposes these projects disregarding the sentiments of the people. People would like to know few basic things viz., i) what are the benefits of these projects both in terms of income and employment generation? ii) what are its likely impact on the environment both in terms of physical instability and long terms implications like flood, landslides and earthquake? iii) How many households/people are going to be affected/displaced? What are the rehabilitation and resettlement projects envisaged and how they going to be implemented? What is the legal framework for these rehabilitation measures? How scientifically sound are these projects?

All these questions of the civil society needs to be properly addressed to before really launching these projects.

### **Transferring the Cream of Development**

One of the most serious problems faced by the North East States has been the siphoning off of its resources to outside the region. This has taken place mainly on three counts viz., i) returns on investment in the North East States including in transport, tourism, major manufacturing industries and other services have all been repatriated to other metropolis of India, ii) most of the merchant capitalists doing tradings in the North

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East region have always preferred to transfer their earnings to either their home States or to some other business activities outside the region and iii) a very limited portion of the bank deposits in the North East States have been released as credit to the locals. It may be purely on the grounds of creditworthiness, and iv) the very nature of natural resource exploitation including the crude oil makes the State transfer a huge chunk of resources to other States while Assam gets hardly a fraction in terms of royalty.

All these have very serious impact on the economies of the region. As the returns from the private economic activities are not ploughed back, generation of employment and income outside the government sector has been very dismal. The pressure on the governments has been tremendous and at times it tends to reach a flash point. Whereas the cream of development gets siphoned off to outside the State, many of the private actors take the North East region as an entreport and just as a launching pad. This is how the North East region has been steadily losing what Keynes calls the multiplier effect as expressed below :

$$\Delta Y = \frac{1}{1 - c} \Delta I_0$$

Where  $\Delta Y$  is change in income ;  $c$  is marginal propensity to consume (mpc) and  $\Delta I_0$  is increase in investment, the value of multiplier (K) is :

$$\frac{1}{1 - c}$$

According to this theory of income determination, income will increase by an amount which is K times the increase in investment. Since most of the returns on investment are not ploughed back the multiplier will not be effective enough to accelerate the investment. Because of the low income the marginal propensity to consume will be rather high.

This outflow of multiplier has been witnessed historically in many countries. It is very difficult to monitor and quantify the resource transfers

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from the North East region to other States mainly because of the nature of transfer, involvement of informal agencies and the poor level of economic activity wise database and information. However, one can make use of some of the rough indicators to substantiate the fact that the resource transfer has been on massive scale. The usual measure for which data is reliably available is the credit-deposit ratio in the banks. For example, Sikkim has one of the lowest credit-deposit ratios. This ratio of 18 per cent as compared to much higher ratios of many of the North East States shows that the ground for investment in Sikkim has not been congenial at all (Table 5).

**Table 5**  
**Credit-Deposit Ratio in the Hill States (per cent)**

<b>States</b>	<b>March 1992</b>	<b>March 1997</b>
Arunachal Pradesh	14.5	10.8
Assam	63.3	51.4
Manipur	109.7	138.6
Meghalaya	39.9	25.7
Mizoram	38.8	29.2
Nagaland	47.7	46.1
Sikkim	20.4	18.5
Tripura	97.4	62.1

*Source:* Reserve Bank of India, *Report on Currency and Finance, 1996-97*, Bombay, Vol I, p XI-22.

Assam has a low credit-deposit ratio. This ratio of 51 per cent shows that the grounds for investment in Assam have not been congenial at all. A noted economist of the region Jayanta Madhab writes that “the credit-deposit ratio being very low in the region, the banking sector transfers something like Rs 5,000 crore from this region to other regions for investment. Because of prolonged insurgency in the region, despite abundance of natural resources (oil, gas, coal, granite, limestone, water and forest wealth) no outside investment has taken place. Indeed there was capital flight in the last eight years from the region”.

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Interestingly, Sikkim has been one of the most peaceful States in the country. The question of law and order and other political instability related rancours are not there in Sikkim. So the usual explanation that the situation of fear and uncertainty has been driving away the potential investors and siphoning off of the returns from the investment can not be there in Sikkim.

One possible reason could be the fact that the private entrepreneurs who have been there in Sikkim have their native places in other parts of India so they would prefer to go back to their native places. Many of the merchant capitalists we interviewed explained to us as how difficult it has been for them to invest in Sikkim because of the land laws, son of the soil policy and other traditional laws. They maintain that unless there is an attitudinal change among the locals vis-a-vis the people from outside, no one will be willing to reinvest the returns earned.

This process of resource transfer has to be reversed forthwith by both a check mechanism and through incentive measures. Because this will have adverse impact on the fresh future investors also. One of the check mechanisms could be legal framework drawn on a scientific basis.

**Transit through Bangladesh**

The question of inadequate physical infrastructure in the North East and therein inaccessibility both from outside and within the region has been a major issue. This has been central to the process of development interventions, market access, extraction and commercial use of natural resources and poverty eradication. The pre-1947 situation used to be different as the North East could be accessed both through present day Bangladesh and the existing Chicken neck corridor. In the post-1947 period the huge infrastructure of road, rail and sea created so far largely remained underutilised in Bangladesh. The traditional economic exchange and cross border activities between Bangladesh and the North East were totally cut off. The market suddenly shrunk to the minimum possible level. This continued to remain so for the next 50 years.

Only of late there has been a negotiation going on between the two governments of Bangladesh and India to reopen the Bangladesh route



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to the North East. This has been more or less conditioned by again the fast pace economic reforms in the region, the need to expand market and reduce transaction cost, harness the complementarity that exists in terms of natural resources and more importantly opening the entire North East to the eastern fringes of Asia including Myanmar, Singapore and Thailand.

The Bangladesh government is keen to have such a transshipment arrangement mainly on three grounds. Firstly, this will yield a huge revenue of \$ 400 to 500 million per annum to Bangladesh on account of transshipment charges and each truck fetching \$ 550 per trip. Secondly, this will make the North East market easily accessible for the Bangladesh goods thereby helping the present trade deficit of over \$ 1.6 billion with India to come down steadily. This will also largely regulate and institutionalise the unrecorded trans-border trade which is estimated to be in the range of \$ 2 billion. Finally, it will open up other vistas of cooperation in the region including the use of Bangladeshi ports, industrial cooperation with the raw materials from across the border and the possibility of gas trading in the eastern fringes of South Asia. A number of foreign companies including Cairn Energy, Rexwood-Okland, United Meridian and Occidental are already there in exploration and development of recoverable gas reserves of 13 trillion cubic feet in Bangladesh. For this the natural market is India particularly the north east and east Indian regions within the 4089 kms. of India-Bangladesh border.

The opening up of Bangladesh Corridor to the North East will bring down the transaction cost to almost half of the existing cost. The market structure and composition will change the entire course of development intervention and the sectoral priority in the North East. This is going to be a major challenge to the existing institutions both governmental and traditional informal which have so far played a crucial role in the governance process.

Transshipment is vital both for reducing the cost of development in the North East and for promoting a long term sustainable framework for

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economic interaction in the eastern fringes. The present distance of 1645 kms. between Agartala and Calcutta via Siliguri was hardly 350 kms. via Bangladesh before partition. Agartala is still 135 kms. away from the nearest Indian rail head whereas it is hardly 4 kms. from the rail head at Akhura in Bangladesh. As a result the freight flows have been very costly for the entire North East region. L.C. Jain Committee estimated that Assam alone has drained Rs 3,500 crore as the transport costs of food procurement during the Eighth Plan.

It's not that there are no past agreements between India and Bangladesh on these issues. The inland waterways transport has been fairly active under the aegis of the Central Inland Water Transport Corporation (CIWTC) which has been operating through Calcutta-Assam and Calcutta-Cachar routes using transit traffic via Bangladesh. It carries over 1.3 lakh tonnes of cargo annually. But this is also coming under heavy pressure because of the burgeoning nature of India-Bangladesh trade.

The emerging initiatives like South Asian Growth Quadrangle (SAGQ) involving Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal, the recent Kunming move involving North East of India, Bangladesh, Myanmar and China and the proposed BIMSTC arrangement including Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Thailand are primarily aimed at harnessing the rich natural resources in the region. This would, however, essentially depend upon opening the Bangladesh corridor to the East.

If this transshipment proposal becomes a reality, it will lead to much quicker pace in the implementation of Asian Highway network in this part. In fact Bangladesh can now make effective use of the huge road and transport infrastructure the pre-partition India created. The absence of any lucrative centre of trade and commerce after the partition had largely made this infrastructure redundant. A recent study carried out by the scholars from Bangladesh, India and Nepal has suggested development of two very significant road projects which are likely to transform the entire growth profile of these countries. A North-South corridor for the India's North East States and Nepal and Bhutan could

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be a reality by developing a route through Titulia-Rangpur-Nagarsarai-Jenaidah-Jessore-Mongla port. This will provide an ideal and convenient road access ultimately to the Bay of Bengal. This route also links Western Bangladesh from North to South and will also make use of the recently built Jamuna bridge. The second is an East-West corridor connecting the State of West Bengal through Benapol-Jessore-Narail-Dhaka-Sarail-Tamabil to North Eastern States.

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# MIGRATION, IDENTITY AND CONFLICT IN INDIA'S NORTH EAST

## *The Case of Assam*

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Migration has been a major element for violent conflict in India's North East since the early twentieth century. Almost all the seven Indian States of this region have experienced varying degrees of political mobilisation and organised violence against migrants ('outsiders') many of which have overblown into anti-outsider identity movements leading to persecution and expulsion of communities of migrant origin. This paper examines how migration leads to conflict situations in a post-colonial multi-cultural receiving society, in the context of India's North Eastern State of Assam. At the centre of Assam's many violent conflicts is the *Asamiya*<sup>1</sup> claim to an exclusively '*Asamiya*' homeland in post-colonial Assam while 'other' voices, both tribal and migrant, are raised contesting this claim and the right of the *Asamiyas* alone to speak for the people of Assam. The first part of this article provides a background to the problem of migrants in Assam and argues that the problem of migration was a matter of concern for the people of Assam since the beginning of this century. The second part deals with two specific ongoing anti-migrant conflict situations in Assam - the movement against illegal Bangladeshi migrants in the Brahmaputra Valley and the ethnic cleansing of non-Bodos in the proposed Bodoland area in Kokrajhar and Bongaigaon districts of Lower Assam - and examines their fall-outs. The third part of the paper suggests a democratic framework as a central factor in any attempt to solve the political deadlock on the issue of migration into Assam.

### BACKGROUND

Through the ages Assam has been a melting pot of migrant cultures. This forested expanse at the base of the Eastern Himalayas, well watered

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and fertile when the trees were felled, provided an ideal ground for rulers and peasantry alike to sink roots.<sup>2</sup> The colonial conquest of Assam in 1826<sup>3</sup>, and the accompanying economic transformation opened up the province as a land frontier, attracting largescale immigration of both labour and enterprise from the neighbouring provinces of the *Raj*, especially Bengal. The initial population inflow fed the demand for tea plantation labour, which arrived mainly from the Chhotanagpur Plateau to the large tracts of land that were ‘gifted away’ to British planters after 1833.<sup>4</sup> Also, the elaborate British administration required a body of English educated Indians who were ready to work at one-third of the salary that an Englishman would settle for. Thus, in the late nineteenth century, while the indigenous population of the Brahmaputra Valley, the traditional homeland of the *Asamiyas*<sup>5</sup>, tended to be stagnant, even to decrease<sup>6</sup>, the non-indigenous population of Assam Proper<sup>7</sup> increased meanwhile from less than a lakh in a total population of about 22 lakhs in 1901.<sup>8</sup>

While the inflow of migrants neutralised the decline in indigenous population, it also effected a substantial ethnic redistribution where the migrant became a ‘visible’ element in Assam’s population with growing control over important sectors of economy like government jobs, small businesses, agricultural land and professions like law, medicine and teaching. Non-indigenous elements thus came to constitute at least one quarter of the population of Assam proper in 1901<sup>9</sup>, and most of this was of Bengal origin with a smattering of Marwaris, Nepalis and Biharis. Significantly, Bengali remained the official language of the colonial province, to the exclusion of *Asamiya*, for the entire period between 1834-1873. The colonial province slowly evolved into a shared homeland of *Asamiyas*, tribals and migrants and in the end, whatever their character or itinerary, the arriving communities restored the balance of diversity in Assam, enabling it to survive and grow despite the occasional sullen *Asamiya* response. On occasion, particularly in times of sudden influx, there was stress, but the society absorbed the shocks and the migrants merged imperceptibly into the *Asamiya* fold while the indigenous tribes were happy to fall under the general appellation of ‘*Asamiya*’.



**Table: 1A**  
**Language-wise Population Distribution in Assam**

	<b>Languages Spoken</b>	<b>1891</b>	<b>1901</b>
1.	Bengali	2,741,947	2,947,916
2.	Asamiya	1,414,285	2,349,694
3.	Hindi	229,456	351,908
4.	Bodo, Dimasa, Mech	269,346	237,982
5.	Other languages	780,209	954,378

*Source:* B.C. Allen, A. Gait, C.G.H. Allen, H.F. Howard, *Gazetteer of Bengal and North East India*, Shillong, 1901, p.49.

The colonial province of Assam, significantly, was larger and heterogenous than the pre-colonial days. While the pre-colonial Ahom kingdom had consisted of the Brahmaputra Valley alone (the traditional homeland of the Asamiya-speaking population), the colonial province embraced almost all of the North East as we know it now, including the Bengali-speaking districts of Cachar, Sylhet, Goalpara as well as the Hills of the Nagas, Khasis, Lushais, Garos and Jaintiyas. Colonial Assam thus contained a decisively non-Asamiya population in which ‘Asamiya was the claimed mother-tongue of less than a quarter and Bengali of more than 40% of the population’.<sup>10</sup> The population of the single district of Sylhet matched that of all of Assam Proper. Both the Surma valley districts of Cachar and Sylhet were predominantly Bengali speaking while Goalpara had an overwhelming number of Bengali<sup>11</sup> speakers. Under these circumstances, the Bengali linguistic group rapidly grew in numbers and continued to outnumber the Asamiyas in the newly constituted province.

Bengali clerks, doctors and lawyers, most of them *Sylhetis*, with the advantage of their early initiation to English education and the British-Indian administrative system, monopolised government jobs and professions.<sup>12</sup> In this context, the new-born, fragile and unsure Asamiya intelligentsia of the period found itself to be an insignificant minority in

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the urban or middle class sector. Again, when the Asamiyas came forward to participate in the administration of the province at a later stage, they found the Bengalis, particularly those of Sylhet, already in possession of the field, giving rise to an inferiority complex in the Asamiya mind. To the Hindus in particular, who were the real competitors for government jobs, the complex went as deep as to make them intolerant of everything non-Asamiya or non-indigenous and sensitive to their 'otherness' from the Bengalis, or *Sylhetis*, to be precise. Thus, Asamiya nationalism which developed in opposition to the Bengali, acquired through this exclusion, an anti-Bengali and anti-'outsider' character.<sup>13</sup> This fear complex was built into their ideology and constantly harped on by their politicians since the 1920s. The conceptual and organisational roots of Asamiya nationalism began to take shape since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century through political mobilisation by the Asamiya middle classes on the language issue. Linguistic affinity soon transformed into a constructed notion of 'identity' which graduated with time into a part of the emerging nationalism or nationality formation process in Assam.

Again, for some reasons rooted in the history of the region, the Brahmaputra Valley had an abundance of cultivable wasteland when the British occupied it in 1826 and the numbers of Bengalis in Assam continued to be replenished by a steady migration of Bengali speaking Muslim peasants from East Bengal districts who crowded the agricultural fields, providing cheap labour and purchasing land wherever possible. At the turn of the century the greatest obstacle to the extension of agriculture in Assam was the absence of a labouring class.<sup>14</sup> While in the Surma valley, Kamrup and Goalpara agricultural labourers were 'extremely scarce', in Central and Upper Assam they were 'practically non-existent'<sup>15</sup> and so initially, the Asamiyas were happy to find a cheap and steady supply of labour to work on their sprawling fields. It is explicit in Table 1B that except for the districts of Kamrup and Sibsagar, the rest of Assam had a remarkably low density of population in 1872 and the average population for Assam as a whole clearly indicates a situation of an abundance of land to its population.

**Table: 1B**  
**District-wise Distribution of Population and Houses in**  
**Assam Proper in 1872**

Sl. no.	District	Area in sq. miles	Population	No. of Houses	Persons per sq. mile	House per sq. mile	Person per House
A.	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
1.	Kamrup	3,631	5,61,681	1,03,908	155	29	5.40
2.	Darrang	3,418	2,36,009	43,558	69	13	5.40
3.	Nowgong	3,415	2,56,390	44,050	75	12	5.80
4.	Sibsagar	2,855	2,96,609	55,604	104	19	5.30
5.	Lakhimpur	3,192	1,21,267	26,398	38	8	4.60
	Total/Av	16,511	14,71,956	2,73,518	89	17	5.38

*Source: W. W. Hunter, A Statistical Account of Assam, Vol.1.*

Increase in the number of Bengali migrants in the census of 1911 alarmed the Asamiyas from about 1916 and under the circumstances, ‘valley-jealousy’ which was formerly limited to job-seeking middle classes alone<sup>16</sup>, was slowly being percolated and transformed into a cult of aggressive and defensive linguistic nationalism.<sup>17</sup>

### **PROTESTS AGAINST MIGRATION INTO ASSAM, 1920-1947**

The regional nationalists, most of them Asamiya Hindus, now raised the slogan of the Asamiya race being in danger. Several ‘nativist’ organisations like the *Assam Sangrakshini Sabha* were floated which expressed alarm at the declining numbers of Asamiya speakers and were haunted by the spectre of ‘Bengalisation’ by both Bengali Hindus and Muslims<sup>18</sup>. The ideological roots of Asamiya nationalism began to take shape since the mid-nineteenth century through political mobilisation by its middle class on the language issue and in the face of the growing Bengali hegemony, language became the most sensitive symbol of identity for the Asamiyas. The publication of the 1931 census and the remarks made by the Census Commissioner Mullan<sup>19</sup>, added to the fear of being

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outnumbered. The separation of Sylhet and restrictions on land-hungry Muslim peasant migration from East Bengal into the Asamiya hinterland, it was believed, were the two primary issues on the solution of which depended the very existence of the Asamiya 'race'.

Both objectives were achieved in 1947 when, first, in a political move the political leaders of the migrant Muslims dissolved the Muslim League in Assam and asked all Bengali speaking Muslims of East Bengal origin to officially adopt the Asamiya language in order to assimilate themselves with the Asamiya mainstream, thus registering a sudden, remarkable increase in the number of Asamiya speakers in Assam in the Census of 1951. Second, as per the Mountbatten Plan of 3 July 1947, a referendum was held in Sylhet in July 1947 following which it ceded to East Pakistan. The problem of migrant Bengalis, the Asamiya leadership thought, would no longer be there since the catchment zone would now be a foreign territory.<sup>20</sup>

The Asamiya middle class emerged stronger and gutsier after 'dumping' Sylhet off into East Pakistan and considered the post-colonial territory secure for itself since none of the other communities living in Assam was strong enough to pose threats, numerical or cultural, of any sort. Guha observes that '...more ambitious than ever after Sylhet was shaken off its back, its Little Nationalism started degenerating into chauvinism and minority-baiting'.<sup>21</sup> Riots against non-Asamiyas in 1948, 1950, 1968, 1972 and 1979-85 in the Brahmaputra Valley bear him out.

The fact was that Assam had historically been a shared homeland of the native Asamiyas, various indigenous tribes and migrants, a reality which the post-colonial political elite now chose to ignore. It pushed forward the myth of an 'Asamiya' homeland and endeavoured to maintain, in spite of severe strain and social tension, at least a public 'Asamiya' identity by imposing the Asamiya language well beyond the precincts of the traditional Asamiya homeland. This was achieved by sheer strength of numbers and a series of measures which marked, symbolically as well as practically, the closure of the nation-building process in Assam.

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## THE PROBLEM OF REFUGEES IN ASSAM

Meanwhile, the partition of Assam in 1947 introduced a new actor in the tangled native-migrant relations in Assam: the Bengali Hindu refugees from the ceded part of Sylhet. The problem of the refugee influx in-built in the emerging situation threatened to neutralise the gains achieved by the ouster of Sylhet.<sup>22</sup> Gopinath Bardoloi, the first Chief Minister of Assam and his Congress ministry fought tooth and nail the Central Government decision to settle these refugees in Assam.<sup>23</sup> In reality, very few Sylhet refugees were actual burdens on the State and most of them managed to establish themselves comfortably in and around Assam by the early sixties.

However, as both the refugees and the sons of soil had to compete within the same mobility structure with a very limited space, it obviously generated a perpetual clash of interest.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, post-colonial India was now to be reorganised along linguistic lines and the numerically dominant linguistic group in each state could make a special claim to the territory it occupied and to any economic and educational activities that took place.<sup>25</sup> The Asamiya middle class feared that since Bengalis already constituted a sizeable population in the state, the new Bengali refugees would strengthen the cause of the Bengalis posing a severe threat to Asamiya language and culture in post-colonial Assam.

The upcoming middle classes wanted to capture the post-colonial regional market and reserve it for the sons of soil to the exclusion of the traditional 'non-Asamiya' competitors. They swooped in swiftly to consolidate the demographic gains of 1947 and to enforce an Asamiya identity in the state through the Official Languages Act, 1960 and the Medium of Instructions Act, 1972. The linguistic rearrangement of Indian States added legitimacy and respectability to Asamiya demands for reserving Assam, or specifically, the Brahmaputra Valley, as its patrimony with exclusive rights to its sprawling fields, jobs and small businesses.

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**THE POST-COLONIAL PREDICAMENT,  
1947-1971**

The partition of India and its aftermath had, however, substantially influenced the balance and composition of languages in Assam and inverted the colonial equation of linguistic communities. While the fear of being outnumbered might have had some basis in the colonial period when the Asamiya speaking population was growing very slowly both in relative and absolute terms, the situation rapidly changed after 1947. With the separation of the Sylhet in 1947, Bengali lost its dominance and the Asamiya language gained ascendancy with each successive census. The number of Asamiya language speakers also increased substantially from a 42% in 1931 to a 73% in 1951 in the Brahmaputra Valley, while the number of Bengali speakers marked a steady decrease.<sup>26</sup>

**Table: 1C**  
**District-wise Percentage of Population Speaking**  
**Asamiya and Bengali in Assam, 1931-1971**

<b>Districts</b>	<b>Asamiya 1931</b>	<b>Bengali 1931</b>	<b>Asamiya 1971</b>	<b>Bengali 1971</b>
Goalpara	18.3	54	63.6	14.7
Kamrup	66.5	17.5	76.7	12.3
Darrang	32.9	17.2	62.8	13.3
Nowgong	42.2	34.4	73.3	19.3
Sibsagar	54	7.9	85.7	3.5
Lakhimpur	30.4	10.1	62.7	9.3
<b>Total of Brahmaputra Valley</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>71.8</b>	<b>11.5</b>
<b>Total of Assam</b>	<b>35.31</b>	<b>29.9</b>	<b>60.8</b>	<b>19.7</b>

*Source: Census of India, 1971 ( Tables B1 and B2).*

The tactical adoption of Asamiya language by the Bengali Muslims coupled with their calculated support to the Asamiya leadership in

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electoral politics served the Asamiya interest in three vital ways: (i) the Asamiya speakers for the first time in history became an absolute majority in Assam. This majority status was further consolidated in subsequent decades. The enactment of the Official Languages Act, 1960, making *Asamiya* the sole official language of the State became possible precisely because of support the migrant Muslims rendered to the violent agitation launched in 1960 for such enactment; (ii) the electoral support of the Bengali Muslims proved to be invaluable as it ensured Asamiya leaders a safe passage to the political power structure of the State which was essential for retention and expansion of the *Asamiya* hegemony over the diverse peoples of the state; and (iii) the ‘alliance’ was used as a counter-weight against the Hindu Bengalis who became a significant minority in the newly constituted State of the Indian Union.<sup>27</sup> But instead of heaving a sigh of relief, *Asamiya* nationalism, supported by a strident middle class with stakes in jobs and businesses, became even more aggressive and determined to exclude the other diverse communities from the precious little economic space that post-colonial Big Capital had spared them.

But as *Asamiya* was imposed as the official language beyond the Brahmaputra Valley, it was resented in the hills and the culturally ‘different’ Barak Valley. In the post-colonial years even the tribals of the Brahmaputra Valley who had, for all practical purposes, become bilingual, speaking both the *Asamiya* and tribal language (some had even forgotten their tribal language/script) resented the imposition of *Asamiya* language and struggled to revive their language from slumber. Significantly, language became an important tool for assertion of their distinct identity and opposing the post-colonial *Asamiya* hegemony in a multi-cultural state. There were several important fallouts for the future:

- (i) The post-colonial territory of Assam shrunk rapidly following ethnic assertions by the Nagas, Mizos and Khasis all of whom demanded the right to self determination;
- (ii) While the creation of separate tribal States reduced some of the cultural heterogeneity of Assam, it also brought the tensions between

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the indigenous *Asamiyas* and migrant communities into sharper relief as both now became proportionately larger<sup>28</sup>;

- (iii) A (successful) movement was launched by the Bengalis of the Barak Valley in 1962 for the continuance of Bengali as the official language of the Barak Valley;
- (iv) The beginnings of Bodo separatism (later insurgency) over the issue of a forced 'Asamiyaisation' in the Brahmaputra valley of which they were the autochthons with the demand to divide Assam 'fifty-fifty' between the *Asamiyas* and Bodos;
- (v) In 1978, Myron Weiner wrote about an 'unspoken coalition between the Assamese and Bengali Muslims against the Bengali Hindus' but that 'it was not a wholly stable coalition' since 'a major influx of Bengali Muslims into Assam' or 'coalescence of Bengali Hindus and Bengali Muslims' could bring down this coalition.<sup>29</sup>

#### **FROM 'NA-ASAMIYA' TO 'FOREIGNERS': THE ASSAM MOVEMENT, 1979-1985**

This happened in the early 1970s when the emergence of Bangladesh in 1971 along the entire south-western border of Assam gave a new twist to the situation: it was perceived by the *Asamiya* leaders as an alarming development capable of wiping out the traditional divide between the Bengali Hindus and Muslims in Assam<sup>30</sup>. In 1978, the regional parties again raised the slogan of 'outsiders' in Assam and their threat to *Asamiya* identity, which, in the beginning failed to catch the imagination of the masses. The *Asamiya* press started a vigorous propaganda against the dangers posed by the 'outsiders' in Assam, though the definition of the 'outsider' remained foggy. A growing apprehension about the growth of non-*Asamiya* groups living in Assam continued to be an inseparable part of social transformation of Assam and the ruling class played a significant role in propagating, perpetuating and patronising this weakness in their own class interest.<sup>31</sup> The uneven economic development in Assam failed to meet the rising aspirations of the *Asamiyas* and this frustration was expressed in a movement to exclude non-*Asamiya* competitors from a share of the cake under the banner of 'culture-in-crisis'.



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In a statement made by the Chief Election Commissioner of India, S.L. Shaktihar on 24 October 1978 it was pointed out that the dangers of illegal immigration to Assam convinced the masses that soon the Asamiyas would be outnumbered by 'foreigners'. Accepted in letter and spirit, the issue of illegal immigration received an overwhelming response from the people. Thus, the 'vague' issue of the 'outsider' was then transformed into a more concrete, rational issue of 'foreigner'.

Hussain writes :

...the Asamiya ruling class had to look for an alternative issue in place of '*bohiragoto*' (outsider) campaign for the *Asamiya* masses, and an alternative political leadership and organisation capable of transforming the genuine discontent of the *Asamiya* masses to protect and promote the interests of *Asamiya* ruling class so as to increase their bargaining power vis-a-vis the Indian ruling class to enable them to exercise their hegemony over the people of all nationalities and national minorities like tribals in Assam.<sup>32</sup>

It was suggested by the leadership of the movement that a large number of illegal migrants from Bangladesh (and some from Nepal) had found their way into the electoral rolls of Assam and for 6 long years this nativist movement wrecked the Brahmaputra Valley (the movement did not find a response in the Bengali speaking Barak Valley) during which the fine line between the 'outsider' and the 'foreigner' was crossed many times and even used interchangeably.<sup>33</sup> Hussain and Guha have pointed out that though ostensibly the movement was against so called 'foreigners', it were the Bengali Hindus and the *Na-Asamiya* Muslims who faced the brunt of the violence and persecution in these six years.<sup>34</sup>

The issue gradually divided the people of Assam and the *Asamiya* press did not allow for open or democratic discussions which only deepened the xenophobic fears in the Brahmaputra Valley. A large number of Bengalis fled the Brahmaputra Valley and the Government of West Bengal was compelled to open two relief camps in Siliguri to accommodate them. Choudhury sums up the essence of the Movement in the following words:

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...in Assam, the term 'foreigner' is not perceived as a legal category; its denotation and connotation, depending on the need of the hour, may exclude and include a number of attributes which have nothing to do with the provisions of the Citizenship Act....In short, the term 'outsider' is still used in non-official conversations within Assam since it sells well in the domestic market ; and the term 'foreigner' is a later innovation for the consumption of the national press and national conscience. Thus, the same commodity is being sold with rare acumen in two different brand names in two different markets to suit the taste and demands of two different varieties of consumers.<sup>35</sup>

Thus, what is known as the refugee/outsider/foreigners problem in Assam is essentially the re-articulation of an old problem, with tactical adjustments, in a new *avatar*. A close look at the history and politics of Assam reveals a pattern of resistance to and violence against Bengali migration, both Hindus and Muslims, with periodic intervals since the early twentieth century. On the whole, the Bengali partition refugee and the Bengali economic migrant have become an unwelcome presence all over the North East and continue to be a flash-point of conflict and ethnic insurgency.

In 1985, the student leaders called off the Assam Movement and signed the now discredited Assam Accord which among others, provided for the detection and deportation of the illegal Bangladeshi immigrant by a freshly modified law, the Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunal) Act, 1985 and also agreed to fence off the entire border between Bangladesh and Assam. Fifteen years later, the problem remains unresolved and the controversy over the unmitigated illegal migration of Bangladeshis continues in Brahmaputra Valley.

The Movement itself, as well as the politics over migration have had severe fall-outs for regional society:

- (i) The Assam Movement was a watershed in Assam's post-independent history as it radically changed the direction of subsequent political developments in the state. A democratic mass movement in its appearance, its covert agenda of extremism made violence an intrinsic part of political movements in Assam ever since.

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(ii) The United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), and along with its militant sub-nationalism, was born as a radical offshoot of the Assam Movement. It introduced into Assam's politics the ideology of armed revolution and the agenda of secession. Even though the Assam Movement ended in 1985 with the signing of the Assam Accord and subsequent installation of the Asom Gana Parishad (a political party led by the leaders of the agitation) government in Assam, the ULFA had by then already rejected the democratic path.

It established ties with the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) and then with the Kachin Independent Army (KIA) in Myanmar with whose active support and help initially its small guerilla army was raised and their 'tools' of revolution were procured. Help from the NSCN and the KIA had played a vital role in transforming ULFA into a formidable guerilla outfit armed with sophisticated weapons. Since then, the ULFA has established contacts with various militant groups inimical to India including the LTTE and the Afghan *mujahideen* fighting in Kashmir. At present, it also receives active political and material support from nations hostile to India while some others provide with sanctuaries, base camps and transit routes.<sup>36</sup>

- (iii) According to recent reports, the ULFA is now providing training to Kamatapur Liberation Army of North Bengal who have only just launched a movement for a Koch-Rajbongshi homeland.
- (iv) The Assam Movement became a reference point for similar movements launched within Assam, like the Bodoland Movement, and in the other North Eastern states of India.
- (v) The Movement triggered a series of 'identity' movements in India's North East.
- (vi) It severely damaged group relations within Assam and introduced fresh flash-points for conflict between migrants and natives, tribals and non-tribals.
- (vii) It embittered socio-political relations with Muslims as the increasing tendency to lump all Bengali Muslims as Bangladeshis did little to assuage their fears. Though most of the pre-1971 Muslims of East

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Bengal origin are, essentially, ‘insiders’ within the Asamiya nationality (Na-Asamiya Muslims) certain problems are yet unresolved and defined democratically. This represents the weakest point of Asamiya nationality : in trying to enforce ‘Asamiya-isation’ it has immeasurably injured the nation-building process.

(viii) It also left a lasting legacy of political insecurity for minorities in the Brahmaputra Valley even denying them the right to education in their own mother-tongue.

### **POLITICS OF A PROMISED LAND: ‘NON-BODOS’ IN BODOLAND**

While the *Asamiya* construction of the ‘outsider’ is old and has its own troubled history, the Bodo construction of the ‘outsider’ or ‘non-Bodo’ is relatively recent and located specifically in the context of the Bodo sub-national narrative of homeland. It is a calculated response to the confusion regarding the formation of the Bodoland Autonomous Council without a clear-cut boundary and a vast non-Bodo population with the stipulation that all Bodo majority villages in the proposed area would constitute the homeland. The non-Bodos, constituting some 50% of the population, include *Asamiya* Hindus of almost all castes, *Koch-Rajbongshis* (OBC), *Asamiya* Muslims, Rabhas (ST), Muslims of East Bengal origin, Bengali Hindus or the refugees from erstwhile East Pakistan besides the Santhals and ex-tea labourers. Thus, the ‘historically’ Bodo areas were also areas where many of Assam’s indigenous and migrant communities had settled since colonial times and evolved a common homeland.

The forcible eviction of this non-Bodo population from that shared space is sought to be achieved by the Bodos by ethnic cleansing or indiscriminate killings of civilians. It is no accident of fate that all the victims of violence in Bodoland areas belong to oppressed/minority communities like Muslims of East Bengal origin and Santhal settlers. The calculated decision not to antagonise/victimise the considerable *Asamiya* Hindu population in so-called Bodo areas, indicates the opportunism

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inherent in Bodo extremist politics as the final decision regarding the future of Bodoland remains in the hands of the *Asamiya* political elite. Both the Muslims and Santhals are 'dispensable' communities in Assam and the State government at Dispur is not unduly concerned about their security or loss of lives. The Asamiya press has also underplayed these acts of violence. It will be pertinent to remember here that even in a historically non-communal society like Assam, not a single person was punished for the infamous Nellie Massacre of 1983. The cases of violence in Kokrajhar and Bongaigaon districts of Lower Assam are also similar and it is clear that Dispur has utterly failed in its duty to protect the lives of its citizens and punish the perpetrators of mob violence.

Thus, the theory and the praxis of the anti-outsider politics of the Bodos is qualitatively different from those of the Asamiyas and can be categorised as a New Type of response towards the historically multi-cultural state where an ethnic sub-state has to be accommodated in a limited territorial area within that State with a select population to the exclusion of all historical partners co-existing in the shared homeland for many years. The fall-outs of the anti-outsider politics of the Bodoland movement has been dangerous for civil society in the region:

- (i) Following the failure of the Bodoland Accord in 1993 granting the Bodos an autonomous council, the militant factions within the movement usurped the initiative with the tacit acquiescence of the moderate leadership. The Bodo Liberation Tiger Force (BLTF) and the Bodo Security Force (BSF) which later became the National Democratic Federation of Bodoland (NDFB) transformed the movement into a violent ethnic insurgency. Although numerically much smaller than the ULFA, both the BLTF and NDFB cadres are extremely well armed and experts in the making and use of improvised explosive devices (IED). They have been far more ruthless in pursuing their agenda carrying out indiscriminate blasting of roads and railways killing innocent civilians and indulging in ethnic cleansing by massacring non-Bodos, mostly Santhals, Muslims of Bengali descent and Nepalis, within the area of their proposed homeland.<sup>37</sup>

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- (ii) Ethnic cleansing has also resulted in massive displacement of mostly Santhals from Bodo-dominated areas in search of safer sanctuaries as the government relief camps too, in the past, were not spared by the Bodo militants. At present there are (at least) 1,20,000 conflict-induced internal refugees, belonging to Santhal, Bengali Muslim and Rabha communities, in about 100 relief camps located in Kokrajhar and Bongaigaon districts of Assam.
  - (iii) A number of Bodo moderate leaders too have fallen victims to inter-factional warfare.
  - (iv) Of late, there have been reports of the NDFB providing sanctuary to the retreating ULFA cadres from Bhutan in the Manas Sanctuary, a traditional Bodo hide-out.
  - (v) The competing Bodo ethnicity has in turn, given rise to an assertion of identity among the Santhals living in and around the proposed homeland of the Bodos. The Santhals who had been settled in lower Assam by the British, most of them ex-tea garden labourers, had borne the brunt of the Bodo violence for a few years before they organized themselves to retaliate. Essentially a defensive manoeuvre, it has now turned offensive in a bid to defend its own homeland or the place where the Santhals had been living for close to a hundred years since the British had settled them there following the Santhal Rebellion of Birsa Munda.

Faced with persecution, even annihilation, they have formed the Birsa Munda Commando force while other militant Santhal outfits like the Adivasi United Liberation Front of Asom and the Cobra Force are meant to inspire a sense of security. The Santhals have, in the past, been a peace-loving community in the Brahmaputra Valley and appear to have been 'pushed' into taking a militant stance by the actions of the Bodos. Unlike the Bodos who are a detribalised and a highly politicised community, the Santhals are not yet sufficiently detribalised. Technologically too, they are far behind the Bodos, who use modern weapons like the AK-47. The Santhals use bows and arrows to fight their enemies and at best, possess a few pipe-guns.

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## CONSENSUS, NOT 'CONFLICT'

At the heart of the conflict situations discussed above has been the contested claims to the living space of post-colonial Assam made by the indigenous as well as communities of migrant origin, the latter putting forward the reasoning that it has historically been a 'shared' homeland and must continue to remain so. This was further complicated by the linguistic reorganisation of states in independent India when the Asamiyas put forward their claim of an 'Asamiya' homeland based on the numerical strength of Asamiya speakers in the region as reflected in the Census of 1951. Over the years it has become crucial for the Asamiyas to maintain this demographic strength in order to refute contestations of other communities to a legitimate share in this homeland. Thus, the Asamiya nationality has progressively acquired an overtly linguistic and covertly exclusionary character.

Baruah explains this weakness of Asamiya nationality formation process:

...(T)o the extent that Assamese sub-nationalism, like most Indian sub-nationalisms, has been based on a language that is, or aspires to be, a regional standard, there are inherent limits to how inclusionary Assamese sub-nationalism could have been. Furthermore, to the extent that the symbol of an Assamese Assam was another way of talking about and protesting Assam's demographic transformation, there was even less likelihood of Assamese sub-nationalism ever operating outside the framework of the cultural grammar of nation-province and of being able to accommodate a multi-lingual concept of Assam.<sup>38</sup>

As things stand in Assam, the search for a normative solution acceptable to both sides in question would appear to be the most democratic framework in which to attempt at political accommodation and conflict resolution. Scholars have suggested that the inflow of illegal Bangladeshi migrants can stop only if the economy of Bangladesh improves. Solutions like issue of photo-identity cards to bonafide Indian citizens and work permits to Bangladeshi workers to work in India are worth serious consideration. Such measures will help in making the entry

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of Bangladeshi workers legal, visible, contractual and monitored. So the Asamiya collective psyche vindicated by such a firm measure. It is also crucial for the majority community living in the Brahmaputra Valley to recognise the historicity of a collective homeland and involve its religious/ linguistic minorities in inclusionary projects and confidence building.

On the issue of the Bodos, it is still not too late to work out a compromise with the Asamiyas. While it might have been tenable to speak of a Khasi, Naga or Mizo homeland in the past, it is entirely impractical to speak of a 'Bodo' homeland in the Brahmaputra Valley which continues to be a highly plural area and events have already proved beyond a reasonable doubt that non-Bodos will not be safe in a 'Bodo' homeland. Finally, it will not do for the Bodos to deny their 'Asamiya' identity as it would not do to deny their 'Indian-ness'. The answer lies in a confident negotiation of identities from 'Bodo' to 'Asamiya' and Indian. But like all issues quagmired in opportunist politics, the past fifteen years have clearly demonstrated that this is by no means an easy task in Assam today. It is a potent invitation to anxiety, and one which has been used to its fullest by vested political interests within and outside the State. It is crucial that the solution is arrived at through arguments based on political and social justice, taking cognizance of the remarkable socio-cultural diversity in Assam and the legitimate aspirations of its people.

## REFERENCES

1. Throughout this paper by *Asamiya* we mean those inhabitants of Assam whose acquired or real mother-tongue is Assamese.
2. Anindita Dasgupta, "Political Myth-making in Post-colonial Assam", in *Himal South Asia*, Kathmandu, Nepal, August 2000(A).
3. Assam was occupied by the British following the Treaty of Yandaboo, 1826 with the Burmese.
4. The Charter Act of 1833 for the first time allowed Englishmen to possess land outside the three Presidencies.
5. Following Guha, throughout this paper the term 'Asamiya' will denote those whose natural or acquired mother-tongue is Assamese;



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the term 'Assamese' will denote those inhabitants of Assam whose mother tongue is not Assamese.

6. The census authorities came to the conclusion that the indigenous people actually decreased 5% between 1881-1891 and 6.4% between 1891-1901.
7. Assam Proper denotes the five Asamiya-speaking districts (colonial) of the Brahmaputra Valley, the traditional homeland of the Asamiyas : Kamrup, Nowgong, Darrang, Sivasagar and Lakhimpur.
8. Guha, 1977, p.25.
9. *Ibid.*, p.39.
10. Amalendu Guha, "Little Nationalism Turned Chauvinist: Assam's Anti-Foreigner Upsurge, 1979-80," *Economic and Political Weekly*, Special Number, October 1980; p.1701.
11. Bengali was the vernacular of Surma Valley where it was used by 87 out of every 100 persons and in Goalpara 69 out of 100 persons spoke Bengali.
12. For employment details, see Chaudhury, J.K., *Purbanchal Reconsidered*, Memorandum submitted to States Re-organisation Commission by Cachar States Re-organisation Committee, Silchar, April 14, 1954, p.4.
13. For a detailed discussion on development of Asamiya 'Little Nationalism', see Guha, 1980.
14. B.C.Allen, E.A.Gait, C.G.H. Allen and H.F. Howard, *Gazetteer of Bengal and Northeast India*, 1905, reprint 1993 (hereafter GBN), Mittal Publications, New Delhi ; p.67.
15. *Ibid.*, p.67.
16. The balance of power between the two valleys was maintained on an even keel through a parallelism formula in the allocation of public expenditure and government jobs.
17. Guha, 1977, p.205.
18. 'The Bengalis are adopting a devastating attitude towards linguistic imperialism over Assamese nationality...The Bengali Hindus and

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the Muslims who run at each others' throats in their own province are all one in Assam in this respect....for establishing their Bengalee kingdom in close co-operation with the British government....' *Memorandum presented to Pt. Nehru on behalf of the Congress-Shanrakshanite Group*, Assamiya Sanrakshini Sabha, Gauhati, 28th November, 1937. The fear of the Asamiya middle class was reflected in the editorial articles of the time published by the *Assam Tribune*, the mouth-piece of the Asamiya middle class: 'Since the independence, the attack is being carried on from two flanks. First there are the Muslim immigrants whose love and attachment to Pakistan areas are as strong as ever.....then there are *the Hindu immigrants who apparently want to create a Bengal in this province* (Emphasis ours). Again, in a memorandum addressed to Sri Prakash, the Minister of Scientific Research and Natural Resources, Government of India and President of Assam Refugee Rehabilitation Enquiry Committee, the Assam Jatiya Mahasabha expressed its concern : 'The problem of Bengal refugees in Assam definitely means a vision of creation of *brihattar Banga samrajya*, based on the Bengalism of Bengali language in which combined efforts of a powerful section of Bengali speaking old settlers of Assam, West Bengal, East Pakistan and also the Bengali settlers in other parts of India. Both the Jatiya Mahasabha and the Assam Tribune, at the same time, expressed a preference for refugees from Punjab rather than from Bengal. 'Had Assam no right to exist as the land of Asamiya people? Is it the intention of the government to turn the Asamiya people into minority community in their own province and jeopardise their language, culture and their very existence.

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20. Choudhury, Sujit, "Foreigners in Assam: Myth and Reality", Unpublished paper, Karimganj, Cachar, 1999, p.6.
21. Guha, 1980, p.1703.
22. Choudhury, 1999, p.4.
23. *Ibid.*, p.5.

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24. Monirul Hussain, "Refugees in the Face of Emerging Ethnicity in North East India, An Overview" in *Studies in Humanities and Social Sciences*, 1995, Vol. 1, p.125.
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28. Myron Weiner, *Sons of the Soil : Migration and Ethnic conflict in India*. 1978, Princeton University Press. South Asian Edition by OUP., p.87.
29. *Ibid.*, p.87.
30. For details, see *ibid.*
31. For details, see Hussain, 1993.
32. *Ibid.*, p.101.
33. This has been established by both Guha and Hussain.
34. The Peoples' Union of Civil Liberties, New Delhi, constituted a fact-finding committee on the Assam unrest of 1980. After their week-long investigation in Assam during Feb 9-16, 1980 they submitted a report. It said that between August 1979 and Feb 16, 1980, as many as 23 persons were killed in Dibrugarh district alone. Of then 6, including 4 claimed as martyrs, were killed by police firing and 17 were killed by mob violence or unknown assailants. Of the latter 17, one was an Asamiya and the rest 'mostly Bengalis as the names suggest', (See Guha, 1980, p.1707).
35. Choudhury, 1999, p.3.
36. Anindita Dasgupta, "Small Arms Proliferation in India's North East : A Case Study of Assam", paper presented at international workshop on 'Small Arms Proliferation in South Asia', Regional Centre for Strategic Studies, Colombo at Kandalama, Sri Lanka, 20-23 June, 2000 B.
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## THE ORIGIN AND IMPACT OF SMALL WARS AND INSURGENCIES IN THE NORTH EAST

*Binalakshmi Nepram*

North East India, comprising the seven States of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura<sup>1</sup>, and 7.6 per cent of land area and 3.6 per cent of total population of India has been engulfed by the fire of insurgency for the last half a century making it one of the South Asia's most disturbed region. Bound by four countries namely Bhutan, Bangladesh, China and Myanmar, the region has immense geo-political significance. There are about 193 tribes and more in the region, the region thereby earning the name of a "miniature Asia".<sup>2</sup> Besides, non-tribes like Assamese (in Assam) and Meiteis (in Manipur) exist.<sup>3</sup> One finds a large variety of conflictual dynamics in the North East ranging from insurgency for secession to insurgency for autonomy, from sponsored terrorism to ethnic clashes, to problems of continuous inflow of migrants and the fight over resources. Socio-political instability and economic backwardness coupled with isolation and inaccessibility compound the problem further.

No other region of India, South Asia or the world has seen the existence of the numerous insurgent outfits as it is in the North East India, nor in any known part of the world, the proliferation and mushrooming of militant outfits as it is happening in this region, thus forming a complex matrix, which in the words of Eric Fromm (1973) is a state of 'Malignant Aggression', a sure sign of spreading sickness.

Subir Bhowmick calls North East a "Colonial Construct".<sup>4</sup> According to him, "India's 'North East' is a post colonial region created by the partition of the subcontinent". Ancient or medieval Indian geographical discourse has no reference to a 'North-East'. Kamrup or Pragjyotisha does figure in ancient texts as the 'land of the eastern light', and reference to 'Asham' appears in the *Ain-i-Akbari*.

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In no Indian writing does the concept of 'North East' figure anywhere in ancient and medieval times until the advent of the British. The British were the first to evolve the concept of a 'North Eastern Frontier' for their Indian dominions after they conquered Assam and other tribal and princely kingdoms located between Bengal and Burma towards the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>5</sup> Assam with its oil and tea potential was partially integrated into the imperial economy and secured some marginal benefits of infrastructural investments like those in the railways.

The Kingdoms of Manipur and Tripura were left to survive as princely States with a degree of sovereignty, which went a long way in reinforcing their sense of distinctiveness. The rest of the tribal homelands around the Brahmaputra-Surma valley region, once they accepted British suzerainty, were left to live in their own way, somewhat frozen in a time warp. The tribesmen traded with their neighbours, sometimes fought with them and amongst themselves, but remained largely oblivious of the ways of the outside world until the Christian missionaries arrived to proselytize and educate them. The missionary efforts created many pioneers in the tribal societies and pioneers of discontent too. Missionary education not only started a new elite formation process in the North East, it also provided the emerging class with fresh aspirations and a world view.<sup>6</sup> This world view largely differed, in content and form, from India's new emerging elites. The communication gap, thus created, persisted into the post-colonial era as India emerged from the British rule, determined to protect its political identity as a unified nation-state, almost to the point of overlooking the limitations imposed by its heterogeneity.

Then followed the Second World War, which brought the global conflict between the Allied and the Axis powers to the doorsteps of the North East. Some of the fiercest battles of the war were fought in this region-Kohima and Imphal ended up as part of the Great War folklore, its battles resembling the battlefields of Somme.<sup>7</sup> The distinctness and identity of the region had already emerged. If the British conquest of Assam and other princely and tribal lands between Bengal and Burma gave rise to the concept of a North Eastern frontier, the British withdrawal

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and the process of partition that accompanied it turned the North East into a distinct region. When East Bengal became East Pakistan, this frontier region was left completely isolated, hanging tenuously to the Indian mainland through a small 14 kms. wide corridor in North Bengal. It was this very general sense of isolation that gave the region the sense of being so different from the rest of the country.<sup>8</sup>

### **THE FIRST SPARKS OF INSURGENCY**

Insurgency is the refusal of people who are indigenous to an area to actively cooperate with, or express support to the current authority figures. An insurgency is usually directed at changing the policies of the government authority, the personnel of the authority, or the governmental structure, by means not usually used in, or sanctioned by the existing system.<sup>9</sup> Insurgency is thereby a zone between politics and international war. If war, as Clausewitz declared, is “diplomacy by other means”, then insurgency is certainly “politics by other means”.<sup>10</sup>

Half a dozen forms, or methods of insurgency can be identified. They are:

- Civilian Defense/ Non-Violent Resistance
- Coup
- Guerilla Warfare
- Terrorism
- Riot/Revolution
- Civil War.

What is happening in the North East region is a cusp between guerrilla warfare, revolution and of late, terrorism. But it is important to note that all the movements started in a peaceful, non-violent way which later escalated into a violent form of resistance. Maino Daimary, the Publicity Secretary of the Bodo Liberation Tigers Force (BLTF) once said:

...unless you do something against the Indian government or the administration, you do not get any response. They [the government] respond only to violence. So we have taken up arms.<sup>11</sup>

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### **THE CASE OF MANIPUR**

Manipur came under British suzerainty in 1891 after the legendary Battle of Khongjom. However, the king was allowed to retain his rule with the crown having “graciously assented to the re-establishment of Native Rule” under an “Asiatic Sovereign”. The State remained independent until paramountcy lapsed in 1947 when the British left. Immediately, the then Maharaja Bodhchandra relinquished his monarchy and instituted a new Constitution, which is the first of its kind in India called the “Manipur Constitution Act, 1947”. This was an attempt to introduce democracy in Manipur. On September 21, 1949, the Maharaja signed the “Merger Agreement”, by which Manipur became part of the Indian Union from October 1949. The merger of Assam and Tripura also followed simultaneously.

Early 1960s began to witness the growth of insurgency in Manipur. Table 1 lists various insurgent outfits operating in Manipur.

**Table 1**  
**Insurgent Outfits Operating in Manipur**

1. United National Liberation Front (UNLF)
2. People’s Liberation Army (PLA)
3. Peoples Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak (PREPAK)
4. Kangleipak Communist Party (KCP)
5. Kanglei Yawol Kanna Lup (KYKL)
6. Kuki National Army (KNA)
7. Kuki National Front (KNF)
8. Zomi Revolutionary Army (ZRA)
9. National Socialist Council of Nagaland, Isaac-Muivah (NSCN-IM)
10. National Socialist Council of Nagaland, Khaplang (NSCN-K)
11. Islamic Liberation Front (ILF)
12. Hmar Peoples Convention (HPC).

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While the first four and last two outfits were all formed by 1980s, (7), (8) and (9) are new outfits formed only in the 1990s. The reasons may be interesting enough to note.

Topographically, Manipur comprises of two geographical regions: the valley and the rugged hills. The hills, home to diverse tribes comprise nearly 90 per cent of the total area of the State inhabited by 27.3 per cent tribes of the total population of the state. The fertile valley is the abode of the Meiteis who account for nearly 65 per cent. The main ethnic groups in Manipur are Meiteis, Hill tribes and Manipuri Muslims. Of the hill tribes, the Nagas and the Kukis form a major chunk. The Naga-Kuki ethnic violence erupted in 1992 having claimed thousands of lives.

In the hill areas of Manipur, house-tax is being levied by the Naga insurgents ever since the beginning of the underground movement at the rate of Rs.10/- per house. This was projected as a symbolic gesture emphasizing the dominance of Naga insurgents over the general public. The trouble started in 1992 when the NSCN (IM) started demanding Rs.100/- per house and Rs.1000/- per village. This was resented by the Kukis and led to strife between the two tribes leading to the ethnic clashes between the two ethnic groups. The Kuki National Front and Kuki National Army were formed as a result of this ethnic clash and now they are asking for a separate Kuki State within the Union of India.

In June 1995, for the first time in the history of South Asia, a clash took place between the Kukis and the Tamils in a town called Moreh in Manipur, on the Indo-Myanmar border.<sup>12</sup> The clash left eight dead and 13 injured on the June 6, 1995. Of the eight killed, five were Kukis and three Tamil settlers. The Tamils<sup>13</sup> settled themselves on the Indo-Myanmar border after they were ousted during the regime of General Ne Win in 1964. A lot of Chettiars from Tamil Nadu had gone to Myanmar and established flourishing business there. In the attack, 11 Kuki houses were also set ablaze apart from 29 Tamil houses in the town of Moreh.

About 37,000 Kuki refugees are now housed in twenty six relief



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camps located all over Manipur. The main outfit responsible for the Kuki exodus was the NSCN (IM). One of the refugees in the camp said: "President's rule is of no use for us. Give us *arms*, we can take care of the NSCN (IM)." Another refugee spoke:

... even our ten year old children are accusing us of being useless and are ready to go out into the jungles with arms to kill the NSCN. We are having a tough time restraining our children.<sup>14</sup>

A statement issued by the Naga-Lim-Guard of NSCN (IM) as shown below shows how the NSCN(IM) is spreading terror among Kuki villages:

**Copy of Statement Issued by the Nagalim-Guard of NSCN (IM)**

To,  
The President  
Kuki Village Chief, Tamei Sub-Division

This is a warning to the following Kuki villages that, the Kuki residents who are residing in the below mention villages must evacuate their village and leave the Naga Land before 15<sup>th</sup> September 1993. No condition or request will be entertained within or after the dead-line. Any villages or villagers found within our Land after the deadline will face serious consequences and no responsibilities shall be held for any eventualition.

The President, Kuki Village Chief Tamei Sub-Division shall be held responsible to inform the below mentioned villages.

1. Joui
2. Bombaikhang (Janglenphai)
3. Lower Jampi
4. Uppper Jampi
5. New Dulen
6. Bunning
7. Bolkot
8. Taloulong

S/d-  
Area Commander  
(Naga-Lim-Guard)

(Volunteers for self protection of Nagas and Defending of Motherland)

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The Kuki-Inpi Manipur (KIM), an apex body of the Kukis was formed to coordinate the mushroom growth of Kuki organisations in the wake of the Naga-Kuki clashes all over Manipur. As noted earlier, the Kuki National Front (KNF), a militant political organization sprang up demanding a separate Kuki State within the Indian Union comprising parts of Manipur, Assam, Mizoram and areas of Myanmar. P.Gangte, a former Deputy Inspector of Police and himself a Kuki said:

... in India alone we have a population of about three lakh and including Myanmar we could easily be about ten lakh. If Mizoram could get a state with only five lakh people in 1987, why not the Kukis?<sup>15</sup>

Besides the *Kuki-Naga* and *Kuki-Tamil*, there is another ethnic clash and that is between the Kukis and Paites. The conflict erupted on June 24, 1997 in Churachandpur, when some armed Kuki militants attacked a Paite village and killed at least 10 villagers on the pretext that there were some Naga militants taking shelter in the village. Another ethnic clash which occurred was between Meities and Pangals,<sup>16</sup> the Manipur Muslims. Over 100 people were killed in May 1993. After the clashes, *The Islamic Liberation Front*, a new militant outfit emerged. Other minority militant groups found in the region are: the Mizoram based Hmar People's Convention (HPC), which is extending its activities to the Churachandpur district of Manipur; another outfit is the Zomi Revolutionary Organization (ZRO) and its militant wing Zomi Revolutionary Army (ZRA) which was founded as late as 1995 by K.C. Guite, whose original home is in Assam. 'Zomi' is a new generic name coined by T.Gougin as early as the 1970s in Manipur. With Kukis coming in, the minority tribes like the Vaipheis, Gangtes, Simtes, Kims and the Zous are in a dilemma. They are told to accept either Kuki or Zomi. For tribes like Thadous and Paities, who have an identity of their own, are under tremendous pressure. With almost six militant outfits in the hills of Manipur, things are getting difficult for the people of Manipur.

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### **THE CASE OF TRIPURA**

Tripura once had the distinction of being a proud tribal kingdom ruled by a succession of 183 Tripuri princes who held sway over a land whose history is recorded over the centuries in the *Rajmala*, the State Chronicle. On the eve of partition, a part of the Tripura plain was inhabited by Muslims, though the overall demographic position was overwhelmingly tribal. With the creation of East Pakistan, Tripura was virtually isolated. Tripura merged with India on October 15, 1949, and became a Part C state with the inauguration of the new Constitution on January 26, 1950 and subsequently a Union Territory in November 1956, attaining statehood only in January 1972.

Influx of refugees from East Pakistan occurred so much so that migration was occurring at the rate of 10,000 refugees a month. The inexorable pressures from the migrant population soon began to be felt and tribals found themselves being pushed into less hospitalable lands in the hilly interior. Forests were cleared and the population density in Tripura rose from a low of 17 per sq. km to 49 in 1941 which further went up to 196 by 1981, the highest so far among the hill States of the North East. By 1981, the tribal proportion was down to 28.44 per cent in a total population of 2.05 million. The tribal people were reduced from over a half to barely more than a quarter of the population within a century. An estimated 609,998 immigrants entered Tripura between 1947 and 1971.

The first manifestation of opposition to the Bengali refugee influx from East Pakistan was the formation of Seng Krak, a militant organization of tribals as early as 1947. This was outlawed but spawned the *Paharia Union* in 1951. Two other tribal bodies, the *Adivasi Samiti* and the *Tripura Rajya Adivasi Sangh* also came into being. Later in 1954 all three organisations came together and formed the *Adivasi Sansad*. As elsewhere in eastern India, the Communists established a peasant organization, the *Rajya Mukti Parishad* in 1948, the year when the Zhdanov line was adopted and violence erupted all over the State but was soon controlled. The Congress Party ruled till 1977. Earlier in 1967,

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another militant outfit named *Tripura Upajati Juba Samiti* (TUJS) was formed under the leadership of Samacharan Tripura, a teacher.

In 1978, the *Tribal National Volunteers* (TNV) was formed by Bejoy Hranghkawal, a former member of TUJS. It was helped by the MNF. Further, in 1982 the *All Tripura People's Liberation Organization* (ATPLO) was formed which in 1983 was surrendered to Dasarath Deb. In a letter dated March 17, 1983, Hrangkhawal wrote:

Armed insurgency was necessary to reach your heart... Either you deport all foreign nationals who infiltrated into Tripura after 15 October 1947 or settle them anywhere in India other than Tripura. Restore tribal majority interest. It may not matter to you much, but delaying implementation of our demands means the TNV will fight for total self determination.

And finally, the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC) came into being in January 1982. However not all TNV cadres were happy about laying down arms. Some went underground in 1990 to form *All Tripura Tribal Force* (ATTF) but some of them also broke off from ATTF and founded another outfit called *National Liberation Front of Tripura* (NLFT) in 1989 (Table 2). There are now around 11 militant outfits operating in Tripura. And NSCN (IM) and ULFA have forged links with some groups especially NLFT which is currently the main insurgent organization operating in Tripura. Their cadres have been trained in Myanmar and Bangladesh.

**Table 2**

**Militant Outfits Operating in Tripura**

1. National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT)
2. All Tripura Tribal Force (ATTF)
3. Tripura and Tribal Commando Force (TTCF)
4. Tripura Commando Force (TCF)
5. Social Democratic Force of Tripura (SDFT)
6. All Tripura Volunteer Force (ATVF)
7. Tripura Defence Force (TDF)
8. The National Militia of Tripura (TNMT)

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9. Tripura National Force (TNF)
10. Tripura Tribal Volunteers (TTV)

*Source: Frontline* (Chennai), Vol. 16, No.7, March 27- April 9, 1999, p.46-48.

### **THE CASE OF MEGHALAYA**

Meghalaya, the abode of clouds, has seen the rise of insurgency only lately. Its problem is basically related to Bengali and Nepali influx which has been gradually occurring over the decades. The cause of insurgency in Meghalaya has been less from home grown discontent as from suddenly having become the conduit route to Bangladesh which has replaced Myanmar as the prime sanctuary and supply base for north eastern insurgents, especially the NSCN, ULFA and the BDSF.

With a matrilineal society encompassing all the major tribes, Meghalaya's three tribes namely Garo, Khasi and Jaintia had adopted Christianity. Declared as an autonomous (sub)-state within Assam in 1970s, Meghalaya became a full-fledged tribal State in 1972. It was in 1978-80, during the time of All Assam Students Union agitation that the Khasi Students Unions, launched a movement to detect, and delete the name of foreigners from the electoral rolls and deport them, with 1951 being the cut off year.

Things took an ugly turn in 1992 when rioting in Shillong started. The violence claimed 31 lives<sup>17</sup> in tribal versus non-tribal clashes. This was the fifth major riot against *dkhars* or outsiders since 1979. Shillong has a population of 3,50,000 of which 40 per cent are non-tribal, consisting of Bengalis, Assamese, Napalese, Marwaris and others. Since then these riots keep happening mostly during the month of October. Students staying in boarding houses / hostels during that time call it the "October festival". Paul Lyndoh, Khasi Students Union President in an interview said that in a number of constituencies, Bangladeshis have outnumbered locals while in the Jaintia coal belt, Napalese and Bangladeshi nationals are already in a majority. There are an estimated 3,00,000 Nepalese and Bangladeshis in Meghalaya's population of 1.7 million (1991 census).

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Discontentment and disillusionment, and the ongoing ramblings in other Northeast States gave birth to the *Achik Liberation Matgrik Army* (ALMA), a Garo vigilante movement in 1989. The number of cadres then was 30. The ALMA surrendered by 1994 but it encouraged the formation of the more radical and secessionist groups like the *Khasi Hynniewtrep Achik Liberation Council* (HALC), a Shillong based urban group which latter split into three factions. There was another outfit called the *National Socialist Council of Hynniewtrep* (NSCH) which was formed under NSCN(IM) inspiration.

*Operation Birdie* was launched between March 25 to April 2, 1997<sup>18</sup> for the first time in the State by the Indian army, which is considered to be one of the most peaceful States of the region. Of late, killings, kidnapping and extortion have risen in the State.

At the close of the past decade an estimated number of HNLC members was 180.<sup>19</sup> Reportedly, HNLC has split into 2 factions with the formation of *Hynniewtrep Socialist Democratic Front* (HSDF) with 35 to 40 members. It is the Garo Hills which is close to the Bangladesh border which of late has seen the spurt in activities. The entire Garo Hills have become the hideout of militants which includes the PLA (Manipur), KYKL. (Manipur), NSCN (IM) (Nagaland), BLT (Assam) etc.<sup>20</sup> NSCN (IM) is the main ally of *Achik National Volunteers Council* (ANVC) and provides all sorts of support including training facilities and weaponry. And for joints operations the two outfits split the booty on a 50-55 basis.<sup>21</sup> The ANVC operates not only in Garo Hills but also in West Khasi Hills. Killings, Kidnappings and extortions have become a regular features.

**Table 3**  
**Militant Outfits of Meghalaya**

1. Achik Liberation Matgrik Army (ALMA)
2. Achik National Volunteer Council (ANVC).
3. Hynniewtrep Volunteer Council (HVC).

There has been an extensive writing on the rise of insurgency in Assam and Nagaland. The rise of ULFA has been attributed mainly as a

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response to the 'foreigner' issue, the massive influx of migrants from Bangladesh, while the Bodos, like the Kukis want a separate state of their own within the Union of India. Some of the major outfits of Assam are given in Table 4.

**Table 4**  
**Militant Outfits Operating in Assam**

1. United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA).
2. Bodo Security Force
3. Karbi National Volunteers
4. National Democratic Front of Bodoland
5. Muslim United Liberation Tigers of Assam
6. Muslim Volunteers Force
7. Islamic Tigers
8. Sadam Bahini
9. Adam Sena
10. Muslim Security Force.<sup>22</sup>

In Nagaland, it is the NSCN (IM) and NSCN(K) who are operating. As far as Arunachal Pradesh is concerned, although the State is reasonably peaceful than the rest, some outfits have emerged there also (Table 5).

**Table 5**  
**Militant Outfits Operating in Arunachal Pradesh**

1. United Liberation Volunteers of Arunachal Pradesh (ULVA),
2. United People's Volunteers of Arunachal Pradesh (UPUA).
3. United Liberation Movement of Arunachal Pradesh (ULFA).<sup>23</sup>

*Source:* Sanjoy Hazarika, *Strangers of the Mist*, (Delhi: Viking, 1994).

The insurgency in Mizoram came to an end with the signing of the Mizo Accord in 1985 but this State is being used by some militant outfits as their base, e.g., *Hmar People's Convention*. On March 24, 1999, a Manipuri militant outfit (PREPAK) attacked Vaitin Hamlet in Mizoram, 3 AK rifles, one pistol, one carbine, one self loading rifle and ammunition were taken away by militants.<sup>24</sup> The problem of the influx of Reangs

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and the Burmese is also causing great tension. The Zomi Revolutionary Army (ZPA), a Paite militant outfit of Manipur forcibly took Rs.108 from each family belonging to the new land use policy beneficiaries in Mimbung, Hungmur and Teighan villages near Mizoram-Manipur border.<sup>25</sup>

Another rebel Manipur organization called Mizoram Accord Implementation Force (MAIF) has also been reportedly engaged in extortion. Three armed militants belonging to MAIF looted Rs.2000 from the Public Works Department officials of Zawngin hamlet in March 1995.<sup>26</sup>

### **THE ROLE OF EXTRA-TERRITORIAL FORCES IN NORTH EAST INDIA**

The external compulsions of the happenings in the North East region of India can be studied under three sets of parameters. Firstly, they are concerned with influences from forces which are external to South Asia, i.e. the extra-regional forces. The role played by the US, erstwhile USSR and China fall in this category. Secondly, this region gets influenced by the forces emanating from the South Asian countries themselves from across the border. For example, due to its interest in Kashmir Pakistan got involved in terrorist activities in the North East region too. And finally, the happenings in different States of North East has had serious repercussions amongst its neighbouring States. For example, Meghalaya till the late mid 1990s had been a peaceful State but afterwards it got sucked into the web of insurgency of the neighbouring areas.

### **THE CHINESE FACTOR**

The People's Liberation Army (PLA), one of the most important groups spearheading the armed insurrection for Manipur's secession from the Indian Union, is committed to the Mao doctrine that war is the highest form of struggle and eliminates war. As far as urban insurgency is concerned, the PLA ranks high in South Asia today. In 1980-81 large areas of the Imphal valley were under their indirect control. In 1980s, they were acclaimed the world over as the perfect examples of the Maoist guerrilla fighters.



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Namierakpani Bisheshwar, the leader of PLA, went to Lhasa through Nepal in 1975. The local Chinese authorities in Tibet first put them through a rigorous course of Mao Tse Tung thought. The PLA, with N. Bisheshwar and 18 of lieutenants re-entered Manipur from Lhasa and thus started the prairie fire of insurgency. The PLA were deeply influenced by Maoist philosophy. Bisheshwar stressed on guerrilla warfare urging “the rank and file to organize people, train them, build up bases and to turn rural areas as fortified center to encircle the town”. He related the developments in Manipur then to changes in China, Naga politics and the Mizo National Front and Naxalbari movements on the one hand and China’s interventionist policy, developments in Cambodia then, their consequences in Vietnam and the then Beijing’s support to the Thai and Burmese Communist parties.

The mood generated by China-inspired movement can be understood from the newspaper clippings of the times. In one of the newspaper articles and reports dated May 4, 1980, it was written :

...Manipur police claimed tonight that it had detained some *Maoist rebel leaders* for their involvement in the current unrest in the state. The rebels belonged to the underground People’s Liberation Party of Kangleipak and its armed wing, the People’s Liberation Army...

In another report, it writes (dated April 26, 1980):<sup>27</sup>

...Three big Chinese-type propaganda balloons were seen hovering in the sky over flags of the People’s Liberation Army with the party’s red star emblem inscribed on them were fastened to the balloons...

Yet another report following the above incident, stated: (April 27, 1980).<sup>28</sup>

...Mr. Shiv Chandra Jha (Janata), today raised in the Rajya Sabha the reported seizure by Manipur police of a Chinese type propaganda balloon in Imphal Valley yesterday and described it as a “serious matter” touching the security of the country in the North Eastern region... The member also referred to the increased arms supply by the US to Pakistan and said the appearance of the

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balloons in this context was ominous.

In a November 1, 1980 newspaper report, the former Chief Minister of Manipur, Dorender Singh said that the disturbances in the North Eastern region were the result of “big power game in destabilizing India.” He said that the troubles in Assam, Manipur, Nagaland and other places were engineered to gain a bargaining point on border disputes. He said that Manipur was facing trouble from insurgents because of its 1,400 kms. border with Myanmar. The fact that it would take only two days for anyone to walk into China from Manipur border makes the region vulnerable to Chinese manoeuvres.

Accepting the “China Connection” did not come easily to the Christian Nagas - most of them, initially, abhorred the idea of friendship.<sup>29</sup> But tactical considerations drew them closer to the People’s Republic of China. A Naga guerrilla leader once said, “... it was the destiny of most South East Asian guerrilla movements”.<sup>30</sup> It took the Naga underground leaders three years to translate this connection into a tangible reality. The first group to reach China was the 353 strong guerrilla detachment led by Thinoselie Medon Keyho and Thuingiland Muivah which started from Nagaland’s Mon district in early October and reached China’s Yunnan province in January 1967 after an arduous 97- day trek.<sup>31</sup> The Chinese had been apprised of the departure of the Naga guerrillas from Mon by the “FGN Liaison cell” in Dhaka, which was regularly feeding reports received from the “OKING” (mobile headquarters of the FGN)<sup>32</sup> to Chinese diplomats in the East Pakistani capital.

On their arrival in China, the fighters with Thinoselie Medon, “Army Commander” of the group, were sent to three training camps in Yunnan. Muivah, the FGN’S “Plenipotentiary”, to Peking, was taken to the Chinese capital just as the Cultural Revolution, was beginning. In 1968 a similar detachment, about 300 strong and led by Issac Chisi Suu and Moure Angami, reached China by the same route – through Myanmar’s Kachin state, the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO), which had been fighting against Rangoon since 1961, extended all support to the Nagas en route. The KIA leaders were also aided in their armed

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insurrection by China, as was the Burmese Communist party (White Flag Faction), By the end of 1969, three Naga groups had been trained by the Chinese and sent back with arms and equipment superbly suited for jungle warfare, together with a large stock of guerrilla warfare literature, particularly Mao's writings on the subject.

The Chinese covert support to the Naga insurgents resulted in a closer military understanding between the Indian and Burmese armies, probably after the visit of the Burmese leaders, General Ne Win, to New Delhi and his meeting with the Indian Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, on 16 March 1968. Therefore, while the first China bound Naga rebel detachment had got through almost unscathed, the Muivah-Isaac group and the one that followed in faced frequent encounters with the Burmese Army. In June 1968, the Indian Army first faced a force of Nagas who had returned from training in China in a fierce four day battle at the Jotsoma knoll. B.K. Nehru wrote in his Memoirs:

... they [North East insurgents] were indoctrinated into Chinese Communist philosophy, given training in guerrilla warfare and then sent to Vietnam to get practical experience...<sup>33</sup>

It was when B.K. Nehru was the Governor of Assam (Nagaland was a part then), that these insurgents came back with arms and training. He writes of those times: "The first lot of Chinese trained men with their shiny new weapons was expected to get back to Nagaland very shortly."<sup>34</sup>

New Delhi's concern at the Chinese connection in Nagaland was reflected in a determined campaign by the Government of Nagaland. In May 1968, it produced a poster showing a bayonet wielding Chinese soldier threatening a Naga woman It read:

We love our land like own children. We love our family more than the beads in our necklace. If Chinese Communists come from the other side of the mountain, our Naga way of life will be destroyed. Every plot of our land will be confiscated and we will be deprived of the harvest by the Chinese... We will all be forced to work as coolies in our own land, feeding the Chinese. Then they will take away our beloved children, who will be sent to Peking for

Communist indoctrination...<sup>35</sup>

The impact of the Chinese-trained guerrillas go diluted by the split in the Naga underground. By then, the Chinese had armed the Nagas well. The weapons seized from Muivah's group show that Chinese were providing sophisticated arms to the guerillas: of the 163 weapons seized, 89 were semi-automatic rifles, 11 light machines guns, 42 sub-machine gun, one rocket launcher, six 6mm mortars, and 14 pistols. The Chinese support continued strongly for some time. Thinoselie recalls:

The Chinese and Pakistanis were considering building an airstrip near Rangamati [in the Chittagong Hill Tracts]. They asked us to provide the best fighters for training as parachutists. That is why I moved with my best boys to East Pakistan.. we held several meetings with the Chinese military experts, who had been sent to East Pakistan to coordinate our activities. As far as I can remember, the first meeting between our representatives, those of the Mizo National Front and the Chinese and Pakistani experts was held at Rangamati on 15 February 1969.<sup>36</sup>

In the North East, China seems to have a grand design to carve out a client state from the tribal-inhabited border areas of India's North East and North Myanmar that is virtually a no-man's land.<sup>37</sup> As described earlier, it was the money and arms from China which started the insurgency while core militants got training in the Naga settlements which have been established in the Yunan Province in China and also in North Vietnam.<sup>38</sup> China's hand has been seen in Pakistan in Punjab in aid of Khalistanis, and the militants in Kashmir too. According to Pannalal Dhar, "India is thus kept busy in the North East and the North and North West by China through Pakistan and Bangladesh and now Myanmar".

However, the decade of the eighties witnessed a major shift in China's South Asia policy which emphasized a closer relationship with India, its former adversary. The changes that occurred in Chinese foreign policy in the 1980s were to a great extent a result of the emergence of a new leadership under Deng Xiaoping who helped to steer Chinese foreign policy away from communist idealism and towards socialist pragmatism.<sup>39</sup>

**PAKISTAN'S ROLE IN NORTH EAST INDIA**

Pakistan's role in fomenting trouble in India with special emphasis on the North East can be divided into three periods:

- a) 1947-1971
- b) 1972-1989
- c) 1990-till present

**a) 1947-1971 Period:** The political developments in India and Pakistan just after independence generated complexes and controversies which contributed further to the adversarial content of Indo-Pakistan relations. According to J.N. Dixit:<sup>40</sup>

..while India succeeded in completing the processes of territorial integration, the making of constitution and the consolidation of democracy, Pakistan floundered in political uncertainties. This created a crisis of identity for Pakistan which continued till today.

Three wars were fought between India and Pakistan during this time - Oct 1947 (over Kashmir), April 1965 (border dispute over Rann of Kutch) and in September 1965 (over Kashmir). Diverting attention to the real or imagined threat from India, Pakistan's Islamic existence became basic elements in Pakistan's defence and foreign policies.<sup>41</sup> Right from the beginning, Pakistan followed a policy of confrontation with India through various stages which manifest in various ways.

It was at the 1955 Bandung Conference that Sino-Pak relations developed which has had major repercussions leading to the rise of armed insurgency in the North East region. The Sino-Pak relations were further strengthened in the light of deteriorating relationship between India and China since 1959. Pakistan thought that the Sino-Pakistan friendship could not only be utilized to harass India but also to pressurize the US into taking active steps towards finding a solution to the Kashmir issue.<sup>42</sup> In 1962 during Sino-India War, both Pakistan and China supported each other against India which they regarded as their common enemy.

Between May 1962 and June 1964, with Chinese military and moral support Pakistan encouraged various minority groups in India against

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the Indian Government. According to Ratna Tikoo:

Both the governments of Pakistan and China gave assistance to those minority groups like Mizos and Nagas. From May, '62 to June '64, three hostile Naga groups were reported to have gone to Pakistan. The fourth group of Nagas consisting of around 1500 went to East Pakistan and then returned in April 1965. On their return, these groups of Nagas brought large quantities of arms and ammunitions.<sup>43</sup>

According to the then Indian Defence Minister, Y.B. Chavan<sup>44</sup> those Naga groups which returned from East Pakistan carried 21 LMG, 10 sten guns, 268 rifles, 3 MMGs, 2 three-inch and one 2-inch mortars. In Pakistan, a school was opened to train the rebel Nagas in guerrilla warfare.

It was in March 1956, after the failure of talks between the Nagas and the Government of India that nearly two divisions of the Indian Army and thirty five battalions of the Assam Rifles and armed police were deployed in the Naga Hills.<sup>45</sup> It was then that the Naga National Council finally announced the formation of a "Federal Government" and started raising a standing Army.

It was at this time, Pakistan stepped in. It found in the incipient insurgency of the Naga Hills an opportunity to extend the theatre of its proxy war against India. Phizo escaped into East Pakistan where he was cordially received by Pakistani intelligence officials who offered weapons and training for the Naga guerrilla and support to internationalize the Naga problem. With Pakistani support, Phizo found his way into the United Kingdom. From there, he tried to internationalize the Naga problem. Though its effect was limited, Phizo's international campaign remained an irritant to New Delhi.

In 1958, the daring Naga rebel commander Kaito Sema took the first batch of guerrillas to East Pakistan through the North Cachar route in 1962. When the Sino-Indian war broke out, more than six batches of Naga fighters; more than a thousand men had undergone training and received weapons in East Pakistan. During the war with China, large numbers of Naga fighters were undergoing training in East Pakistan.

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The return of the Pakistan-trained Nagas, loaded with modern weapons, intensified the guerrilla war in this remote hill zone. From 1963, Naga squads regularly blew up rail tracks and attacked army and paramilitary posts. In 1964, another group of 1,000 Naga guerrillas reached East Pakistan. And a series of devastating offensive on Indian positions in and around Kohima continued.

On May 5, 1964, a cease-fire occurred. By early 1965, the Pakistani Army and military intelligence agencies had set up a “coordinating Bureau” to supervise its covert activities in Nagaland – similar to the high power “Kashmir Cell” set up for the same purpose in Kashmir. Indian military intelligence officials believe that Pakistan clearly planned a two front covert war against India at this stage.<sup>46</sup> A retired Brigadier of the Indian Military Intelligence in an interview with Subir Bhomick said:

After the war with China, they knew we had to deploy a large part of our Army formation. To drive home this advantage, they boosted the Naga rebels, and later the Mizos, to keep as many Indian divisions tied down in the North East as possible. That would reduce the Indian strength in Kashmir and Punjab and give them the opportunity to drive home their military action in Kashmir...<sup>47</sup>

However, the absence of a common border with the Naga Hills seemed to have ruled out another Operation Gibraltar in the area. By late 1970s, the situation worsened as the Bengal Revolt in East Pakistan gathered momentum, Pakistan’s attention was totally diverted to the ensuing crisis which ultimately led to the formation of Bangladesh in 1971. Both China and Pakistan continued to openly support the Mizo, Manipur and Nagas during the whole of 1960’s and 1970’s. *The People’s Daily* of Peking expressed open support to the North East cause. Similarly the *Dawn* newspaper of 5 January 1967 carried an article on the Naga and Mizo disturbances.<sup>48</sup> The support for these insurgents continued till the Bangladesh Liberation War, 1971 and got activated again later.

**b) 1972-1989 Period :** With the creation of Bangladesh, the external linkage pattern of North East insurgencies underwent a temporary change. Instead of a hostile Pakistan, India now had a friendly regime in

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Dhaka that would not support or shelter any insurgent movement directed at New Delhi. The Nagas and the Mizos had to relocate all their bases to Myanmar's untenanted Saigang region. After the Chinese, the Kachin Independence Army stepped in. By then, many of the insurgents were already flooded with arms and ammunitions by the Chinese and Pakistan.

Zulfikar Ali Bhutto encouraged an anti-Indian stance in Pakistan's India policy after the 1971 conflict. After his death, Indo-Pak relations acquired a 'positive' ambience during the Janata regime. However, it was during the so called positive interlude (1978-80) that Pakistan established connections with the Sikhs in Punjab and elsewhere with a view to fomenting Sikh separation.<sup>49</sup> There is reliable proof that General Zia had authorized the ISI to give training, weapons and logistical facilities to Sikh militants. Violence erupted in Punjab which ultimately claimed Indira Gandhi's life. J.N. Dixit writes: "There were suspicions about Pakistan's hand in Mrs. Gandhi's assassination."<sup>50</sup>

**c) 1990 till present :** The dawn of 1990s saw an extremely tense relations between India and Pakistan. Pakistan started its proxy war in Kashmir in 1989-90 and there was a quantum increase in the flow of arms and infiltration by trained terrorists<sup>51</sup> resulting in the escalation of war in Kashmir. After a lull for about two decades, the NSCN succeeded in securing fresh support from Pakistan's Inter Services Intelligence Directorate in the early 1990s. According to the confessions of a captured NSCN "Finance Secretary". Khayao Huray, the Pakistani Diplomats in Dhaka handed over more than one million dollars to the NSCN's Muivah faction between 1993 and 1994. With these funds, the NSCN has been able to purchase from black markets in South-East Asia and Bangladesh large quantities of Chinese rifles, machine guns, mortars and explosives.

Pakistan continued its support to the North East insurgents in this period too. A number of training camps have sprung up in Bangladesh and there is a massive influx of arms and ammunitions in the region. The number of Muslim insurgent outfits have increased in Assam, Manipur and illegal migration from Bangladesh has reached an all time high. In Assam itself, there are about ten Muslim outfits which have emerged recently.



**Table 6**  
**Muslim Insurgents Outfits Operating in Assam<sup>52</sup>**

1. Muslim United Liberation Front of Assam
2. Muslim Volunteer Force
3. Muslim Liberation Front of Assam
4. United Liberation Army of Assam
5. Islamic Tigers
6. Saddam Bahini
7. Adam Sena
8. Muslim Security force
9. Islamic Students Movements of India (SIMI)
10. Islamic Students Organization of India (ISO).

SIMI is supposed to be floated by Saudi Arabia and ISO by Iran. In Bengal, recently there has been a spurt of activities on its soil by the ISI. A Bengal Tiger Force has been established there too. In Manipur also there has been a spurt in Muslim insurgent outfits.

#### **NORTH EAST INDIAN REBELS AND BANGLADESH**

After the assassinations of President Mujibur Rahman on August 15, 1975, the equation of India vis-à-vis Bangladesh changed. For despite his megalomaniac ways and arrogance, Mujib represented a strong bond between India and Bangladesh as he was indebted to India for its role in Bangladesh's liberation movement.

North East insurgents began to be operated from Bangladesh. Around 14 training camps of the insurgents have been identified in Bangladesh bordering Tripura. However another report puts the number of training camps at 24.<sup>53</sup> The report further says that besides camps that are run by the outlawed A11 Tripura Tiger Force (ATTF) as bases for training and operation in the Sylhet, Chittagong and Comilla areas, there are about 18 camps being maintained by the National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT) on the other border areas in Bangladesh. NLFT has 4 camps in Habiganj and one in Moulavi bazaar in the Sylhet region, in addition to 13 in the Chittagong Hills and in Comilla. Besides, Naga rebels as well as urban guerrillas of Manipur have also been using

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Bangladesh territory for their shelter and operation. These extremists often use the Tripura border as a corridor to their bases in Bangladesh.

It was in 1989 that the Bangladesh camps became operational for the ULFA.<sup>54</sup> A chain of camps in the Chittagong area guaranteed entry into Assam through the Cachar and Barak valley corridors. According to an ULFA activist, they were asked to adopt Muslim names and perform *namaaz*. The management of the camps was left to Muslims within the ULFA ranks, and though no Bangladesh officials were ever seen around the camps which numbered around 13 to 14, these were fairly well established and suffered no harassment from local police.<sup>55</sup>

It was after the unleashing of Operation Rhino that Bangladesh assumed prominence and became a full fledged base area. The General Council meeting of the ULFA was apparently held at Dhaka on July 22, 1992 to discuss ways and means to recoup lost ground.<sup>56</sup> The need to get weapons into Assam meant control over those routes which led to Sylhet, and were dominated by the immigrant Muslim population (Barak Valley / Cachar). A major change of stand of ULFA followed, which was formalized in August 1992, when a 15-page policy document declared that settlers had contributed to the productivity of Assam and in effect were a part and parcel of "Swadhin Asom".<sup>57</sup> This turnaround was seen as move to appease the Bangladeshis, and secondly, one that would give the ULFA an adequate manpower base. In October 1996, a report noted that Bangladeshi settler colonies had sprung up along a vital route, and these were assisting the NSCN and its allied groups which included the Dimasa Halam Douda, and the Hmar Revolutionary Force.

Using Bangladesh as an exit point, ULFA made contact with arms dealers as far off as Romania, and, closer to home, in Thailand. ULFA sources speak of regular visits to Chiang mai, the then stronghold of the Maung Tai warlord Khun Sa. This was possibly the beginning of contacts with arms dealers in Cambodia, even as Cox's Bazaar began to emerge as a transit route for weapons. At Cox's Bazaar, ULFA cadres were to meet the NSCN and other insurgent groups who had bases in the same

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area. Bangladesh also served as a place for currency conversion, and moving finances out of the country. Gradually by 1993, the ULFA had acquired huge quantity of weapons from Cambodia with ease, and paying for these in hard currency banked in Nepal. Many noted ULFA militants are currently in Bangladesh holding various assets there. Following the signing of the Indo-Bangladesh Water Agreement, the Bangladesh government vowed not to let its soil be used by North East insurgents. However, not much had been done in this direction.

Bangladesh of late has been flooded with small arms too. According to a report, the Chittagong Hill Tracts seems to have been flooded with illegal arms and ammunitions posing a grave threat to the country.<sup>58</sup> These arms are mostly possessed by political parties, terrorists, illegal toll collectors and miscreants. These arms have been procured from insurgent groups in Myanmar and from some foreign vessels engaged in carrying smuggled goods to the outer anchorage of Chittagong Port.

The presence of many terrorist outfits in Bangladesh has its impact on the insurgency in North East India as well. Mention may be made of terrorist outfits like *Freedom in Bangladesh*, *Harkat-ul-Jihad al-Islami*, and *Islami Liberation Tiger of Bangladesh*.

There are insurgent groups like Priti Group<sup>59</sup> and Parbatya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samiti (PCJSS) which are active in the remote forests of Baghaighat. The international linkages of these outfits can be gauged from the fact that members of “freedom in Bangladesh are sent to Libya to take “special training” on arms and explosives. Arms for the outfits are procured even from East European countries.<sup>60</sup> Linkages have also been established between *Harkat-ul-Jihad al-Islami* and Osama Bin Laden.<sup>61</sup> In January 1999, Bangladeshi Police arrested five of its members from a pro-Islamic NGO office in Dhaka. Of the five arrested, one was a South African, another a Pakistani, third was an Afghan and the remaining two were Bangladeshis.<sup>62</sup> According to the *Daily Star* of Bangladesh, a lot of *Madrasas* in Chittagong Hill Tracts have been used by the *Harkat-ul-Jihad* for arms training. These *Madrasas* are called the *Kharji Madrasas*.<sup>63</sup> In January 1999, den of a new armed Islamic

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terrorist group called *Islami Liberation Tiger of Bangladesh* was unearthed from Barisal.<sup>64</sup> On January 27, 1999, an Arakenese Taliban, Abdul Amen of Myanmar was arrested from Cox's Bazaar. He was a member of the Rohingya Solidarity Organization (RSO), an Arakenese revolutionary group based in Bangladesh.

### **NORTH EAST INSURGENCY AND THE MYANMAR CONNECTION**

The happenings in the North East region has strong parallels with that of the happenings in Myanmar. In Myanmar various ethnic groups namely the Kachins, Shans, Was, Kokangs, Kayah, Karens, Mons, Chins and the Rohingyas revolted against the 'Rangoon' government and demanded independence. There are around 67 ethnic groups in Myanmar and the country like India suffers from a centrifugal tendency generated from the above mentioned ethnic groups mostly. The second parallel can be drawn from the fact that insurgency started in both the regions around the same time just after the colonial powers left the region. Hyam Irabot Singh, the legendary visionary of Manipur whose activities sowed the seeds of insurgency in Manipur started his underground activities in 1949. Hyam Irabot Singh was helped by the Burmese Communist Party, which is the oldest insurgent group in Myanmar.

Irabot too was a confirmed member of the Communist Party of India at that time. In fact much before 1949, Irabot was in constant touch with the Manipurians in Myanmar who were around 40,000 in number. When the third Nikhil Hindu Manipur Mahasabha session was held in Mandalay, Myanmar on March 2, 1937, he had asked for the creation of a small Manipur in Myanmar.<sup>65</sup> He further said:

Burma is called Awaleipak. It is a country of Awas, however, the Manipuri Awas must feel a sense of beloniness in this foreign country... I hope to reconstruct the buried memories of a filial love, and the matrimonialties between Manipur and Burma. We have so far played the role of a bunch of wild children for whom our mother had shed enough tears.

There are localities in Mandalay which are mostly populated by the

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Meities since the early days of yore and these localities bear Manipuri names too.<sup>66</sup> They are: Sagol Zongba Khul, Leishang Khong, Yeijipank, Anauk, Letma, Prome.

Till now, some of the militant outfits have their bases in Myanmar. Particular mention may be made of the United National Liberation Front (UNLF). There are about 7 Naga Tribes living in Myanmar. The NSCN asks not only for secession from the Union of India but for the freedom of all Naga-inhabited lands in the Indo-Burma region: In 1990, the Indo-Burma Revolutionary Front was formed under the leadership of the UNLF Supremo Rajkumar Meghen alias Sanayaima.<sup>67</sup> Other militant outfits who joined the front include NSCN(K), KNF and ULFA.

It is important to note that UNLF Secretary, Rajkumar Meghen traced the origin of UNLF to that of the efforts made by Hijam Irabot Singh in 1949 till his death in 1951.<sup>68</sup> It was in 1976 that Sanayaima (Rajkumar Meghen) went to Myanmar in search for arms and training. Dubbed as an “intellectual Pan-Mongolian Movement” established in 1964 under Arambam Somorendro, the outfit’s first President was a Rongmei Naga by the name of Kalamio. Its vice President was s singsit Kaki by the name of Hangkhanpao and the General Secretary a Meitei.<sup>69</sup>

The remarkable thing about the outfit was its role in the ‘social cleaning’ of Manipur rather than of violence. By 1996, the outfit stopped using violence and strove to give ‘political education’ to the people and to work for the betterment of the society. It stressed the combined need of ‘Revolution’ and ‘Reformation’, a strategy rare to find in the violence prone outfits of the region. Other outfits like the PLA also took help from Myanmar. It was the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) in Myanmar which initially helped the PLA with arms and training. PLA training camps still exists in the country.

S.S. Khaplang, the founder member of NSCN and the supreme of NSCN(K) is a Naga from the Saigaing Division of Myanmar. It was in 1965 when he after setting up the Eastern Naga Revolutionary Council (ENRC) cooperated with the Naga National Council (NNC) and trekked down to China for training via Myanmar. It was the KIA who escorted

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the men earlier, in 1963, General Kaito, a Commander of the Naga Rebel Army who established a base in the Somra Tract in Myanmar just opposite Manipur's Ukhrul district. Between 1958 and 1962, Kaito Sema succeeded in training of six batches of Naga fighters consisting of more than a thousand men each. The men were all trained in erstwhile East Pakistan.<sup>70</sup>

They received weapons after their training. And in 1968, a 300 strong detachment led by Isaac Chisi Swu and Moun Angami reached China through the Kachin State. The Kachin Independence Organisation extended all support to the Nagas en route and "fraternal ties" established between the two organisations remained unbroken even today. By the end of 1969, three Naga groups had been trained by the Chinese and sent back with arms and equipments superbly suited for jungle warfare, together with a large stock of guerrilla warfare literature, particularly Mao's writings on the subject. The weapons include: Semi-automatic rifles, Light-machine-guns, Sub-machine-guns, Rocket launcher, Mm mortars, Pistols.

Even the Mizo insurgents had bases in Myanmar. In 1980, 200 Indian and 400 Burmese soldiers attacked a Naga base in upper Dangaing Division. And in 1981, Indian troops crossed into Myanmar and bombed Naga headquarters at Monghkwe here.

In February 1993, the ULFA's "Foreign Secretary" travelled from Bangladesh to Bangkok entering Chiang Mai and Mac Sot and entered Manerplaw, the Karen stronghold in lower Myanmar. The "Foreign Secretary" requested General Bo Mya for around 100,000 assorted weapons which could not be immediately fulfilled. He left leaving \$ 100,000 as an advance and returned to Assam for another \$100,000 leaving via Dhaka from Mannerplaw where the weapons were to be delivered. The first consignment supplied by the Karen,<sup>71</sup> reportedly included 775 AK-56 rifles, 65 GPMGs, 10 Rocket propelled guns, more than 100 anti-tank, anti personnel shells, 50 pistols, assorted ammunitions.

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### **BHUTAN: A NEW SHELTER FOR NORTH EAST INSURGENTS**

Many insurgent outfits in the North East region have apparently bases in Bhutan. They also maintain contact abroad through Bhutan and Nepal too. With a weak police force in Bhutan and a border that was considered “friendly”, the groups that were based here faced few problems in infiltrating into Assam through territory that was controlled by the Bodos. Joint operations between the Bodos and ULFAs as well as the Bodos and NSCN have been taking place quite regularly to the benefit of both. This may have been as a result of a loose agreement between the groups in late 1991, when the leaders worked out a plan for greater cooperation.<sup>72</sup>

In 1996, the ULFA were joined by the Bodos with at least seven camps operating.<sup>73</sup> Nearly 500 insurgents were said to have been holed up in the eastern and southern Bhutan. Apparently, these groups were assisting the Nepali settlers, hostile to the king, and pressing for their rights. Between May 6 and Aug 16, 1996, there were more than 17 incidents of violence in areas adjacent to the Bhutan border, including the assassination of a Minister (Nagen Neog) and the editor of *Asomiya Pratidhin*, Parag Das. Given the King’s obvious countenance to “joint operations” against the militants in his Kingdom, India offered to train a crack force in Bhutan for operations against the militants.

There is a significant preserve of insurgents belonging to the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) and even the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB). It is reported that some of the several ULFA camps in Bhutan are named after prominent districts of Assam like Nalbari, Dhubri, Bogaigaon, Darang and Barpeta.<sup>74</sup>

### **THE ROLE OF NEPAL**

Nepal is increasingly found to be used by various militant outfits. Various reports show the infiltration of the ISI in various parts of Nepal and using it as a base, besides Bangladesh to infiltrate the North Eastern States of India. Thus becoming a major extra-territorial force which needs

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to be curbed soon. Nepal is also used as a route for narcotics coming from the Golden Triangle areas. On February 1, 1999, 5 persons with 42 kgs of hashish were arrested in Pokhara. The hashish was reportedly brought for exporting.<sup>75</sup> In March 1999, Nepalganj police arrested 25 persons with 500 kgs of hashish, the largest haul worth crores of rupees in international market. Those arrested admitted that they were about to set out for India to sell the hashish when the police caught them.<sup>76</sup>

Besides, the massive influx of Nepalis in North Eastern India has also affected the demographic structure which can have serious repercussions on the security of the country. Table 10 shows the detection figures of Nepali nationals from 1993 to 1995, which was stopped with effect from 1.10.95.

Several Nepali settlers also reside in different states of North East India. In Manipur alone, an entire region of a district named Sapermaina in Kangpokpi region of Senapati district is filled with Nepali migrants and they constitute a major vote bank. There are an estimated 12 lakh Nepalis who came from Nepal.<sup>77</sup> Although most of them work as menial labourers, one cannot rule out other possibilities which can have major repercussions on the security of the North East region in particular and the country as a whole.

### **ROLE OF OTHER EXTRA TERRITORIAL FORCES**

Of all the terrorist outfits, the role of the LTTE in the supply of small arms to the North East insurgents has become an established fact. The LTTE referred to as the “Lord of the High Seas” has been the main channel for the supply of small arms and narcotics from South East Asian countries to North East region.

In April 1996, Bangladesh forces seized more than 500 AK-47s and other small arms, more than 80 general purpose machine guns, 50 rocket launchers, and over 2,000 grenades from two vessels off Cox’s Bazaar. Reports indicated that four Tamilians were among those arrested which to a certain extent indicates an LTTE connection.<sup>78</sup> Coming back to the LTTE connection, the apparent link between the ULFA and the



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LTTE was underlined by the Jain Commission investigating the assassination of the former Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi. Reportedly, the Assam government had warned that the ULFA had even set up camps in Tamil Nadu.<sup>79</sup> Many of these cadres were also picked up from an engineering college in Bangalore. There are about 40,000 Tamils living in Moreh in Chandel district of Manipur. Situated on the Indo-Myanmar border, the place is a haven for gun and drug smugglers. The LTTE reportedly approached the Tamil population after the fall of Jaffna.<sup>80</sup> When the Tamil-Kuki clash broke out in Moreh in early 1990s, the LTTE had supposedly intervened too.

Of the other terrorist groups who apparently do have a role in the region, mention may be made of the various Islamic fundamentalists outfits operating in Kashmir, West Bengal and Bangladesh. Various Muslim outfits have sprung up in various parts of North East that include ISI-sponsored outfits namely:

- i. The Muslim United Liberation Tigers of Assam,
- ii. Muslim Volunteer Force.
- iii. Muslim Liberation Front of Assam

As mentioned earlier, Saudi Arabia-sponsored student bodies have also started operating in Assam, besides the one floated by Iran. The Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI) floated by Saudi Arabia is reported to be using mosques to exhort the youth, while imparting military training as well. Huge religious congregations bringing together thousands of people both from within India and West Asia are becoming a recently phenomena in Assam.<sup>81</sup> The first was held at Hojai in 1994, followed by one at Naogaon and at Rupai (all in Assam). Posters demanding autonomy started appearing in Goalpara, Dhubri and Barpeta districts too, underlying the gravity of the situation.

The 1991 census revealed that 9 out of 23 districts of Assam are dominated by Muslims which now constitute over 33 per cent of the population. Muslims now constitute the majority in some of the major towns (Dhubri-70.46 percent; Goalpara-50.18; Barpeta-56.07; Hailankadi 51.42). Surely, this is a phenomenon which cannot be neglected !

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There have been linkages of the North East militants with Sikh militants too. A copy of a notice issued by Gurmit Singh Aulakh, President, Council of Khalistan came to light after Muivah's meeting of Khalistani leaders based in the US during the meeting of the Unrepresented People's Organization (UNPO) which was held in the Haque, Netherlands.

There has also been an alliance with Marxist groups of Leninist variety in West Bengal and Bihar with the North East militants. In December 1995, meetings were held between the ULFA and the Party Unity Group (PUG) of the CPI (Marxist-Leninist) to join hands in intensifying armed activities in their respective areas. The PUG maintains close links with the Mao Communist Centre (MCC) and the People's War Group (PWG).<sup>82</sup> The ULFA group was headed by Anup Chetia at the meetings. As a result of these meetings, the North East groups were given access to Nepal, coming into Assam through the Bodo Security Force (BSF) areas. In April 1994, there were also reports of training in Bangladesh of North East militants being imparted by Kashmiri militants together with ISI officers.<sup>83</sup>

The basic needs to acquire weapons and access money have to a large extent led to links with those who operate on the fringes of law or are wholly outside it. Their very requirement in supplying weapons and laundering of money makes these criminal gangs a major force to reckon.<sup>84</sup> A trader in Bongaigaon (in Assam) was caught with Rs.6 crores in foreign currency, including US dollars, Central Bank of Brazil notes worth Rs. 1 lakh, Somalian currency, Polish, Japanese and Iraqi currency.<sup>85</sup> The trader confessed that he had been a conduit for the Bodos in acquiring arms and ammunitions. The foreign exchange came from a Muslim trader.

The term 'insurgent crossfire' has been aptly coined by Subir Bhowmik to explain the 'sponsored insurgency' diplomacy which has been occurring in South Asia ever since the colonizers left. The region possesses ideal conditions for sponsored insurgencies.<sup>86</sup>

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### **CRISIS OF IDENTITY, SECURITY AND UNDERDEVELOPMENT**

The crisis in the North East can be defined as one of identity, insecurity and underdevelopment. North East is a mini-India. There are more than 70 major population groups and sub groups, speaking approximately 400 languages and dialects, of which there are about 168 in Arunachal Pradesh, 95 in Nagaland, 87 in Manipur, 100 in Tripura and 200 in Assam, Meghalaya and Mizoram.<sup>87</sup> No other part of India has been subjected to such a prolonged violent struggle, which have held development to ransom, as the North East. Violent and vociferous demands for new states in the North East have been occurring over the past five decades.

And behind all these demands and struggle, the overriding factor is one of identity. Whether it is the Nagas, Mizos, Assamese or Tripuris, the Bodos, and the Cacharis, it is the assertion of identity which is the main spring board. This is followed by the sense of insecurity and underdevelopment. Barring Nagaland, all other insurgency movements in the North East had their genesis in economic backwardness. Most of the fight between Bodos and Santhals has been over the control of resources. Lack of infrastructure, particularly communication, transportation and power together with the lack of investible capitals and lack of entrepreneurship slowed the pace of development. Besides, unemployment is acute in the region. As a result, most parts of North East are much more disturbed than ever before. Industrial development in the North East region is very poor. Only a negligible percentage of the country's total number of factories is in the North East. Most of the factories in the region are largely engaged in the manufacture of food products, wood and wood-based products and non-metallic mineral products. According to M. Dattatreyyulu, some of the factors responsible for the poor industrialization include:<sup>88</sup>

- lack of trained manpower, inadequate public and private investment
- weak institutional finance
- low domestic demand

- poor law and order situation
- absence of the use of latest technology
- low yields of agriculture
- absence of post-harvest management practices
- poor rate of capital formation
- low per capita income
- capital deficiency
- poor credit facilities
- lack of efficient transport facilities both men and materials
- inadequate exploitation of riverine routes
- agricultural land use restrictions
- barriers in the free movement of people.

### **IMPACT OF ARMED INSURGENCY**

Insurgency impedes development, while lack of development breeds the discontents that feed insurgency. A close examination of the turbulence and frustrations evident in the North East would indicate a number of underlying economic factors. The North Eastern economy continues to be one of the most backward economies. In Assam, resource rich State of the region, urbanization is poor with only 11.1 percent living in urban areas compared to the 25.7 per cent for all India.<sup>89</sup> The proportion of working population is lower at 31.7 percent than the country's average of 34.1 percent. The per capita net State Domestic Product (SDP) in 1992-93 was Rs.5,056 while the per capita net national product was Rs.6,234 which is worst in other states of the region. While the percentage of people below poverty line in 1987-88 stood at 22.8 per cent, the national average was 27.9 percent. In Manipur, the percentage of population below poverty line is as high as 45.06 percent.

Most of the hill districts of Manipur, which are strongholds of insurgents, are reeling under acute poverty mainly because of under-utilization of their natural resources due to lack of infrastructure. In Chandel district, over 64 per cent of the people live below the poverty line while in Churachandpur, Ukhrul and Tamenglong districts, it is between 51 and 55 per cent.<sup>90</sup> Of late, poverty level in the North Eastern

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States most hit by insurgency is increasing while the national average fell by about seven percentage points during the 1987-88 and 1993-94 period.<sup>91</sup>

While the decline in poverty at the all India level can be traced back to a better growth rate in the economy between 1987-88 and 1993-94, the same cannot be said about the North Eastern region. Most of the States had erratic growth of their SDP and some had even negative growth. During the intervening period, the growth rate of combined SDP in the region was only 2.5 per cent.<sup>92</sup>

Most jobs in the region are in the unorganized sector, and this includes all rural activities. This is evident in the proportion of workers in the primary sector, as opposed to the tertiary sector, leaving between five and seven per cent in the organized sector.<sup>93</sup> The political instability further adds to the problem.

Even the basic requirements due to insurgency like law and order, justice, primary education, primary health, water supply and sanitation, roads and electricity could not be delivered by the States despite having received from the Centre Rs.42,000 crore during the last seven years. And corruption is highly rampant. Whatever the reasons the common man has not been benefited. People at large in the North East are very critical of the performance of the local governments which have failed to harness the abundant natural resources of the region and exploit the potential of border trade with Myanmar and Bangladesh. The new economic environment emerging in the country has not percolated down in the region. The geographical proximity of the North East region to the dynamic East and South East Asia, prompts the region to improve the infrastructure of the region.

Of late, some interesting developments have taken place in the region. Efforts are on to invest in communications, oil, hydro-electricity etc. Joint sector project like Tengakhat Gas Gracker Complex Plant and Numaligarh Oil Refinery in Assam at the cost of Rs.4,600 and Rs.3,000 crores respectively may provided opportunities to investors.<sup>94</sup> Foreign companies have proposed large power plant in Amguri (Assam) and

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Kemang (Arunachal Pradesh).<sup>95</sup> A Rs.3,000 crore NEEPCO hydro-electric plant at Lohit is awaiting approval. And various irrigation projects are also under implementation in Assam and Manipur.

Border trade has been normalized with Myanmar from Moreh in Manipur. Liberalization in Bangladesh and operationalization of SAPTA will also be another boosting factor. Also, six major institutions in the financial sector, namely IDBI, ICICI, UTI, LIC, IFCI and SBI have proposed to set up a North Eastern Development Finance Corporation that would provide finance in Guwahati.<sup>96</sup> This Corporation would provide finance for creation, and expansion and modernization of industrial enterprises and for infrastructural projects. Even the North Eastern Council is doing its best to accelerate the pace of development in the area.

Statistics available at the police department show that the police have seized more than Rs.3 lakh worth fake notes, and arrested 32 people owing the last three years. During the same period, 19 cases have been registered. A number of materials used in printing fake notes were recovered by police.<sup>97</sup> In June 1998, the police arrested a member of the counterfeit gang and recovered 209 fake notes of Rs.500 and Rs.100 denominations from his Imphal residence.<sup>98</sup> The Army also recovered a huge quantity of ammunitions from the apprehended man too.<sup>99</sup> Between July and September 1998, Rs.42,000 worth fake notes were seized in Manipur and the apprehended include members of underground outfits too.<sup>100</sup> According to the army sources, "Fake Currency is used for illegal purchase of arms and ammunition and drugs." Drug traffickers also use fake notes. According to the Director General of Police, Imphal, "the counterfeit notes are circulated by drug smugglers and black marketers along the Indo-Myanmar border"<sup>101</sup>

There are reports which also suggest that intelligence agencies of Pakistan, particularly ISI are pumping a huge amount of fake currency notes in India to ruin the economy. Bank sources in Imphal confirmed that the problem has assumed dangerous proportions. Alarmed by the wide circulation of fake notes, the RBI recently reportedly circulated a

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series of numbers of notes printed on fake notes among the banks in Manipur.<sup>102</sup> According to sources, these counterfeit notes also surface in large numbers during election seasons.

### **EXISTING AND EMERGING CBMS IN THE NORTH EAST**

There are a variety of confidence building measures being undertaken in the North East. A series of accords have already been signed. They are the Shillong Accord of 1975, the Mizo Accord signed on June 30, 1986 and the Assam Accord, 1985. In the Memorandum of Settlement signed between the Mizo National Front (MNF) leader Laldenga and Government of India on June 30, 1986, it was stated:

With a view to restoring peace and normalcy in Mizoram, the MNF party, on their part, undertakes within the agreed time-frame to take all necessary steps to end all underground activities, to bring out all underground personnel of the MNF with their arms, ammunition and equipment to ensure their return to civil life, to abjure violence and generally to help in the process of restoration of normalcy.

Soon after Mizoram returned back to normalcy. However, the Shillong Accord heralded the beginning of intense armed struggle in Nagaland.

Besides the accords, there have been continuous ongoing talks. The Government of India has also been preparing novel packages for the insurgents so as to inspire them to shun violence. The latest rehabilitation package was in May 1999 under which each of the surrendered militants would be imparted training in some vocational courses including electrical and computer. Each one of them would also be provided with a stipend of Rs.1,800 per month. Those who surrender along with a gun are to be given an additional amount. For instance, for surrendering an AK-47, would fetch an insurgent, an amount of Rs.25,000. Seven years back, the Assam government had given Rs. 2 lakh each to surrendered ULFA members in an attempt to wean them away from violence.

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Also, the Centre has drawn up a 52-point comprehensive national strategy to bridge the yawning gap between the perceptions of the policy makers at Delhi and the aspirations of 32 million populace tucked away in the region. Some of the proposals include:

- at least 25 per cent of all plan funds being released by the Centre to the States should go directly to the district councils or panchayats.
- each year, 1,000 youths from the North East be provided vocational training with scholarship in institutions outside North East for the next five years.
- an amount of Rs.50 crore per annum should be made available from non-lapsable pool created in Planning Commission for developing infrastructure for agricultural marketing and strengthening of NERAMAC.
- new ITI's to be opened in the North East.
- a Central Forest Protection Force, in line with para-military force be raised for protection of forest areas in the North East.
- eminent men from the North Eastern States be given prominent positions at national level committees, boards etc.
- conscious efforts be made to increase exposure of Mongoloid North East people on Doordarshan and other TV channels, by appointing them as announcers and news readers and also for advertisements.

There has also been the creation of institutions like North Eastern Council, technical institutions, universities etc.

It is high time that attempts are made for a deeper analysis of the problems of the region and hence attempts be made to solve them at all levels – historical, economic, social and political. In the words of noted conflict resolution theorist John Burton:

Conflict, its resolution and prevention..involves the whole person, the nation or the identity groups of the person, the political system and the physical environment.

This is what needs to be done for North East India.



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## WHITHER D G H C : POLITICAL FISTICUFFS AND AFTER

*Dhrubajyoti Bhaumik*  
and  
*Dilip Kumar Sarkar*

GNLf's call for 'Revive Gorkhaland day' on April 5, 2000 is the ricochet of its statehood demand raised in mid-1980s. the call was premeditated. GNLf Supremo Subhas Ghising as a tactician par excellence has played games with every one, his rivals and Marxists alike. The Gorkhaland Sanjukta Morcha spokesman D.S. Bomzan questioned GNLf's sincerity about the renewed demand of Gorkhaland: "If GNLf is sincere about its renewed demand, Ghising and other DGHC Councillors should resign and join the Gorkhaland agitation."<sup>1</sup> United Democratic Front (UDF) supporting Gorkhaland demand japed that GNLf leader would hardly be prepared to surrender the official trappings and join the separate statehood movement. Palden Lama of UDF observed: "There is only one demand in the hills and that is of a Gorkha State; the GNLf is welcome to join the campaign provided it gives up power."<sup>2</sup>

The demand of GNLf for the status of Tribal region under Sixth Schedule for the areas falling under DGHC has driven a kind of wedge between senior ministers of the State government. While Ashok Bhattacharyya holding charge of the Hill Affairs brushed aside the demand for extension of Tribal status for DGHC areas, Buddhadeb Bhattacharyya, the then Deputy Chief Minister found it worthwhile for bringing Darjeeling hills under the ambit of Sixth Schedule. Buddhadeb Bhattacharyya rightly pointed out that the Centre would have to determine whether Darjeeling hills are entitled to Statehood.<sup>3</sup> Ashok Bhattacharyya contended that Nepalese neither constituted a tribal community nor their language was a language of tribal origin. Besides, in comparison with powers enjoyed currently by DGHC under the Act are more than those under Sixth

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Schedule. He was in favour of further devolution of powers upon DGHC.<sup>4</sup>

‘The Revive Gorkhaland Day’ call kills many birds with one stone. It silences the critics and adversaries of GNLF. In a well attended rally at Kalimpong senior GNLF leaders including MLAs and Presidents of Party’s Branch Committees threatened that any attempt by a group to usurp the Gorkhaland issue from them is fraught with dire consequences.<sup>5</sup> Leaders felt, since GNLF Supremo Subhas Ghising had ‘created the demand’ in early 1980s only his party has the right to lead the movement for a separate State.<sup>6</sup> By its opposition to hold Panchayat elections, particularly the election of Panchayat Samiti in this context GNLF has very successfully reiterated its earlier stand that construction of such bodies would amount to infringement of powers and functions assigned to DGHC under the Act. In 1995 when the Panchayat polls were last held within the Council area the Government of West Bengal could not hold Panchayat Samiti polls due to stiff opposition of GNLF.

On April 14, 2000, Urban Development Minister Ashok Bhattacharyya observed that the State Election Commission had informed the government its ‘inability’ to hold Panchayat Samiti polls.<sup>7</sup> Reiterating its status of Zila Parishad he felt that DGHC has been empowered to supervise, monitor and direct local government bodies under its aegis. He exhorted GNLF not to oppose Panchayats; it would amount to loss of central grant to the tune of Rs. 30 to 40 crores annually<sup>8</sup> as now Panchayats are direct recipients of central assistance. Attempt to resolve the GNLF demand by way of constitutional guarantee is a masterly stroke by both GNLF leadership and state government; it offers a convenient tool for Centre baiting and both of them may derive political mileage. If by way of observing ‘Revive Gorkhaland Day’ and bloodstained memories of 1986 so many objectives may be achieved, GNLF may congratulate itself for its own stratagem.

In fact, DGHC plagued with plethora of problems and issues continue to remain as ‘live wire’ in state politics. Over the years neither the Centre nor the State did make serious application of mind in resolving



them and GNLF conveniently used them as pawn for gaining political mileage. The issue relating to the status of Panchayats under DGHC Act, 1988 in the wake of 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act of 1992 was never resolved. The quick retreat of State government in regard to two tier Panchayat elections clearly demonstrated dithering of decision-makers. In early 1995 the disagreement between GNLF and the State government was ingeniously manipulated for postponing the Panchayat Samiti elections indefinitely. Sarkar and Bhaumik (2000) rightly mentioned that DGHC Act 1988 implicitly vested powers and functions of Zila Parishad while providing “general powers of supervision over Panchayat Samitis, Gram Panchayats and Municipalities.”<sup>9</sup> Making penchant criticism of this provision GNLF Supremo Ghising called it “betrayal” and “violating” the Accord on the part of the Centre and the State. Ghising being a signatory of the Accord should seriously try for sorting out the ticklish questions, without unleashing vituperative against the State and the Centre on whose cooperation success of DGHC rests.

Following the announcement that Panchayat elections would be held on May 21, 2000, the joke began to go round that DGHC Councillors contemplated to context Gram Panchayat elections quitting their exalted posts. Euphemistically speaking, DGHC has failed to energize the rugged and inaccessible terrain of Darjeeling hills where drips of development trickle. Undeniably, however, there has been growing reliance upon the efficacy of Panchayat as agency of rural development. Message is clear and unequivocal that decentralized development through Panchayat seems the only answer to abysmal poverty of rural masses.

### **PROPOSED DELEGATION OF POWERS AND AUTHORITY**

A seven member Committee headed by Ashok Bhattacharyya recommended changes relating to powers and functions of DGHC. Firstly, nomenclature of Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC) may be changed to Darjeeling Gorkha Autonomous Hill Council (DGAHC); Secondly, in view of rising prices Centre should enhance the annual central assistance for DGHC from Rs. 22 crores pegged in 1998 to

***D. Bhaumik & DilipK. Sarkar***

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Rs. 50 crores; and Thirdly, earnest effort may be made to delimit Darjeeling a new Parliamentary Constituency. To give effect to these recommendations the Central government's approval is essential. There are some other recommendations, which may be implemented by State government itself. In the first place, all the hilly areas in Siliguri Mouza should be included within territorial jurisdiction of DGHC; second, state controlled Darjeeling District Improvement Fund should be handed over to DGHC; third, Hill Council Planning Committee should be constituted with Subhash Ghising as its Chairman; fourth, more administrative powers should be given to DGHC for performing increasing number of functions; fifth, DGHC should be empowered to supervise the activities of all Panchayats and Municipalities; sixth, Pension Directorate of Schools should be handed over to DGHC; seventh, State Information Directorate has to function for DGHC; eighth, local power stations should be handed over to the Hill Council; ninth, land in the hills is to be distributed in consultation with Hill Council Authority only; tenth, DGHC is to have Tourism Development Council and School Service Commission only for hill areas.<sup>10</sup>

To say that aforesaid recommendations are 'generous' is malapropism; these are not 'maladroit' too. Rather these are ingeniously contrived to fend off the rising tempo of political discontent in the hills. Significantly, Ghising has admitted that the demand for bringing DGHC areas within the purview of Sixth Schedule and granting the hills status of tribal region is of greater importance than the Gorkhaland statehood issue.<sup>11</sup> Given the recent political developments in Hills following GNLF's renewed call for statehood CPI (M) leadership felt the imperative necessity of reviewing its long standing demand for autonomy for Darjeeling Hills. The party leadership is peeved with State administration for its failure to introduce the use of Nepali as a language of communication and correspondence in government office even though the language has gained constitutional recognition as an Indian language. The party has remained unhappy with the DGHC's failure to supply mini-kits, loans and agricultural inputs.<sup>12</sup> All these indicate that CPI (M) wants to steal the thunder of GNLF movement. The cry for separate

Gorkhaland by AGSU (All Gorkha Students Union) is a camouflage for identical purpose.<sup>13</sup> Notable also is the Union Home Minister L.K. Advani's reported assurance<sup>14</sup> to a seven-member delegation of GNLFF leaders for separate statehood. It is intended to allure the hill leadership and cut the ground from CPI (M) and GNLFF's feet. In the midst of brouhaha common people's interest takes a back seat. Darjeeling hills have been empowered but people there are groaning under grinding poverty, illiteracy and disease even after twelve years of DGHC's rule.

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## TOY TRAIN STILL & CYNOSURE OF DARJEELING

*R.P. Lama*

“Northwards soared  
The stainless ramps of huge Himala’s wall  
Ranged in white ranks against the blue-untrod  
Infinite, Wonderful-whose uplands vast  
and lifted Universe of crest and crag,  
Shoulder and Shelf, green slope and icy horn  
Riven ravine, and splintered precipice  
Led climbing thought higher and higher, until  
It seemed to stand in heaven and speak with God”

– **Sir Edwin Arnold**

The present history of Darjeeling starts with the Deed of Grant by the Rajah of Sikkim executed on February 1, 1835 in favour of East India Company through the constant efforts of S.W. Grant and G.W.A.Lloyd. The Deed of Grant reads as follows:

The Governor General having expressed his desire for the possession of the hill of Darjeeling on account of its cool climate, for the purpose of enabling the servants of His Government suffering from sickness, to avail themselves of its advantages, I Sikkimputtee Rajah, out of friendship for the said Governor General, hereby present Darjeeling to the East India Company, that is all the land south of the Great Rangit rivers, east of Balasun, Kahail and little Rangit rivers and west of Rungno and Mahanadi rivers.

The year 1839 was the most important in the history of Darjeeling – the year the road which connected the hill station with the plains - its lifeline-was built. Right from the start it had been pointed out by the planners: NO ROAD – NO DARJEELING and 1839 was the most critical and historic year when the decision was finally taken to go ahead

### ***TOY TRAIN OF DARJEELING***

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with the road plans. The pioneers who came to open up Darjeeling after it has been ceded in 1835 were confronted with arduous journey from Calcutta before they reached the hills. A guide to Darjeeling published in 1838 mentioned 98 hours as the time the journey took from Calcutta by dawk as follows:

- 54 hours Calcutta to Maldah
- 16 hours Malda to Dinajpur
- 20 hours Dinajpur to Titaliya
- 8 hours Titaliya to the foot of the hills

The whole journey to Darjeeling lasted five or six days and the discomfort and expenses were graphically described by Sir Joseph Hooker who in 1848 at a cost of Rs. 240/- had the occasion to perform the journey from Karagola Ghat on the Ganges to the foothills.

The first measure taken to improve communication was the deputation of Lieutenant Napier (subsequently Lord Napier of Nagdala) to construct a road from Siliguri to Darjeeling. This was carried out from 1839 to 1842 and the road, now known as the Old Military Road can still be seen winding its way by sharp accents from Pankhabari to Kurseong and thence on to Dew Hill and Ghum. The section of this road from Pankhabari to Kurseong is a part of what is now known as the Matigara – Kurseong Road.

The obvious disadvantages of such a means of communication led to the proposal for the laying of steam tramway from Siliguri to Darjeeling. Franklin Prestage (at that time Agent of the Eastern Bengal Railway Company) approached the Government of Bengal in 1878 with a detailed scheme. Sir Ashley Eden, the then Lieutenant Governor appointed a committee to examine the project and this committee reported that the construction of a steam tramway was feasible and would be of great advantage both to the Government and the public. Prestage's scheme was accepted in 1879 and the construction of the tramway was commenced. The name of the Company was then changed to Darjeeling Himalayan Railway Company and M/S. Gillanders Arbuthnet and Co., one of the leading and oldest firms in Calcutta were appointed Agents of the Company from its inception.

***R.P. Lama***

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K.B. Char of Tindharia said that his father Rabilal Char worked for nearly 50 years under the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway. It is said that Subedar Jangbir Chhetri and his brother Dharamlal were the labour suppliers during the construction works of the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway. Progress of construction works of rail line was rapid inspite of heavy odds faced by Franklin Prestage and his men. The following sections of the Railway were opened within a short period:

Siliguri to Kurseong:	23. 8. 1880	51.09 Kms
Kurseong to Sonada	1. 2. 1881	15.29 Kms
Sonada to Ghoom	4. 4. 1881	9.45 Kms
Ghoom to Darjeeling	4. 7. 1881	5.84 Kms
Darjeeling to Darjeeling Bazar	16. 6. 1885	0.40 Kmps

Opened in 1881, the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway is a 19<sup>th</sup> century engineering marvel still pulled by ancient steam engines some of which are over hundred years old. To the hill people of Darjeeling the toy train is of course more than just an engineering feat and an outstanding example of railroad engineering. In 1999, UNESCO put it on its list of world heritage site, a recognition that apart from making available some funds for restoration, would oblige the Indian government to conserve the railway and report every five years to UNESCO of the state of its preservation.

The Darjeeling Himalayan railway created history on December 1, 1999. UNESCO's International Council of Monuments and World Heritage at its meeting in Markesh enlisted the Darjeeling Toy Train as the world's second heritage train. The Toy Train's inclusion in the UNESCO list is somewhat extraordinary for railways normally do not feature on heritage list. Of the 500 odd sites inscribed by the UNESCO before 1999, only one i.e., Austria's simmering line is a railroad which was included in 1998. Completed in 1854, the 41 kms. simmering line (now electrified) is the world's first mountain railroad. Its inclusion in the world heritage site came at the initiative of the Austrian government which even financed seem work by the Institute of Railways Studies at York in England to develop criteria for inscription of railways as World Heritage Site.

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Partha S. Banerjee recalls some historical events of this train in his article appeared in the *Statesman* dated March 11, 2000 “The most enjoyable day I have spent on earth... (a) mixed ecstasy of the deadly fright and unimaginable joy. That’s how Mark Twain described his ride on the Darjeeling Himalayan ‘Toy Train’ over hundred years ago in 1895.” Snaking up from Siliguri in the plains of eastern India to the famed hill resort of Darjeeling, 6,800 ft (2075 mts.) above sea level, the narrow 2 ft gauge mountain railway still fascinate tourists and rail enthusiasts a century later. Gushed Elizabeth Mclean from Scotland, after a ride last year said that it’s one of the world’s most dramatic rail journey. My first trip on this train was in 1939 something I have always remembered.

The Additional Divisional Railway Manager, Katihar Division, N.F. Railway Sri S.K. Raina said that the achievements of the “Jewel in the N.F. Railways Crown” will soon be put on the internet to facilitate on-line booking for chartering of the toy train. Plans are afoot to renovate the narrow gauge tracks in the entire stretch of 88.98 kms. between the New Jalpaiguri station and Darjeeling. The Union Ministry of Railways has already earmarked Rs. Six crores for the renovation of the narrow gauge long and winding tracks in the first phase. Efforts are also on to renovate and restructure important Railway stations in the entire stretch—Gheem, Senada, Kurseong, Tindharia and Suka to impart a period look. Special attention has been given to the restoration of 25 arch corbelled bridges out of the total 241 bridges in the entire toy train route. The Toy train of Darjeeling is poised for a historic transition from steam to diesel in the coming months.

The toy train of Darjeeling has left a deep impact on the social and cultural life of the local people and has become an integral part of the ethos of Darjeeling. The tiny toy train has also found a place in the nursery rhymes and the folk literature of the hill people of Darjeeling. Children would sing a nursery rhyme:

The small train of Darjeeling is now ready to depart  
Listen, Oh brother, the whistle of the guard has blown  
and lo, the green flag he has shown  
It chugs on now with its bogies smart,  
Chug, Chug... Chug...

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The resolution taken in the workshop held in December 1997 organised by National Museum of Mankind and Planners Alliance for the Himalayan and Allied Regions at Darjeeling has also laid emphasis for the beautification of the Toy Train with local cultural background. The resolution reads as follows: The Railway and its route to be made into a dynamic tourist circuit with cultural notices along the route with local cuisine, music, performance, guide services within the car, supported by a Museum, which ties the history of the railways with the history of the people and events of different towns, pioneers and prospectors along the route.

Many opine that induction of a diesel locomotive has been a hasty decision for Darjeeling Himalayan Railway. Considering its geographical conditions, uncertain behaviour of nature, old and torn rail lines and untrained drivers and managing staff were inducted after hurried trials. Diesellisation has robbed it of its nostalgia and has defeated the very purpose for which the train was put on the world heritage list. The much hyped diesel locomotive derailed at several places at Upper Paglajhera 10 days after it was flagged off by the Railway Minister. Cases of train jumping tracks, frequent derailments have caused concerns to the Railway authorities and to the Railway commuters coming from distant places.

Inspite of these bare facts, the Toy Train of Darjeeling still proves to be a cynosure, a focal point of charm and charisma, thrill, excitement and amusement to the innumerable visitors coming to this Queen of hill stations.

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## FOOD CULTURE IN THE EASTERN HIMALAYAS

*Jyoti Prakash Tamang*

Ever since ethnic people inhabited in the Himalayan regions ranging from the foothills to alpine, gathering and utilization of available plants, animals and their products for consumption started and gradually emerged as ethnic food culture of the present days. Food culture has been evolved as a result of traditional wisdom and empirical experiences of generations over a period of time, based on agro-climatic conditions, ethnic preference, socio-economic status, religious and cultural practices. The *Bhat-dal-tarkari-achar* (rice-legume soup-curry-pickle) constitutes the daily meal in every household, followed by consumption of milk products and meat or fish, based on availability and accessibility to afford as well as the religious taboo.

A variety of fermented foods and alcoholic beverages as well as foods produced by micro organisms are prepared and consumed in these regions (See Table 1). It has been estimated that 87.6 gm per capita of fermented foods, representing 10 % of the total meal, are consumed daily in the Sikkim Himalayas (Yonzan and Tamang, 1998). These culturally acceptable inexpensive traditional foods provide a basic diet as staple, side-dish, condiment, pickle, confectionery, alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages, which enhance nutritional quality, palatability, wholesomeness of the product with acceptable flavour, aroma and texture. Women using their traditional knowledge of food fermentation technology usually prepare fermented foods, alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages.

Food culture of the Eastern Himalayas is reflected in the pattern of food production. Agriculture forms a major component of a mixed farming system. Depending on the altitudinal variation, the main agricultural crops are rice, maize, finger millet, wheat, buckwheat, barley, vegetable, potato, soyabeans, and varieties of seasonal vegetable. Preparation of wild edible

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plants and their parts such as seeds, fruits, roots, leaves, flowers in local diet is important component of food culture. Seasonal fruits such as orange, apple, banana, etc. are grown and eaten. Livestock mostly plays a subsidiary role in the mixed farming system. Cattle rearing are common for milk, milk products and meat. Yaks (*Bos grunniens*) are reared mostly on extensive alpine and sub-alpine scrub lands between 2100m to 4500m altitude for milk products and meat. Table 2 shows the common non-fermented traditional foods.

### **IMPORTANCE OF TRADITIONAL FERMENTED FOODS**

Preparation of foods from locally available plant and animal materials by using micro-organisms is wisdom of traditional practice, based on trial and error. During the process raw substrates of either plant or animal origin are converted biochemically and organoleptically by microorganism(s) into upgraded edible products called fermented foods. Fermented foods are generally nutritious. This is the most remarkable development in the cultural history of human being. I generally regard our great forefathers as the pioneer in the field of 'food biotechnology', the technology that involves the production of our fermented foods and beverages.

During fermentation of *Gundruk* and *Sinki*, common traditional non-salted fermented vegetable products, species of *Lactobacillus* and *Pediococcus* produce lactic acid and acetic acid, which reduce the pH of the substrates making the products more acidic in nature and inhibit the growth of pathogenic microorganisms, thus foods are safe for consumption (Tamang and Sarkar, 1993). Due to low pH (3.3-3.8) and high acid content (1.0-1.3%), *Gundruk* and *Sinki*, after sun-drying, can be preserved without refrigeration and addition of any synthetic preservative for more than two years. This can be cited as an example of biopreservation and physical preservation of perishable vegetable, which are found in plenty in the winter season in the Eastern Himalayan regions.

Bioenrichment of food substrates by traditional fermentation with protein, essential amino acids and vitamins enhances nutritive value of

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raw material. This has a high significance for developing countries where the majority of the people cannot afford to have commercially available expensive fortified nutritive foods. Total amino acids, free amino acids and mineral contents are increased in fermented soyabean foods of these regions (Tamang, 1996; Tamang and Nikkuni, 1998).

### **TRANSITION OF FOOD CULTURE**

Food culture of the ethnic groups of people in the Eastern Himalayas shows a culmination of both 'rice-soyabean-alcoholic beverage diet', the characteristic food culture of the oriental countries and 'wheat-milk-non-alcoholic beverage diet' of the Western and Hindu Kush Himalayas. This predicts a transition of an emergence of mixed food culture of both oriental east and western Hindu Kush Himalayas. As seen in case of fermented soybean foods, which are prepared and consumed in the Eastern Himalayas and its adjoining foot hills such as *kinema* in eastern Nepal, the Darjeeling hills, Sikkim and Bhutan, *aakhuni* in Nagaland, *hawaijar* in Manipur and *turangbai* in Meghalaya, *bekanthu* in Mizoram and *pe-poke* in Myanmar. Consumption of fermented soyabean food is uncommon in the Western and Hindu Kush Himalayas, and even in other parts of India. These fermented soybeans foods are similar to *natto* of Japan, *thua-nao* of northern Thailand, *dou-chi* of China and *chungkok-jang* of Korea.

Most of the traditional fermented foods are prepared by processes of solid substrate fermentation in which the substrate is allowed to ferment either naturally or by adding starter cultures. In East and South East Asia, filamentous moulds are predominant micro-organisms in the fermentation processes, whereas in Africa, Europe and America, fermented products are prepared exclusively by using bacteria or bacteria-yeasts mixed cultures; moulds seem to be little or never used. However, in the Eastern Himalayas, all three major groups of microorganism (moulds-yeasts-bacteria) are associated with traditional fermented foods and beverages (Tamang, 1998), showing the transition of food culture.

### **ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES**

Traditional alcoholic beverages have strong ritual importance in the Eastern Himalayas. In these regions, social activities require provision of consumption of appreciable quantities of alcoholic beverages by the non-Brahmin ethnic community. *Jaanr* or *Chhyang* and *raksi* are essential to solemnize marriage ceremony of non-Brahmin Nepalis, the Bhutia and the Lepcha in the eastern Nepal, the Darjeeling hills, Sikkim and Bhutan, and even in almost all northeastern hills of India. Alcoholic drink is offered to perform the *pitri puja/kul puja*, the religious practice to pray family God. Among the Lepcha, *mong chee* (fermented beverage) is essential to perform various cultural functions such as *lirum*, *sejum* and *namsung*. *Kodo ko jaanr*, filled in *toongbaa* and rice-made *raksi* are among the important materials to perform the ritual practice of the Limboo called *tonsin mundhum*. During death ceremony traditional alcoholic beverages are served and used, mostly seen among the Sherpa and the Bhutia. Spirit possession by the Limboo priests called *phedangma* and *bijuwa* need freshly distilled *raksi*.

### **ETHNIC FOOD TOURISM**

The concept of ‘ethnic food tourism’ may have a relevance in present days due to increase in tourist industry in the Himalayas. Movement and interaction of people, sense of respect for traditional value and culture may serve to intricately link the enjoyment of dining to locale, making this the standard of food culture of the region. France attracts the greatest number of tourists worldwide as estimated in 1998 reaching 70 million which even exceeds existing population of 58 million. The secret of this appeal is nothing more than the delicious food and wine of France, served in inexpensive traditional restaurants that offer the delicious agricultural produce of the region which allow one to experience enjoyment and friendship (Kimura, 2000). Finding enjoyment in eating the produce of the region while in that region – herein lies the essence of a food culture that gives confidence in life, pride to the people of the region and ultimately, enjoyment and friendship. Further, it imparts meaning to the act of travel and bestows happiness upon the traveller.

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The promoters have to focus on the specific food culture of a region in a presentable form where tourists can find local cuisine in menu, signifying the food culture of a region.

Ethnic food culture harnesses the cultural history of a particular community, their indigenous knowledge of food production, vast nutritious qualities, microbial diversity associated with fermented foods as genetic resources, source of income-generation related to tourism and enjoyment of dining.

**Table 1**

**Ethnic Fermented Foods of the Eastern Himalayas  
and its Adjoining Foot-hills**

<b>Food</b>	<b>Substrate</b>	<b>Nature and use</b>	<b>Region</b>
<i>Kinema</i>	Soybean	Sticky, flavoured cooked soybeans; side-dish curry	Eastern Nepal, Darjeeling hills, Sikkim, Bhutan, North-East India (common to non- Brahmin Nepalis)
<i>Turangbai</i>	Soybean	Sticky, flavoured cooked soybeans; side-dish gravy curry	Meghalaya (common to Khasi)
<i>Hawaijar</i>	Soybean	Sticky, flavoured cooked soybeans; side- dish as fish-substitute	Manipur
<i>Aakhuni</i>	Soybean	Sticky, flavoured cookedsoybeans; side-dish	Nagaland
<i>Bekanthu</i>	Soybean	Sticky, flavoured cooked soybeans; side-dish	Mizoram
<i>Pe-poke</i>	Soybean	Sticky, flavoured cooked soybeans; side-dish	Myanmar

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<i>Masaurya</i>	Black gram	Ball-like hollow; condiment	Nepal, Darjeeling hills, Sikkim (common to Newar caste of the Nepalis)
<i>Gundruk</i>	Leafy vegetable	Dried, sour-acidic taste; soup, pickle	Nepal, Darjeeling hills, Sikkim, Bhutan, North-East India (common to Nepalis)
<i>Sinki</i>	Radish tap-root	Dried, sour-acidic taste; soup, pickle	Nepal, Darjeeling hills, Sikkim, Bhutan, North-East India (common to Nepalis)
<i>Mesu</i>	Bamboo shoot	Sour; pickle	Bamboo growing regions of the Sikkim Himalayas
<i>Lung-siej</i>	Bamboo shoot	Sour-acidic; side-dish curry	Meghalaya
<i>Soibum</i>	Bamboo shoot	Sour-acidic; side-dish curry and pickle	Manipur
<i>Khalpi</i>	Cucumber	Sour; pickle	Nepal, Darjeeling
		hills, Sikkim, (common to Nepalis)	
<i>Selroti</i>	Rice/ wheat-milk	Pretzel-like, deep fried; confectionery bread	Nepal, Darjeeling hills, Sikkim, Bhutan, North-East India (common to Nepalis)
<i>Pheuja</i> or <i>Suja</i>	Tea-yak Butter	Fermented Butter tea	Darjeeling hills, Sikkim, Bhutan, Arunachal Pradesh (common to Bhutia and Dukpa)
<i>Dahi</i>	Cow milk	Thick-gel, savory	All
<i>Gheu</i>	Cow milk	Butter	All
<i>Maa</i>	Nhho* milk	Butter	Sikkim, Bhutan (common to Bhutia)

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<i>Mohi</i>	Cow milk	Butter-milk	All
<i>Chhurpi</i>	Cow milk	Soft-mass; curry, pickle	Nepal, Darjeeling hills, Sikkim, Bhutan
<i>Chhu</i>	Cow or Nhho milk	Soft, semi-solid mass, strong flavoured; curry	Sikkim, Bhutan (common to Bhotiya)
<i>Somar</i>	Cow milk	Dark-brown, soft paste with strong flavour; condiment	Easter Nepal, Rimbik and Sanduk areas of Darjeeling hills, West Sikkim (common to Sherpa)
<i>Dachi</i>	Cow or Nhho milk	Soft, cheese-like, semi-solid; strong flavoured; side-dish	Bhutan (ema dachi is popular hot- cheese curry dish)
<i>Dudh chhurpi</i>	Cow milk	Hard-mass, masticatory	Nepal, Darjeeling hills, Sikkim, Bhutan
<i>Hard chhurpi</i>	Yak milk	Hard-mass, masticatory	Nepal, Darjeeling hills, Sikkim, Bhutan, Arunachal Pradesh
<i>Philu</i>	Cow or Nhho milk	Soft, solid mass, cream; fried curry with butter	Sikkim (common to Bhutia)
<i>Sukako masu</i>	Mutton/pork	Smoked meat; curry	All
<i>Sha- kampo</i>	Beef/Yak	Smoked meat; curry	Sikkim (common to Bhutia)
<i>Marcha or Phab</i>	Rice, wild herbs, spices	Dry ball-like, mixed starter culture to ferment beverages	Eastern Nepal, the Drajeeling hills, Sikkim and Bhutan (marcha makers are restricted to Limboo, Rai and Lepcha)

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<i>Kodo ko jaanr</i> or <i>Chhyang</i>	Finger-millet	Mildly alcoholic, sweet acidic beverage	All
<i>Bhaati jaanr</i>	Rice	Mildly alcoholic, sweet acidic beverage	All
<i>Makai ko jaanr</i>	Maize	Mildly alcoholic, sweet acidic beverage	All
<i>Raksi</i> or <i>Aarak</i>	Cereal/tuber	Distilled, clear alcoholic drink	All
<i>Kiad-lieh</i>	Rice	Distilled, clear alcoholic drink	Meghalaya
<i>Sukako machha</i>	River fish	Smoked, sun-dried fish; curry	Nepal, Darjeeling hills, Sikkim, Bhutan
<i>Tungtap</i>	Fish	Dried, mixed with salt; pickle	Meghalaya (common to Khasi)
<i>Hentek</i>	Fish	Paste prepared by fermenting a mixture of sun-dried fish powder and petioles of aroid plants	Manipur
<i>Ngari</i>	Fish	Fermented fish product; curry	Manipur
<i>Karoti</i>	Fish	Sun-dried fish product; side-dish	Assam
<i>Mua</i>	Fish	Sun-dried fish product; side-dish	Assam

\*Khho = female yak



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**Table 2**

**Common Non-fermented Ethnic Foods of Eastern Nepal,  
the Darjeeling Hills and Sikkim**

<b>Product</b>	<b>Ingredient</b>	<b>Nature and Use</b>	<b>Major Consumers</b>
<i>Dheroh</i>	Maize/millet	Cooked maize/millet; staple food	Nepalis
<i>Phulaurah</i>	Buckwheat	Deep-fried; snack	Nepalis
<i>Khalo dal</i>	Black gram	Thick dal; staple	All
<i>Kwathi</i>	Legumes; curry	Cooked sprouted	Nepalis (Newar)
<i>Kodo ko roti</i>	Finger millet	Baked millet flour; staple food	All
<i>Phapar ko roti</i>	Buckwheat	Baked buckwheat flour; staple food	All
<i>Chambray</i>	Rice	Soaked, fried and cooked rice; staple	Nepalis
<i>Rayo sag</i>	Brassica spp.	Fried leafy vegetable; side-dish	All
<i>Ban tarul</i>	Dioscorea hamiltonii roots	Boiled/roasted	All
<i>Shimrayo</i>	Cardamine hirsuta	Fried young leaves; curry	All
<i>Ghario Sishnu</i>	Nettle ( <i>Urtica dioica</i> )	Boiled and cooked; soup	All
<i>Patle Sishnu</i>	Nettle ( <i>Laportee terminalis</i> )	Boiled and cooked; soup	All
<i>Bhangrey Sishnu</i>	Nettle ( <i>Girardinia diversifolia</i> )	Boiled and cooked; soup	All
<i>Sauney</i>	Fern	Fried vegetable,	All

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<i>Ningro</i>	(Diplazium polypodiodes)	mix with meat or chhurpi	
<i>Kali</i>	Fern	Fried vegetable, mix	All
<i>Ningro</i>	(Diplazium spp.)	with meat or chhurpi	
<i>Tama</i>	Young bamboo shoot	Boiled; curry	All
<i>Kalungey</i>	Agaricua	Curry	Bhutia, Lepcha,
<i>Cheu</i>	sivaticus		non-Bhramin Nepalis
<i>Kanney</i>	Pleurotus	Curry	Bhutia, Lepcha,
<i>Cheu</i>	sajor-caju		non-Bhramin Nepalis
<i>Chhwelaa</i>	Buff meat	Boiled, cooked meat curry	Nepalis (Newar)
<i>Lhaka mari</i>	Wheat flour	Deep fried, sweet confectionary	Nepalis (Newar)
<i>Siltimbur</i>	Listea cubeba	Pickle	All
<i>Timbur</i>	Zanthoxylum nitidum	Pickle	All
<i>Chindey</i>	Pentapanax leschnaultii	Pickle	All
<i>Lapsi</i>	Choerospondis axillaris	Pickle	All
<i>Dalle khorsani</i>	Green/red chili	Pickle	All
<i>Thotne</i>	Wild plant Aconogonum molle	Pickle	All
<i>Koirala</i>	Wild plant Bauhinia vareigata	Pickle	All
<i>Chinping</i>	Heracleum nepalense	Pickle	All

**FOOD CULTURE IN THE EASTERN HIMALAYAS**

<i>Kukurdaina</i>	Wild plant Smilax sp.	Pickle	All
<i>Nakima</i>	Wild plant ( <i>Tupistra nutans</i> )	Vegetable	Bhutia
<i>Kabra</i>	Wild plant Ficus <i>infectoria</i>	Pickle	All
<i>Silam</i>		Pickle	All
<i>Vatamas ko achar</i>	Soybean	Roasted, grinded with red-chilies; Pickle	Nepalis
<i>Philinge</i>		Pickle	Nepalis
<i>Momo</i>	Wheat flour/ meat/vegetable	Steamed dumpling; staple food	Traditionally Bhutia (now common to all)
<i>Thukpa</i>	Wheat noodle	Boiled, mixed with minced meat; staple	Traditionally Bhutia (now common to all)
<i>Shya phaley</i>	Wheat flour, meat	Stuffed, fried, mixed with meat	Bhutia
<i>Chempo</i>	Pork/beef	Liver cooked in sauce	Bhutia
<i>Phituk</i>	Rice/ barley flour	Porridge with meat/ chhurpi; staple	Bhutia
<i>Phing</i>	Vermicelli	Cooked with mushrooms, meat; soup	Bhutia
<i>Khuri</i>	Millet/ buckwheat flour	Roll with meat and vegetable; snack	Bhutia
<i>Phaktoo</i>	Macroni	Macroni, cooked with meat; soup	Bhutia
<i>Nya phachung</i>	Fish	Fish baked in bamboo; side dish	Bhutia
<i>Zhero</i>	Wheat	Deep fried; snack	Bhutia

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<i>Khapjay</i>	Wheat	Deep fried; snack	Bhutia
<i>Quasi</i>	Wheat flour	Deep fried, cookies; snack	Bhutia
<i>Kasalok</i>	Sweet potato/yam	Cooked roots; staple	Lepcha
<i>Sorongbee tulak</i>	Rice and nettle	Cooked as porridge; staple	Lepcha
<i>Cho-nyok</i>	Rice, butter, vegetable	Cooked as porridge; staple	Lepcha
<i>Yangben</i>	Lichen (Parmelia nepalensis)	Boiled with wood-ash; side-dish	Nepalis (Limboo and Rai) of eastern-Nepal

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# THE UNITED NATIONS COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS (56th SESSION) : A REPORT

*Sharad K. Soni*

The UN Commission on Human Rights held its 56<sup>th</sup> session from March 20, 2000 to April 28, 2000 at the Palais des Nations in Geneva, Switzerland. The six-week long session was convened to review and discuss the state of human rights and fundamental freedoms all over the world. The Commission which was created in 1946 by the Economic and Social Council, is the United Nations' principal human rights organ. It not only carries out studies, prepares recommendations and elaborates draft international instruments on human rights, but also looks into allegations of violations of human rights. Besides, it provides a positive atmosphere for the coordination of human rights activities in the United Nations system.

Opening the 56<sup>th</sup> session of the UNCHR, the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mary Robinson stressed that dealing with serious and widespread human-rights violations was not only essential to future peace in the societies concerned, but also could have an important deterrent effect elsewhere. She said that the appropriate response to all allegations of gross violations - wherever in the world they were reported - was that they be rigorously and independently investigated. "Where they were proven to be well-founded, it was essential that those responsible be pursued and brought to justice," she said. "There should be no selectivity, no sanctuary, and no impunity for those guilty of gross human-rights violations." Pointing to eradicating extreme poverty as the greatest human-rights challenge the world faced, Ms. Robinson said that the Commission had the responsibility for developing a framework within which that could be achieved.

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Shambhu Ram Simkhada of Nepal was elected Chairman this year who replaced Anne Anderson of Ireland. Kryszt Jakubowski of Poland, Ibrahim Mirghani Ibrahim of Sudan, and Victor Rodriguez Cedreno of Venezuela were chosen as Vice-Chairpersons and Marie Gervais-Vidricaire of Canada was elected to accomplish the job of Rapporteur. In her address the outgoing Chairperson Anne Anderson of Ireland stated that the question that continued to challenge all was to assure the relevance and credibility of the Commission. The minimum credibility of the Commission required that problems be acknowledged where they existed, that the victims of human-rights violations know that the forum was not blind and deaf to their sufferings, and that the Commission do whatever was possible to reinforce the mechanisms available at national and regional levels. At the same time she emphasized that the credibility and effectiveness of the Commission required the most exacting professionalism and its responses needed to be adapted to the requirements of specific situations. In his opening remarks the incoming Chairman Shambhu Ram Simkhada of Nepal while stressing the importance of tackling widespread poverty, social exclusion, and the lack of basic health and education around the world, stated that cooperation in the protection and promotion of human rights was essential for ending the neglect or violations of civil and political rights and the continuing scourge of discrimination based on race, sex, and religion. He called upon representatives of States, NGOs, and international organisations to play an even more active role in the protection and promotion of human rights. “Transparency, tolerance, respect, cooperation and consensus were necessary to further the promotion of human rights,” he added.

This session was also addressed by the United Nations Secretary General, Kofi Annan on April 4, 2000. He said that he had always considered the Commission to be among the most important organs of the United Nations – but never more so than today. He reiterated his belief that the international community was living in the age of human rights – an age where the awareness of the rights of every individual had done more to bring down barriers and boundaries than any force of

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arms, or of commerce or trade. "It was by acknowledging the common human rights that one acknowledged the common humanity," he said. "The universal demand for a world of law and of dignity and rights, of equality and non-discrimination, of peace and of justice could no longer be ignored. The question today was how best to bring it about." He expressed hope that the great human rights instruments which formed the basis of the Commission's work would provide a guide for the efforts of all, and a standard by which one could measure the record of any and every State in meeting its commitments to its citizens, and to the world. "No State, whether developed or developing, could claim that its work was done; every State could help the common efforts to implement human rights provisions more effectively and more comprehensively," he added.

Various issues deliberated at the 56<sup>th</sup> session of the UNCHR included the Right of Peoples to Self-determination and its Application to Peoples under Colonial or Alien domination or Foreign occupation; Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and all forms of Discrimination; the Right to Development; Question of the violation of human rights and fundamental freedom in any part of the world; Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; Civil and Political Rights including the question of Torture and Detention, Disappearance and Summary Executions, Freedom of Expression, Religious Intolerance; Violence against Women; Rights of the Child; Human Rights of Migrant Workers; Rights of Persons belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities; Mass Exoduses and Displaced Persons; Contemporary Forms of Slavery; Rights of the Indigenous People; Report of the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities; Status of the International Covenants on Human Rights; the question of Human Rights Education; the question of Human Rights and the Environment etc. Besides, this session also provided an opportunity for the members of the Commission to discuss the annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and consider the follow-up to the 1993 World Conference on Human Rights held in Vienna.

A number of countries outlined their efforts to respect fundamental freedoms, cited problems encountered and reviewed issues of concern

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internationally. Joseph Deiss, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Switzerland, outlined Swiss foreign policy with regards to human rights, saying the international community often sent out signals that were “too weak” in response to violations in various parts of the world. “The human rights situation in China, for instance, had not progressed in a positive way. Switzerland remained concerned about the severely repressive measures taken against minorities and religious groups, including the Tibetans.” Wang Min of China urged the Commission to discard the “Cold War” mentality of confrontation and instead pursue dialogue and cooperation. He said that the Commission should take concrete action to redress the imbalance between civil and political rights on the one hand and economic, social and cultural rights on the other hand, including the right to development which was of greater urgency to developing countries. “The Commission had made some efforts to redress the imbalance between the two categories of rights in recent years and China hoped this session would further this positive momentum”, he added. The permanent representative of India Savitri Kunadi said that there was a need to rationalise the work methods of the Commission and to introduce cooperative work arrangements, better time management, and ensure fuller participation by non-governmental organisations. “Avoiding confrontational approaches and increasing consultation and dialogue with a view to building consensus were also key ingredients for making the commission sessions more productive and giving a further boost to the promotion and protection of human rights,” she stressed.

### **Report of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and follow-up to the World Conference on Human Rights**

Under this agenda item, the Commission considered a report of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on effective functioning of human rights mechanisms (E/CN.4/2000/5). The report recommended, among other things, that information and country studies from field offices of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) should be made available to Special Rapporteurs and experts on a regular basis; that treaty bodies should call for the cooperation of special procedures



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mandates, including a direct exchange of information during their respective sessions, and that the OHCHR should fund this cooperation; and that joint meetings between holders of special procedures mandates and the chairpersons of human rights treaty bodies should be made a regular activity. Presenting this annual report Mary Robinson, the High Commissioner for Human Rights, remarked that genocide was the most heinous of all human rights violations, and asked why it had not been possible for the international community to intervene effectively to prevent it. She stressed that racism, discrimination and xenophobia were to be found at the root of most of the world's conflict situations. "The subject was especially relevant in light of the resurgence of old ethnic, racial and nationalist antagonisms." The link between enhancement of the right to development and prevention of human rights violations was another theme of the report. "Human rights could not flourish in the midst of rampant global poverty," she said. "A better course for achieving economic, social and cultural rights and the right to development had to be charted."

During discussions China commended the High Commissioner on efforts made in advisory services, technical cooperation and annual workshops in the Asia/Pacific region, and for discussions on regional arrangements for cooperation in human rights. Ren Yisheng of China felt that preventive measures by the international community related to human rights should be carried out under the pre-requisite of respect for sovereignty of the States concerned. He stressed that attention should be focused on providing services and on development cooperation and that such activities should never constitute a broadening of the mandate of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and related mechanisms, nor should they interfere in the internal affairs of countries. Yuri Boitchenko of the Russian Federation too commended the recommendations made in the High Commissioner's report particularly on rationalisation of work, but was concerned about the proposed rapid-reaction force. He said that this recommendation exceeded the mandate of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and clearly ignored the regulations of the UN Charter. "The Commission should provide

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clarification on this point and should understand that human rights issues were meant to create a rapprochement between countries, not justify violations of the UN Charter,” he added. Savitri Kunadi of India stated that careful thought had to be given to the proposals in the High Commissioner’s report concerning humanitarian observers and establishment of a rapid reaction force. “India recommended that the international community discourage secession on ethnic or religious grounds, as such issues could be solved within a democratic framework,” she said. India was not only concerned about the lack of mention of terrorism, particularly State sponsored terrorism, in the report, but it also felt that it would be tragic to impose human rights conditionalities on development cooperation. “Concepts such as early warning systems needed to be approached with prudence,” she added.

### **The Right of Peoples to Self-determination**

Like previous sessions the right of peoples to self-determination and its application to peoples under colonial or alien domination or foreign occupation was one of the main agenda items discussed at the 56th Session of the Commission on Human Rights. Under this agenda item the Commission had before it a report (E/CN/4/2000/14) on the use of mercenaries as a means of violating human rights and impeding the exercise of the rights of people to self-determination introduced by Enrique Bernales Ballesteros, Special Rapporteur. In his report which, among other things, detailed the Special Rapporteur’s visit to Cuba where various attacks had been carried out on hotels and tourist facilities in 1997, Mr. Ballesteros concluded that the attacks were carried out by foreigners for financial gain and that the persons concerned had been recruited, trained, hired and funded by third parties. He recommended that the Commission condemn the perpetrators of the attacks, which were aimed at damaging Cuba’s tourist industry and thereby its economy. The report also pointed out that even after 10 years since General Assembly adopted the International Convention against the Recruitment, Use, Financing and Training of Mercenaries, only 19 States have ratified or acceded to it, whereas 22 are needed for it to enter into force.

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During the debate on this agenda item a number of speakers from Member States and NGOs made their statements. Ural Latypov, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Belarus stated that his country was concerned about international terrorism. While urging the international community to act upon the Vienna Declaration and the Programme of Action in order to take steps against terrorism, he recommended the establishment of a functional commission of the Economic and Social Council on the issue. Siphon M. Pityana, Director-General of the Department of Foreign Affairs of South Africa, said that his country had accepted to host the Third World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance in 2001. He hoped that with the help of other Governments and non-governmental organisations, practical outcomes to the objectives laid down by the General Assembly would be achieved. Tofiq Musayev of Azerbaijan said that the right to self-determination had been incorporated in international instruments but it was not meant to encourage secessionist movements or foreign interference and aggression. "This right had to contribute to safeguarding the political independence and territorial integrity of States, ensuring non-interference in internal affairs and promoting international cooperation," he said. "The right to self-determination should not be used as justification for territorial expansionism under the pretext of care for ethnic groups in other States." Qiao Zonghui of China said that the right to self-determination entitled all peoples to choose their own political and social systems, economic models and paths of development; and to resist all forms of foreign aggression, interference and control. It also entitled them to safeguard State sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity. No country should be allowed to impose its ideology and social system on another country. The domination of the strong over the weak and the bullying of the small by the big, as well as interference in the other countries' internal affairs by means of political pressure, economic sanctions or even armed invasion, would constitute gross violations of the Charter of the United Nations and the right to self-determination.

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Michael Van Walt Van Praag, of Worldview International Foundation, said that conflicts around the world were centred overwhelmingly around the right of peoples to self-determination and the contending notion of unity and the territorial integrity of States. The object of maintaining territorial integrity and unity of existing States was to further peace, security and well-being of their citizens, and not to engage in all-out war. Kashinath Pandita, of the African Commission of Health and Human Rights Promoters, stated that the exercise of political rights ended when violence and terror began. Recalling that the Special Rapporteur was invited to the Asian continent, particularly the South Asian region, to focus on mercenaries impeding the exercise of the right to self-determination, he recommended a study in differentiating peoples under colonial or alien domination or foreign occupation and peoples who had exercised their right to self-determination but were struggling against impediments to full realisation of that right.

Tatiana Shaumenian of the International Institute of Peace, said that one of the main colonisers was Pakistan which not only occupied territory that did not belong to it but also prevented through violence people of other countries from determining their own way of life. Pointing to Afghanistan as a case she said that the country had been transformed into a colony of Pakistan with the Taliban being its proxy. "Pakistan also occupied, through armed aggression, large parts of the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir, denying the people of the region adult universal suffrage," she stated. "The very same area was used by Pakistan for its aggression against India in 1999 in the Kargil region." She also brought it to the Commission's notice that every time there were elections in Jammu and Kashmir, the so-called *mujahideen* from Pakistan tried to thwart them through death threats, killing of electoral officers, attacks and killing of candidates.

### **Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and all forms of Discrimination**

Under this agenda item, the Commission has before it a report on Contemporary Forms of Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and

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Related Intolerance (E/CN.4/2000/16), introduced by Maurice Glele-Ahanhanzo, the Special Rapporteur. The report contained an account of racism and racial discrimination against the Roma in Eastern and Central Europe, including discrimination in employment, education, racial discrimination and racist violence, and reviewed measures taken by the Governments of the Czech Republic, Romania and Hungary to remedy such problems. Recalling that racism and racial discrimination remained widespread and could not be ignored, the Special Rapporteur stressed that aside from education and legal repression, countries should adopt economic and social measures in favour of persons who were marginalised as a result of discriminatory practices. "Every country should adopt a national design to economically and socially integrate ethnic and national minorities, indigenous populations and migrants." There was also a report of the International Labour Office (E/CN.4/2000/17) on racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and all forms of discrimination, which highlighted the ratification and application of ILO Convention No. 111, one of the eight fundamental Conventions of ILO. The report included the work of the ILO within the field of racial discrimination, with particular emphasis on migrant workers and indigenous and tribal peoples. Besides, there was a report of the Secretary-General submitted pursuant to Commission resolution 1999/78 (E/CN.4/2000/15) on racism, racial discrimination, Xenophobia and all forms of discrimination, which contained reports on the implementation and coordination of the programme of action for the Third Decade to combat racism and racial discrimination. The report also emphasised the importance of contemporary forms of racism, such as use of the Internet to spread racist ideas.

As this agenda item was being discussed, the Commission was addressed by Madeleine Albright, Secretary of State of the United States of America. She stated that the Commission was created as a practical instrument for investigating and calling attention to violations of human rights, and as a forum for international discussion, consensus-building and action, and it was the world's responsibility to carry this tradition forward. She urged the Commission to consider a resolution expressing

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concern about widespread denials of political, cultural, labour and religious freedoms in China. The US Secretary of State also condemned the indiscriminate use of force by Russia against civilians in Chechnya, although she recognized Russia's need to preserve its territorial integrity.

A representative of the Russian Federation, speaking in right of reply, said that Russian authorities were acting in Chechnya within the limits of international law in order to preserve the integrity of the Russian State. He said that Russia had the obligation to protect its citizens. "Its campaign was not a religious war against Muslims, but the federal forces were fighting against thousands of terrorist bands," he added. A representative of China too in his right of reply defended accusations against China's human-rights record made by Mrs. Albright as groundless and slanderous. He said that China was committed to the promotion and protection of human rights and it had developed its economy, improved people's living standards, enhanced judicial transparency and law-enforcement supervision, besides fighting against corruption.

A number of member states and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) spoke during the debate on this agenda item. Several NGOs highlighted, among other things, the situation of Roma minorities in European nations and the sufferings caused by caste systems in Asia. They made recommendations for the Third World Conference against Racism (held later in 2001 in South Africa). Many speakers expressed their concern over what they said were mounting trends and new manifestations of discrimination based on race or ethnicity.

Wang Min of China underlined that racism was one of the most serious violations of human rights and it was an alarming fact that new manifestations of racism such as neo-fascism and neo-Nazism had raised their ugly head in developed countries recently with serious consequences. He stated that as a result of the inequitable international political and economic order, various forms of discrimination and unfair treatment existed among countries of the world. "All countries had the responsibility and obligation to strengthen education in human rights and to improve relevant legislation aimed at ensuring the enjoyment of equal rights for all races in various aspects of social life."

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Highlighting that racism was a serious violation of human rights, Arturo Hernandez Basave of Mexico said that determined action by the international community was required to overcome racial hatred, xenophobia and other forms of intolerance. “Action had to be taken against campaigns inciting violence and racial hatred through new global means such as the Internet,” he said.

Wijesiri Hettiarachchi of Sri Lanka said that ethnic conflict was persistent throughout the world, leaving vulnerable groups targets of violence. He pointed to migrant workers as often being targeted, including undocumented migrant workers who were even more vulnerable. He said that a new serious issue was the new access to the internet technology, a tool by which hatred and racism could be spread at little or no cost, hiding behind the principle of free speech.

Sharat Sabharwal of India stated that racism affected individuals, permeated the workplace, schools, neighbourhoods, political organisations, public administrations and even justice systems. “Bigotry, hatred and intolerance were taking increasingly violent forms and even finding reflection in national legislation relating to the right to asylum and free movement of persons,” he said. “Legislation and enforcement mechanisms remained inadequate in many parts of the world.” He noted that social and political groups propagating racial superiority continued to thrive unhindered by law, the media, civil society or Governments and there was misuse of fast-spreading information technologies, such as the internet, to propagate racism. “India was particularly disturbed by the concept of regional fortresses bolstered by political accords by groups of nations,” he added.

Patrick A. Taran of the International Labour Office said that the ILO had a long history of activity in combating racism. Setting and monitoring standards to be used to sanction racist and discriminatory behaviour was the necessary first step. One of the core international labour standards in that area, which had been developed by ILO and ratified by 141 States, was the ILO Discrimination Convention of 1958 No. 111, which called for the elimination of any distinction, exclusion or preference based on race, colour, sex, religion, political opinion, national

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extraction or social origin. He stressed that concrete, practical and effective measures also had to be devised, tested and implemented to change attitudes. "ILO's role was one of assistance in the promotion and the development of such measures, including standard-setting and monitoring, training, research and documentation, provision of technical advice, etc."

### **Right to Development**

While opening up a general debate on this agenda item the Commission had before it a report of the Secretary-General on the right to development (E/CN.4/2000/19) which contained a summary of replies received from the Governments of Croatia, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, New Zealand and Qatar on the realisation of the right. The Commission also considered a report (E/CN.4/2000/20) by the High Commissioner submitted in accordance with the Commission on Human Rights resolution 1999/79 on the right to development. The report contained accounts of the activities of the Office of the High Commissioner for human rights relating to the implementation of the right to development.

Before a general debate could start on this agenda item the Commission heard its Independent expert on the Right to Development, Arjun Sengupta. He said that the right to development had been defined as an inalienable human right by virtue of which every human being and all peoples were entitled to enjoy economic, social, cultural, civil and political development so that all human rights and fundamental freedoms could be fully realised. Stressing that national action in fulfilling the right to development had to be complemented by international cooperation, he stated that the question was no longer formulating the right to development but accepting responsibility for its implementing and proposing programmes of actions aimed at freeing the world of hunger, mal-nutrition and illiteracy.

During the debate a number of speakers stressed the need for designing new strategies and mechanisms to reach the goals set forth under the issue of right to development. Several delegates of developing countries said that the right to development could not be attained in their



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countries because of the economic imbalance between the developing and the developed nations. They also highlighted the lack of transfer of technology and capital to the developing countries, besides viewing the burden of external debt as being among the main obstacles faced by the developing countries to realise the right to development. They stressed that without development the poorer nations of the world had scant hope of providing their populations with the full slate of human rights. Whereas a representative of Egypt stressed that countries were entitled to choose different paths of development, Malaysian representative said it could be misleading to compare one country to another. A representative of Iran said that a handful of developed countries was deciding crucial macro-economic and monetary policies which had far-reaching impact on developing countries, while Paraguay said trade barriers set up in richer regions of the world were unfair and damaging to less-wealthy nations.

Portugal's representative Alvaro Mendonca E. Moura speaking on behalf of the European Union and States associated with the Union, affirmed that the Union attached great importance to the right to development and to assessing the question of development from the perspective of human rights. The Union would highly welcome a consensus as a basis for further and more positive evolution in the implementation of the right to development. He said that with weak economic foundations, many developing countries were vulnerable to the unfavourable changes in the external economic environment and many of them suffered from poverty and population pressure, debt burden, deteriorating terms of trade, insufficient infrastructure and environmental degradation. "Under such circumstances, developed countries should demonstrate political will and help the developing countries overcome their difficulties and realise development," he stressed.

Indian Representative Savitri Kunadi pointed out that fifty years after the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the world was no closer to realising the inherent dignity of the human being. She said that the right to development and human rights were mutually reinforcing and interdependent but the debate on the topic had been

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hindered by the focus on political and civil rights on the one hand and economic, social and cultural rights on the other hand. "Agreement was required on the following issue: freedom from fear had to be equal to the freedom from want," she said. "To put human rights conditions on the right to development would be erroneous." Stressing that democracy and development were essential in ensuring human rights, depending largely on having a transparent and accountable government, she added that political empowerment was required to ensure the right to development, particularly with regards to women.

Nepal's representative Rambhakta Thakur noted that the gap between rich and poor countries increased incredibly. Today about one billion people were still below the absolute poverty level with an earning of about \$1 per day. Decline of foreign aid to the least developed countries and mounting foreign debt burden at more than their export capacity had further increased their vulnerabilities. He said that the fulfilment of the right to development was the responsibility of states, nationally and internationally, international organisations as well as other organs of civil society. "Donor countries and international organisations should develop programmes while keeping in view the basic needs of developing countries, including in priority areas such as food, health care, education, drinking water and shelter," he added.

John Quigley, of Franciscans International, said that operationalism of the right to development could not be reduced to talk about economic assistance. He said that the international community needed to address new, creative and practical ways to finance the needed programmes to help individuals, nations and regions to develop their potential.

Rene Wadlow of the Association of World Citizens said that the Commission had come a long way from the start of its work on the right to development in 1979, with its consideration of a report of the Secretary-General that linked development, among other things, to peace. Since then the right to peace had been exiled to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation and was rarely heard about, while the term New International Economic Order had been

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dropped so that rich States would participate fully in the drafting of the Declaration on the Right to Development. "Now it was time to move beyond the conceptual stage to the implementation of this right," he added.

Leilani Farha of the Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions said that millions of people across the globe were being evicted from their homes and lands, first of all by armed conflict. She said that women and children were the most numerous victims who also suffered most often from evictions because of development projects, city beautification schemes, and international events and conferences. Urging the Commission to adopt the draft resolution on women and the right to land, property and housing; and also appoint a Special Rapporteur on housing rights with a strong mandate, she stressed that all Governments should review their laws, policies, customs, and traditions and reform them so that they did not discriminate against women or deny women security of tenure.

Jerald Joseph of Pax Romana regretted that little progress had been made since the Copenhagen Summit in 1995. He stated that the debt burden would always weigh down nations' potential for development and growth and ironically, it was those very loans that should have propelled States into a more prosperous economy. He stressed that the Commission should recognize more explicitly the positive role of non-governmental organisations in implementing the right to development both nationally and internationally, in the formulation of a resolution on the item.

Rubina Shaikh Greenwood of Liberation said that powerful economic States were using their strength to hinder the development of poorer economies or were increasing their own economic strength by the use of extortionate interest rates on foreign debt. She highlighted that where there were differences in political systems, stronger economies were resorting to economic forms of blackmail such as the use of trade embargoes and some States were using similar methods to impose their own conformity on cultural diversity within their own communities. "More progress must be made on writing off foreign debt," she added.

### **Question of the violation of human rights and fundamental freedoms in any part of the World**

While considering this agenda item, the Commission had before it, a report (E/CN.4/2000/33) by Kamal Hossain, the Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in Afghanistan. Presenting his report Kamal Hossain stated that the human rights situation in Afghanistan was appalling as the people of Afghanistan continued to be victims of gross violations of human rights and persistent breaches of international humanitarian law. “They continued to be virtual hostages in their own land, where externally armed forces sought to rule the country without the effective participation or consent of the people,” he said. “Violations of human rights included forced displacement of the civilian population, deliberate burning of houses, summary executions of non-combatants, including women and children, arbitrary detention, forced labour, crop burning, forced deportation and family separation.” He maintained that Afghanistan’s economy was devastated as a result of two decades of armed conflict, with the Human Development Index and the Gender Disparity Index ranking the country amongst the lowest in the world. Besides, in 1999 Afghanistan was also ranked the world’s largest illicit producer of opium, he added.

His report concluded, among other things, that developments have created an opportunity for “a bold initiative to adopt coordinated measures which will truly address the root causes responsible for the appalling human-rights situation”; that the fundamental aim must be to restore the country to all of its people through revising and sustaining a peace process and a process of transition “which will fill in the Constitutional and political vacuum in which externally supported armed groups impose arbitrary rule without the consent or participation of the Afghan people”. The report called for coordinated measures which included effective action to end external support for warring groups within the country; implementation of the commitments made in the Tashkent Declaration of July 1999; ensuring that neighbouring States deny use of their territory as training and recruiting grounds for the warring parties

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and that they deny them material support as well, particularly fuel supplies necessary to sustain military operations and to carry out aerial bombardments; and promoting a consultative process among all segments of the population with a view to their reaching agreement on a transition process aimed at establishing a broad-based, multi-ethnic, truly representative Government.

Humanyun Tandar of Afghanistan welcomed the fact that the report by the Special Rapporteur showed the responsibility of Pakistan in the war in Afghanistan and its support of the Taliban who violated the most basic human rights of the Afghans. However, he added that “there were thousands of political prisoners, arbitrarily imprisoned by the Taliban militia without charges or trials, who faced severe human rights violations. Furthermore they were not political prisoners but civilians from ethnic minorities.” He commented that political murders were common place, particularly in the Pakistani territories. He noted that “the Taliban had international funding for the mercenaries and served as a host for foreign fanatics.”

Alvaro Mendonca E. Moura of Portugal speaking on behalf of the European Union and countries associated with it, expressed deep concern at the human rights situations in many countries around the world, particularly about the situation in Chechnya. He also expressed deep concern about the continuing grave violations of the rights of women and girls in Afghanistan. Savitri Kunadi of India noted that the success in selecting the right approach while dealing with this agenda item was crucial to the Commission’s credibility and effectiveness. “Balanced dialogue, persuasion, introspection and technical cooperation was necessary to produce durable solutions,” she said. “Better results could be achieved by encouraging self-criticism and inducing positive change through technical cooperation and national capacity building which safeguarded democracy and the rule of law.” Noting that the situation in Afghanistan threatened the stability of the entire region, she stated that the people of Afghanistan continued to be virtual hostages in their own land, where externally armed forces sought to rule without the effective participation or consent of the people. She expressed India’s concern about the presence and involvement of non-Afghans in these human rights violations

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as shown in the report of the Special Rapporteur, and called upon the Commission to take effective steps to counter these forces responsible for the current plight of the Afghan people.

While reviewing this agenda item the Commission on Human Rights heard statements from both the country delegations as well as NGOs. Several speakers decried human rights violations in many countries and urged the Commission to continue to adopt resolutions on countries which violated fundamental freedoms. There were statements from country delegations who defended their human rights records and also levelled accusations against other countries. Speakers underlined the importance of conflict-prevention mechanisms and the necessity to fight impunity in order to ensure the promotion and protection of human rights. They said that reconciliation and tolerance were basic elements towards developing a society based on the rule of law after conflict situations.

Charles Graves of Interfaith International, said that there was a widespread violation of civil, political, cultural, social and economic rights in Pakistan, especially in Sindh province. He said that the martial law which was declared in Pakistan last year, suspended the Parliament, abrogated the Constitution and established “Special Courts”, besides undermining the basic human rights of the people of Sindh. “The Sindh, one of the world’s oldest surviving civilisations was under threat of extinction from deliberate cultural dilution, settlement of immigrants, persecution and the continuation of military operations,” he added.

Noting that mass graves were still being discovered in Bangladesh dating back to killings committed by the Pakistani Army before Bangladesh’s liberation, Vidya Sekera of the Afro-Asian Peoples’ Solidarity Organisation stressed that the Commission should find and reveal the truth about these barbaric acts. He also brought to the Commission’s notice that over 100,000 East Timorese remained in camps in West Timor that were under the control of militia thugs from East Timor and their Indonesian army supporters and reportedly many had died for lack of adequate sanitation and medical care. He urged the international community to bring the perpetrators to justice.

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Mohammad Anwar of World Federation of Democratic Youth said that gross violations of human rights of the Mohajir nation of over 22 million people in Sindh province continued at the hands of the Government of Pakistan. He described the Mohajirs as subject to near-genocide, extra-judicial executions, unlawful arrests and torture in the custody of the State, displacement and forced evictions, disappearances, and ethnic and linguistic discrimination. Referring to the then US President Bill Clinton's visit to Pakistan during which Clinton remarked that people should have the freedom and responsibility to shape their own destiny, Anwar regretted that Pakistan would not be at peace until Mohajirs and Sindhis had that freedom and full autonomy for their province.

### **Economic, Social and Cultural Rights**

Before discussing this agenda item, the Commission had before it a progress report (E/CN.4/2000/6) by Katarina Tomasevski, the Special Rapporteur on the right to education. The report highlighted, among other things, the difficulties in the realisation of the right to education, ranging from financial obstacles, especially the level of primary education, to lack of coherence in international aid policies targeting education. Adopting a 4-A scheme (availability, accessibility, acceptability and adaptability), the Special Rapporteur analysed governmental obligations corresponding to the right to education. While analysing the availability of schooling, the report looked into State and non-State schooling and the human rights jurisprudence relating to State funding for private schools. It also highlighted key facets of the persistently inadequate attention to teachers in international and domestic education strategies.

There was a joint report (E/CN.4/2000/51) by Reinaldo Figueredo, the Special Rapporteur on the effects of foreign debt on the full enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights and Fantu Cheru, Independent Expert on structural adjustment policies. The report tried to provide three strategic entry points for linking debt relief to social investment: HIV/AIDS prevention in Africa, post Hurricane reconstruction in Central America, and debt relief and the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, based on the Bosla Escola scholarship programme in Brazil.

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Introducing the report Figueredo said that the process of development had to include the alleviation of extreme poverty and that structural adjustment policies should also include provisions for the reduction of poverty. He said that in addition, there was also an urgent need to link debt alleviation to emergency action and the protection of human rights besides having a mechanism which could automatically cancel debts when a disaster hit a country.

The Commission also considered a report (E/CN.4/2000/52/Add.1) by the Working Group on Human Rights and Extreme Poverty which contained an account of the Working Group's first consultation on the elaboration of a possible draft declaration on human rights and extreme poverty. Some of the topics addressed in the report included the sociological and political aspects, causes, types and situations of poverty. Anne-Marie Lizin, the Independent Expert on human rights and extreme poverty regretted that despite repeated commitments by international organisations, the struggle against extreme poverty had yet to be translated into action. She said that concerted efforts by all actors had to be maintained as the lack of political will remained a major obstacle in the fight against extreme poverty. She also underlined that "primary responsibility for the fight against extreme poverty rested with the State."

During the debate a number of State representatives affirmed that economic, social and cultural rights could not be dissociated from civil and political rights. Many speakers urged that more efforts be made to eradicate poverty which they said was one of the major obstacles to the full enjoyment of the economic, social and cultural rights of millions of people around the world. They pointed out that a prime obstacle to improving the lives of millions was the crippling external debt owed by many of the world's poorest nations. Numerous speakers called for greater efforts by creditor nations to reduce the debt burdens of poor countries.

Liu Xinsheng of China affirmed that although economic, social and cultural rights were part and parcel of human rights and fundamental freedoms, for most of the developing countries the full realisation and



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enjoyment of those rights remained a distant goal. Hence, the international community was confronted with extremely harsh challenges and urgent tasks to promote and protect those rights. He said that the new China, which was born in poverty and backwardness five decades ago, had created a miracle in the world in the field of protecting and promoting economic, social and cultural rights.

Sharat Sabharwal of India stated that although his country's Constitution preceded the adoption of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, it was deeply influenced by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in giving recognition to economic, social and cultural rights through a chapter on "directive principles" of state policy. He said that in a series of landmark judgements, the Indian Supreme Court had ordered that the "directive principles" should be read into the fundamental rights, also contained in the Constitution, as the two sets of rights were supplementary to each other. The Court had further ruled that without making the right to education, contained in the directive principles, a reality, fundamental rights would remain beyond the reach of large segments of the population which were illiterate. "The Apex Court had also ruled that the right to life included within it the right to live with human dignity and all that went along with it, namely, the necessities of life such as adequate nutrition, clothing, shelter and basic education," he added.

Rambhakta Thakur of Nepal said that all human rights were interlinked and could not be separated, nor could they be studied in one single aspect without taking into consideration all other rights. He brought it to the Commission's notice that Nepal focussed on the conceptual aspects of foreign aid and highlighted the incredible inequalities between developed and developing countries. "Despite all the efforts by the international community, the trend of global cooperation in the field of development had not been promising and was far from meeting the general spirit of the United Nations charter," he said. "As a result there were millions of hungry, illiterate and unemployed people." He stressed that there had to be a new international economic order based on equality and justice.

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Andrei Nikiforov of the Russian Federation said that the rule of law was essential for bolstering economic, social and cultural rights and the right to development within States; but apart from domestic efforts it was important to have the assistance of the international community and the international financial institutions. He said that international terrorism and organised crime, as well as inter-ethnic conflict and illegal trade in weapons and drugs affected the lives of millions of people in the world. He also cited the spread of AIDS and other serious infectious diseases as being the cause of problems of people the world over. He underlined Russia's belief that States should not be able to apply to other States coercive measures or interfere in national sovereignty.

Several of NGOs too spoke on economic, social and cultural rights with many of them telling the Commission that more had to be done to eradicate poverty around the world and many others lamenting that economic globalisation, high levels of Third World debt, and "structural adjustment" programmes imposed on developing countries by international financial institutions were leaving much of humanity in a situation of hopeless and mounting poverty. Expressing concern over the effects of high levels of foreign debt on the economies of the world's poorer nations, they called for further debt relief and even debt cancellation. Education was cited in several instances as a way out of poverty and dependence.

Dulce Jesus Soares of Asian Buddhist Conference for Peace said that in Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) of Bangladesh, the rights of the indigenous Jumma people continued to be violated. Some three thousand refugees who had returned to the CHT did not get back their land as promised by the Government and that their socio-cultural rights had also not been protected. "Annually dozens of forced marriages and forced religious conversions were taking place in CHT," he said. "Customary laws were not respected by the existing administrative system, either."

Jairo Sanchez of American Association of Jurists stated that major transnational corporations, major powers, and foreign debt were having severe negative impact on developing countries. The process of

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globalisation had put wealth in hands of only a few. Under this process, economic, social and cultural rights had been neglected and violated. He criticised the actions of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in establishing closer links with transnationals and the World Bank, under the “strategy of participation” and “integrated development”.

Maurice Graber of Defence for Children International speaking on behalf of 11 NGOs said that the right to education was currently violated on a massive scale. He stated that some 125 million children of school age, the majority of them girls as still having no access to basic education. He regretted that the commitment of Governments at the 1990 World Conference on Education to provide every child with a good primary education by the year 2000 had not been honoured. “Indeed, the objective of achieving universal access to free primary education had been postponed to 2015,” he added.

Sybile Ruppechi of the International Institute for Peace said that the most fundamental requirement for the preservation of economic, social and cultural rights was an atmosphere of freedom and equal opportunity. Since very often people defined their destiny in terms of religion, culture and heritage, freedom of belief also had to be guaranteed, particularly in multi-religious and multi-ethnic societies. However, ethnic and religious discrimination was still rampant resulting from age-old prejudices or sanctioned by the States through legal, constitutional and institutional structures. In Afghanistan whole sections of society had been rendered unproductive on gender, ethnic and religious grounds. Another threat to human rights was terrorist groups who defined their campaigns in terms of religion and opposition to the ethos of particularly societies. An example of this was terrorist groups operating out of Pakistan and espousing fundamentalist ideology, akin to the Taliban.

### **Civil and Political Rights**

Several topics discussed under this agenda item included the questions of torture and detention; disappearances and summary executions; freedom of expression; independence of the judiciary and administration of justice; religious intolerance; states of emergency; and

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conscientious objection to military service. Before beginning a general debate on this item, the Commission took up a report (E/CN.4/2000/54) by the Secretary General submitted pursuant to Commission resolution 1998/39 on civil and political rights, including the question of independence of the judiciary, administration of justice and impunity. The report stated that technical assistance of the United Nations system has an important role to play in coordinating and monitoring the implementation of international standards relating to the administration of justice, in particular juvenile justice. The report also said that the implementation role of the organisations of the United Nations is complemented in turn by the monitoring activities of the Committee on the Rights of the Child and the Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography.

Another report (E/CN.4/2000/3) was presented to the Commission by Asma Jahangir, the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions. The report concluded, among other things, that there is no indication that the occurrence of such executions decreased in 1999, and that certain specific groups such as human-rights defenders, political activities and members of various minorities continue to be particularly exposed to such horrendous crimes. Ms. Jahangir mentioned about her “personal commitment and responsibility to address the unacceptable practice of so-called ‘honour killings’, which constitute violations of the right to life when condoned or ignored by the authorities”.

There was also a report (E/CN.4/2000/4) of the Working Group on Arbitrary Detentions which concluded, among other things, that a lack of protection for human-rights defenders is apparent and that it has recently become common for lawyers defending victims of human-rights violations, as well as other persons dedicated to protecting fundamental rights, to become, together with journalists and politicians, prime targets for repressive measures. The Working Group recommended, among other things, that countries should make only moderate use of states of emergency, and that in imposing them they should adhere strictly to the guidelines given in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

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The report (E/CN.4/2000/9) of the Special Rapporteur on torture, Sir Nigel Rodley included a summary of the activities of the Special Rapporteur as well as information received by him with respect to specific cases in 85 countries and territories. A report (E/CN.4/2000/64) of the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances was also put before the Commission. The report concluded, among other things, that there was a continued practice of disappearances in a number of countries in 1999. During that year, the Working Group received information on 3000 new cases of disappearances which occurred in 23 countries with the highest numbers reported in Indonesia and Colombia. The report also indicated that impunity continued to be one of the main causes of disappearances and also the major obstacle in the process of clarification. Besides, there was a report (E/CN.4/2000/64/Add.1) of the Working Group of Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances on the visit to Sri Lanka by a member of the Group. The report concludes, among other things, that Sri Lanka remains the country with the second largest number of non-clarified cases of disappearances. Another report (E/CN.4/2000/62) prepared by the Special Rapporteur, Cherif Bassiouni on the right to restitution, compensation and rehabilitation for victims of gross violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms was also presented for discussion. The report addressed questions ranging from the obligation to respect international law, treatment of victims, victims' right to a remedy, to access to justice, reparation and information.

During the debate on this agenda item several national representatives described government efforts to protect human rights, while numerous NGOs pleaded for greater attention to such matters as inherent police and judicial bias against women, children, and homosexuals; the fate of missing persons; and reform of court and detention practices in various countries. Questions of religious intolerance drew frequent comment. The UNESCO representative while explaining the programmes to establish a "culture of peace" stated that inter-religious dialogue and the teaching of mutual respect and tolerance were important in regions where conflicts were of a religious nature. A short while after these remarks, the International Association for Religious Freedom

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charged that Islamic states such as Afghanistan, Sudan, Mauritania and Saudi Arabia maintained religious laws which were intolerant, against human rights and misrepresented Islam.

Amir Harez of Egypt said protection of human rights at the national level could be achieved through the promulgation of laws, a democratic environment, education, awareness raising, and full political participation. He said that it was important to combat terrorism to ensure the fulfillment of human rights and, therefore, the Commission should transcend its verbal condemnation of terrorism. He stressed that all acts of terrorism had to be addressed equally, regardless of the nationality of the perpetrators of the crimes.

Annar Gassam of UNESCO said that there was territorial, ethnic and religious rivalry in the world. This stemmed from the closing in of one religion on another, or from ignorance, distorted memories, or prejudice. "Improvements in such attitudes could be realized through education and cultural and religious exchanges," he stressed. Elaborating that political question had taken center stage for too long, to the detriment of ethical and moral values, he said that many conflicts stemmed from misunderstandings between religions.

Highlighting that the phenomenon of terrorism posed one of the most serious threats to human rights, Savitri Kunadi of India said that India believed that there was an urgent need for a comprehensive study on the impact of terrorism on the enjoyment of human rights. However, she stressed that the debate on terrorism and its impact on Human Rights remained inconclusive partly because of genuine conceptual inadequacies and also because of the misleading propaganda of the State and non-State actors who sought to conceal their self-serving violent agenda behind lofty principles such as self-determination and freedom struggle.

Jean-Daniel Vigny of Switzerland stated that the draft optional protocol to the Convention against Torture was an international preventive instrument which should be adopted by the Commission. He expressed hope that Nepal and Viet Nam would continue to cooperate with the Working Group on Arbitrary Detentions as Bhutan and China had done.

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Bulet Meric of Turkey said that terrorism, which aimed at destabilising legitimately constituted democratic Governments and undermining civil society and the rule of law, presented a major challenge which the international community must combat in concert. “No nation was immune, and while terrorism might stem from different causes, such as ethnic, ideological or religious grievances, it had no justification,” he stressed. “All necessary and effective measures must be taken against it in accordance with international law.”

Petros Eftychiou of Cyprus stated that disappearances constituted a multiple violation of basic and fundamental norms and principles of human rights. Disappearances continued to take place in various parts of the world. In Cyprus too, the families of the missing persons who disappeared during and after the Turkish invasion in 1974 were still waiting to learn in a conclusive manner whether their loved ones were alive or dead. Cyprus appealed to all concerned, especially to turkey, to exhibit a humanitarian and a political will in order to help and assist these efforts.

Khalid Jahangir of the **Himalayan Research and Cultural Foundation** said that while the Commission and its Special Rapporteur on religious intolerance had made commendable efforts to combat religious intolerance, it continued to occur in different forms. While countries in the West sought to end such intolerance on their territories, the East was witnessing a spurt of such incidents. In South Asia, religious fundamentalism promoting intolerance was growing. Groups of terrorists styling themselves as Mujahideen had been threatening peaceful and tolerant South Asian societies for more than ten years, selectively targeting non-Muslims, destroying their hearths and homes, performing acts that were completely contrary to the message of tolerance and peace that was the true essence of Islam. In Kashmir, they even had lately targeted Muslims who were opposed to their inhuman actions. He urged upon the Commission to taken note of this alarming situation and impress upon the concerned Government that it must stop supporting terrorist groups which, among other things, were creating havoc in Jammu and Kashmir State.

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Philippe Le Blanc of Franciscans International said that religious intolerance was growing and was at the root of a number of conflicts and ongoing situations of violence in many parts of the world. Religious minorities were increasingly the targets of bigotry, which was often instigated by extremist forces. The lack of political will on the part of Governments to put an end to these destructive trends had encouraged these groups to persecute and victimize individuals and groups. He said that “in Pakistan religious discrimination was enshrined in legislation, which tended to promote a culture of intolerance. In that country, the system of separate electorates on the grounds of religion had the effect of denying religious minorities their fundamental rights to universal adult franchise.”

David Littman of the Association for World Education stressed that Pakistan’s new regime should guarantee international human rights norms be repealing “blasphemy” legislation and addressing “honour killings,” which in one year in one province of Pakistan had caused at least 300 women’s deaths. Pakistan should make human rights a goal for all. Wasay Jalil of Interfaith International said that extrajudicial, summary and arbitrary executions were being practiced in Pakistan. He stated that “The Pakistani Government had not responded to the reports of the Special Rapporteur on torture in 1994, 1995, 1996, 1997, or 1998, which listed gross violations against the Mohajir nation.” He underlined that denial of political civil and human rights of the Mohajirs had been the established policy of Pakistan’s feudal-military-bureaucracy for years.

Soorya Lal Amatya of the World Federation of Trade Unions stated that democracy and the freedom of expression normally available in democratic republics were subjected to many restrictions in Pakistan, where the fundamentalists had acquired tremendous leverage over television and educational institutions even though they did not secure even 5 per cent of the vote in general elections. “Under Pakistan’s Blasphemy Law, any criticism of the Prophet was punishable by death,” he said. “Consequently, large numbers of Christians and Ahmadiyahs had been killed by fanatics and mob violence.” He accused Pakistan of continuing to operate a separate electoral system for its religious minorities



whereby they could not vote as part of an integrated electorate: such a system maintained the segregation of Muslims from non-Muslims, since Christians, Hindus, Parsis and other minorities could only vote for minority candidates who rarely found a place in the Government.

### **Integration of the Human Rights of Women and the Gender Perspective**

The Commission discussed the report of the Secretary General (E/CN.4/2000/118) on the joint work plan of the Division for the Advancement of Women and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. The report recommended, among other things that human rights mechanisms foster contacts with academic institutions, think tanks, other research institutions, national human rights institutions and national machinery for the advancement of women to promote the development of information exchange and projects.

There was also a report (E/CN.4/2000/67) by the Secretary General on the Integration of the Human Rights of Women and the Gender Perspective, focusing on the integration of human rights of women throughout the United Nations system. The report recommended that all Governments ratify without reservation the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. The recommendations of the expert group meeting on the development of guidelines for the integration of gender perspectives into human rights activities and programmes held in 1995 were also included in this report.

There was another report (E/CN.4/2000/68) by the Special Rapporteur, Radhika Coomaraswamy focussing on violence against women, its causes and consequences, the trafficking of women, women's migration and violence against women, which was submitted in accordance with Commission resolution 1997/44. The report recommended that government programmes and international efforts relating to trafficking should be developed with non-governmental organizations, and that efforts should focus on human rights abuses and labour rights abuses of the women involved, rather than treating the victims

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as criminals or illegal migrants. Introducing her report Radhika Coomaraswamy, the Special Rapporteur on violence against women said that she was alarmed by a sudden increase in honour killings in countries such as Pakistan, Jordan and Turkey, and that such murders should be of serious concern to the international community. "If women fell in love, sought divorce even from battering husbands, or entered into relationships outside marriage, they were seen as violating the honour of the community and were subject to the violence of their own family member: husbands, brothers or father," she said. "Honour killing was the most intimate of all crimes since it was those who were tied to women through love or family who were required to carry out her execution – to kill her in cold blood."

Farida Arca, Rapporteur of the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women told the Commission that 165 States had so far ratified the Convention, making it the second only to the Convention on the Rights of the Child as the most accepted human rights treaty. However, she regretted that Convention was still short of its goal of universal ratification by the year 2000, a goal set by the international community both in the 1993 Vienna Programme of Action and the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action. She urged the 27 countries that had not signed the Convention, to do so without delay. On the situation in Afghanistan she said that no regime anywhere in the world that treated women the Taliban way should be allowed access to the community of nations. She noted that a body of Government calling itself the Department of Virtue and the Suppression of Vice was responsible for the most inhuman edicts against women. "Women were denied physical security as members of that department assaulted women in the streets with instruments that looked like leather cricket bats," she said. "They did so with impunity and without due process, if women's ankles were showing, if they did not have a male escort, if they were wearing the wrong kind of burqa, if they were laughing loudly, listening to music, idling, or even wearing white stocks."

The Commission also heard Dubravka Simonovic, Chairperson of the Commission on the Status of Women, who said the adoption of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of

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Discrimination against Women had been signed in October 1999, and would hopefully enter into force before the end of the year 2000. “It would be an additional tool for advancing women’s interests through government reform of legislation and policy” she said.

During discussion on this agenda item there were calls for the international community to make special efforts to strengthen legislation on women’s human rights in order to establish a comprehensive legal system and mechanism to protect these rights. The feminisation of poverty was condemned and several speakers urged that effective measures be taken to eliminate the poverty of women. Among speakers on the situation of women, the European Union noted with concern the phenomenon of the feminisation of poverty and reiterated that gender inequality remained one of the major obstacles of eradication of poverty, as well as of other forms of social exclusion. The Commission also heard statements from Government delegates who deplored the persistence of violence against women and regretted that the Beijing Platform for Action of the 1995 World Conference on Women had not been fully implemented. The representative of Afghanistan said that since the Taliban had taken power in Kabul, the lives of Afghan women had turned into nightmares, and they had been deprived of rights as basic as the freedom to study, work, or leave their homes without male escort. The importance of concerted action on the part of Governments and the international community to end various forms of violence against women was underlined. The setting up of mechanisms to deal with sexual harassment of women was underscored. They also addressed problems like the lack of resources to implement programmes to enhance the status of women. They pointed out that women suffered from gender and sex-based discrimination, which contributed to their ill-health, thus making women and girls more vulnerable to further rights violations.

Humayun Tandar of Afghanistan said that until recently Afghan women had been participating in the economic, agricultural, artistic and pastoral life of the country. The modern evolution of the country had also opened the possibility for them to work in administration and in productive enterprises. However, after the export of the fanatic group to

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Afghanistan and the occupation of the capital city, the living conditions of women had become a nightmare. “Those who were found not abiding by the new rules were violently battered by the Taliban religious police,” he said. “In the minds of the Taliban, women represented danger and insecurity; they were born to satisfy the men and for purposes of reproduction.” He called upon the international community to come to the assistance of Afghan women and to help end their sufferings.

Qi Xiaoxia of China said women played an indispensable role in the existence, development, and progress of human society. The status of women was changing and they were changing the world. The Chinese delegation suggested that the international community make special efforts in strengthening the legislation on women’s human rights to establish a comprehensive legal system and mechanisms to protect these rights. Effective measures were needed to be taken to eliminate the poverty of women as poverty was a major obstacle to the realization of equality and development of women. The international community should provide more assistance to developing countries through more international cooperation.

Chariotte Lindsey of the International Committee of the Red Cross said that violence against women in situations of armed conflict was a violation of international humanitarian law. Violence against women took many forms, some more apparent than others. One of the most painful consequences of armed conflicts was the number of women searching for news on the fate of relatives who were missing. Throughout the world women were continuing to show remarkable courage, resourcefulness and resilience when confronted with the effects of war. Sexual violence was a particularly heinous violation of humanitarian law.

Bashir Muntasser of the United Nations Population Fund said the need for access to information, education and quality reproductive health care was as pressing as ever. There were still 350 million women in developing countries who did not have access to a range of safe and effective family planning methods. More than 585,000 women died every year from problems related to childbirth and pregnancies, more than 99

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per cent of them were in the developing countries. Unsafe abortion claimed annually the lives of some 70,000 women.

Jane Cottingham of the World Health Organisation said that the link between the protection and promotion of women's human rights and their health and well-being needed to be further noted and paid attention to in the entire UN system. Women suffered from gender and sex-based discrimination, which contributed to their ill-health, thus making women and girls more vulnerable to further rights violations.

Jane Zhang of the International Labour Organisation said that the ILO had given special importance to protecting the rights of workers who fell outside the formal labour protection system, promoting partnership and empowering women themselves to determine their needs, promoting a more equitable representation in decision-making and creating a more enabling environment to combine work and family life. He underlined that in order to meet the challenges of globalisation, the ILO had developed a strategic global programme on decent work, promoting equal opportunities for women and men in obtaining decent work in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity.

It was during the debate on this item that Prof. K. Warikoo, the Secretary General of the **Himalayan Research and Cultural Foundation** drew attention of the Commission to inhuman treatment of the women in some parts of the world at the hands of Islamist extremists who were still forcing medievalist practices upon women, keeping them under the veil, stoning them to death, subjecting them to "honour killing", depriving them of education, and using them as sex objects. He said that the situation in Afghanistan was absolutely unacceptable. Similarly, Islamist extremists and militants were committing inhuman atrocities in Kashmir, using rape, kidnapping and murder as weapons to subjugate the people to their will. "Against Muslim Kashmiri tradition, women were being forced to adopt the fundamentalist way of life, including wearing the veil and leading lives of seclusion," he noted. "Women also were killed or seriously injured by militants as a way of frightening or disciplining male members of their families; four women in one family had their throats slit

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on 1 April 1999 as a lesson to the males of the family, who were not following the diktats of the terrorists.” He urged the Commission and the international community to take steps to end such atrocities.

Firdous Syed of the European Union of Public Relations expressed concern that “in the name of religion, the polarisation of communities could degenerate into horrendous acts of violence, curbing all civil liberties. Peace was the sole guarantor to fundamental freedoms, and terrorism was the driving force of instability. Furthermore in modern international relations there was a growing concern that States were using terrorism in inter-State conflicts. Modern warfare was in a transforming phase. By the choice of hard and soft targets, the violence unleashed by non-State actors deregulated the regulations of warfare. In these cases human rights became the first and foremost casualty. Kashmir was ravaged by sheer aggression and unimaginable violence perpetrated by foreign mercenaries induced by a belligerent nation.”

Atsuko Tanaka of the International Movement Against all Forms of Discrimination said that the Commission had to address the issue of the trafficking of women. In order to put an end to international trafficking of women, one had to go beyond focusing on immigration and transnational organized crime. One also had to look into the economic and social marginalisation which often made women vulnerable. The Commission was called upon to take action against trafficking and to appoint a Special Rapporteur to provide information at next year’s session.

Gianfranco Rossi of the International Association for Religious Freedom said that it had been recognised that the extremely difficult situation of Afghan women was due to the application by the Taliban of a religious law which was related to an extremist version of Islam. The Taliban applied the Shar’ia law which contained highly discriminatory provisions against women. For instance, according to the Shar’ia, it was prohibited that women exercised a leading role; a witness of two women was considered as one; the part of the heritage of a woman was half that of a man; and women were obliged to be veiled. In addition women

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should be strictly loyal to their husbands because of the consequences of death by stoning. He asked the Commission to call upon all States not to invoke traditions relating to religion in their fulfillment of their obligations concerning ending discrimination against women.

Melanie Leverger of France Liberte drew the attention of the Commission to the situation faced by Afghan women. Girls were deprived from school at 9 years of age, and women were discriminated against in terms of access to medical care. Their rights to health, work, education and human dignity were being violated. This was unacceptable and the Commission was called upon to take the necessary steps to improve the fate of these women. Another concern was the stoning of women that occurred in some countries, particularly in Iran and the United Arab Emirates. The Commission was called upon to intervene urgently and end these inhuman practices.

Belquis Ahmadi of the International Human Rights Law Group highlighted the systematic institutionalisation of violence against women in Afghanistan. In Afghanistan extreme forms of violence continued with impunity. In more than two-thirds of the country, the ruling Taliban militia had enforced a number of laws which called for the virtual imprisonment of women in their homes. Women and girls were not able to go to school, which was considered a crime by the regime in place. Afghan women were forced to disappear from public life and to adopt a culture defined by the Taliban. Brutal forms of violence against women were imposed in the name of religion and Taliban had established a body called the Department of Virtue and the Suppression of Vices that had the authority to arrest any women at any time without giving her any right to appeal against the punishments meted out.

Christiane Dehoy of the Catholic Institute for International Relations expressed concern about the situation faced by the Rohingya women of Burma who had been and were still being trafficked to Pakistan. The government of Pakistan had largely ignored the issue of trafficking. Rohingya women constantly faced arrest and imprisonment as illegal immigrants. They were further victimised by police and pimps while in

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detention. Rohingya women from Burma were trapped. In Burma they were deprived of citizenship and faced wide-scale atrocities committed by the military regime. In Bangladesh they were unwanted refugees threatened with repatriation or deportation. For many, the only option left was to be trafficked to Pakistan, where some were sold into slavery and prostitution while many more survived in extreme poverty in debt bondage circumstances.

Tatiana Shaumian of the International Institute for Peace expressed her concern about the practice of honour killings of women. She said that the honour killings took many forms, including forced suicide, denunciation of the behaviour and open threats to their lives, acid burns, but the perpetrators of these crimes went unpunished or received reduced sentences. Recognizing that these honour killings were prevalent in Jordan and Pakistan she lamented that “the Government of Pakistan had refused to condemn these killings despite public protest against the decision of the Senate. A comprehensive policy had to be drawn up to abolish practices which impinged upon the life of any person purely because of sexual distinction.”

Geneva Berryman Arif of Interfaith International stated that violence, or fear of violence, was one of the crucial factors which forced women into a subservient position to men and that traditions in various countries continued or exacerbated such tendencies. He said that in some countries, women were not allowed to leave their homes without male escort, or could not hold religious positions, while in some countries mere physical force was enough to subjugate women, in particular Pakistan where up to 80 per cent of women were reportedly subject to domestic violence. Describing honour killings in Pakistan and other countries as a grave problem, he argued that if, as claimed, honour killings were not related to religion but were a matter of tribal and community custom, why did one not hear of local religious authorities speaking out against these murders?

Referring to “honour killings” in Pakistan, David Littman of the Association for World Education said that he had watched a remarkable



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film on BBC that documented the background to such killings, and showed how and why tribal custom was upheld by Pakistan's judicial system – even the legislature – which condoned it all, often under the cloak of religion. He also noticed that explanations were given by those murderers, their male relatives, members of their village – as well as many religious and parliamentary dignitaries – to justify or condone on religious grounds those killings. He stressed that these practices should be condemned, there and elsewhere, by Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

Karen Talbot of the World Federation of Trade Unions contended that even in the most advanced countries, women were treated as less valuable than men and as sex objects. “The redeeming factor was the development of the State structure providing the necessary avenues for redress,” she said. “The problem had its roots in the conditioning to which women had been subjected over the ages to consider themselves as inferior, even when they were fully aware of their own true potential.” She made specific reference to the situation of women in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

#### **Rights of the Child**

Under this agenda item, there was a report (E/CN.4/2000/71) of the Special Rapporteur of the Secretary General for Children and Armed Conflict, Olara A. Otunnu which contained chapters on the Convention on the Rights of the Child and war-affected children; curbing child soldiering; eliciting monitoring commitments from parties to conflict; addressing impunity; the role of the Commission on Human Rights; the role of mechanisms of the Commission; the role of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights; the role of Committee on the rights of the Child; Security Council Resolution 1261; and integrating child protection into United Nations peace operations. Introducing his report Olara A. Otunnu who is also Under-Secretary General said that in his report he had highlighted developments and issues that were of particular concern to the Commission and to the broader human rights community. Citing two primary goals as guide to his advocacy work, he said that the first goal was to build a worldwide social and political movement for the

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protection of war affected children – a movement to repudiate and reverse the present trends of widespread abuse and brutalisation of children in armed conflict. He continued that the second major objective was to instigate a critical mass of activities and initiatives for the benefit of children – in the midst and in the aftermath of armed conflict – measures, practices and attitudes that would become self-sustaining beyond the lifetime of the mandate.

There was a report (E/CN.4/2000/70) of the Secretary General on the status of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The report noted that as of 5 December 1999, 191 countries had ratified or acceded to the Convention. Besides, a report (E/CN.4/2000/74) by the Working Group on a draft optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on involvement of children in armed conflicts was also put before the Commission.

The Commission also considered a report (E/CN.4/2000/75) of the Working Group on the question of a draft optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography presented by the Chairman Rapporteur, Jorge Ivan Mora. The optional protocol expresses grave concern at the significant increase in international trafficking of children and the widespread practice of sex tourism to which children are particularly vulnerable. It also highlighted concern at the growing availability of child pornography on the Internet and other evolving technologies. As such it called for efforts to raise public awareness to reduce consumer demand for the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, besides strengthening global partnership among all actors and improve law enforcement at a national level.

The Commission on Human Rights heard statements on a variety of issues including trafficking in children, sexual exploitation of children, child labour, child detention, children in armed conflicts and promoting the rights of the girl child. Country delegations spoke about measures taken to promote and protect children's rights. They not only stressed the important link between education of children and the development of

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nations but also detailed the effect of the HIV/AIDS epidemic on children. Besides, other issues raised included pleas for universal ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and expressions of support for recently completed draft optional protocols to the Convention aimed at ending the participation of children in armed conflicts and eradicating the sale of children, child prostitution, and child pornography.

Yoshie Noguchi of the International Labour Office (ILO) said ILO Convention 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour, which had been adopted unanimously in June 1999, was explicitly aimed at liberating scores of millions of children from forcible recruitment for armed conflict, from prostitution and pornography, from slavery, trafficking, debt bondage and hazardous work. The ILO had also participated and watched with strong interest the drafting of the two draft protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Convention 182 had seen a rapid rate of ratification and would enter into force on 19 November.

Marta Santos Pais of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) called for ensuring the mainstreaming of children's rights throughout the work of the Commission. He said that over the past year, important steps were taken to reinforce the protection of children's rights, including the approval of two optional protocols to the convention on the Rights of the Child. He hoped that these two optional protocols would be adopted by the next session of the General Assembly and that UNICEF would actively support their process of ratification and future implementation.

Markus Stahlhofer of the World Health Organisation said that WHO chose to draw attention to adolescents because their health needs and rights were all too often neglected; each year, more than one million adolescents lost their lives, mainly through accidents, suicide, violence, pregnancy-related complications and through illnesses that were either preventable or treatable. "WHO wished to recognise the distinct vulnerabilities of boys as well because failure to adequately address the health and development of adolescents constituted a denial of human rights as they were guaranteed in the Convention and other human rights

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instruments,” he added. He urged States to pay full attention to issues relating to health of adolescents as well as young children in their reporting and monitoring obligations under the Convention.

A. Cassam of UNESCO noted that more than 120,000 children under age 16 were serving as soldiers in armed conflicts in Africa; most were traumatized; many suffered from AIDS, malaria, or other diseases; many had enlisted to escape poverty, while many others had been forcibly recruited. He said that they needed to be given back their childhoods, to be given psychological and social help as part of their demobilisation.

Several NGOs too presented their view on this agenda item. They contended, among other things, that children were suffering unacceptable abuses in numerous countries. Ravinder Kaul of the **Himalayan Research and Cultural Foundation** pointed out that the most barbaric example of heinous crimes being committed against children could be found in Kashmir, where Islamist mercenaries with the aim of Islamising the secular Kashmir society were using children as pawns to accomplish their sinister designs. “Abduction, killing, kidnapping, rape, and sodomy were some of the crimes that these children were being subjected to with the aim of either forcing them to follow the Islamists’ dictates or else browbeating their parents into submission,” he said. “Children were regularly being used as gun runners and in various acts of terrorist violence in order to escape the attention of the law-enforcement agencies, that’s how hundreds of innocent children had been used to keep the embers of terrorism alive.” He continued that school going children and school teachers were directly facing the brunt of the atrocities of terrorist who wanted to deprive children of the benefits of modern scientific education by imposing medieval, extremist Islamic education on them.

Thierry Nlandu of the Human Rights Law Group said that in Afghanistan, violence against young children had continued in various forms for 22 years, and that boys there received guns when they asked for bread of education. “Afghan children were also arrested for flying kites or playing with pigeons, as both games had been declared un-Islamic,” he lamented. “Young girls were denied the rights to education

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and were not allowed to play outside their homes.” He emphasized that majority of children had no access to health care and hundreds of thousands had become disabled due to land mine explosions.

Maurice Graber of Defense of Children International said that despite increasing attention given to children’s rights by the international community, police abuse and violence against children persisted, arbitrary detention was frequent, legal and other assistance disregarded and deprivation of liberty was not used as a measure of last resort and for the shortest possible length of time. He drew Commission’s attention to some cases, where States were even introducing policies and laws providing for more repressive measures such as lowering the age of criminal responsibility, prosecuting minors as if they were adults, creating special prisons for the very young, implementing legislation providing for mandatory sentencing and imposing the death penalty for crimes committed by children.

Ashok Bhan of the Indian Council of Education stated that although the Convention on the Rights of the Child had been ratified by 191 States, real concerns about the rights of the child remained unfulfilled. He said that despite the world community’s agreed commitments and legal obligations and general progress in improving the health, nutrition and education of children, the situation of girls continued to be disadvantaged compared to that of boys in many countries. “Prevailing cultural and social attitudes about girls’ roles and division of labour in everyday life had negatively influenced the status of girls,” he added.

Roman Schibli of the International Organisation for the Development of Freedom of Education emphasized that the evolving capacities of the child were of fundamental importance when considering the child’s ability to make his or her own decisions. In this respect, the best interest of the child and the prohibition of discrimination on any grounds should remain the overriding principles guiding children’s policies and education. He said that religion, often combined with ethnic and nationalist intolerance presented today an enormous challenge, as it led to gross violations of human rights of children.

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**Specific Groups and Individuals, including Migrant Workers, Minorities, Mass Exoduses and Displaced Persons, and other vulnerable groups and individuals**

The discussions on this agenda item focused on migrant workers, minorities, mass exoduses and displaced persons, and other vulnerable groups and individuals. Violations of the human rights of minorities and migrant workers were alleged in numerous countries, and such abuses were repeatedly cited as the cause of conflicts and as evidence of racism and intolerance. Several speakers stressed that preventive measures that could keep crises from developing were by far the best response to looming difficulties for minorities and other vulnerable groups.

While opening up a general debate on this agenda item, the Commission had before it a report (E/CN.4/2000/81) by the High Commissioner for Human Rights, submitted pursuant to Commission resolution 1998/49, on human rights and mass exoduses. The report highlighted the need for focused attention to the measures required to prevent and redress the human rights violations causing and characterizing mass exoduses, as well as the undertaking of concrete action when such crises occur. There was also a report (E/CN.4/2000/83) by Francis Deng, the Representative of the Secretary General in Internally Displaced Persons. The report concluded, among other things, that the international community must now devote its attention to ensuring that the Guiding Principles developed on displaced persons and mass exoduses are systematically applied; and that “the time has come to go beyond ad hoc responses and to agree on a clear legal and institutional framework for protecting internally displaced persons. Their precarious plight, as highlighted in the country situations in this report and in the unpredictability of national and international responses, underscores the urgency of translating the normative and institutional frameworks created thus far into actual protection on the ground.” Introducing his report Francis Deng said that “apart from physical insecurity and persecution, internally displaced people were often deprived of adequate shelter, food, safe water, medicine and education. The causes of internal displacement,

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internal conflicts, gross violations of human rights, communal violence, and other human made and natural disasters were factors associated with an acute crises of national identity.” However, he elaborated that many Governments and non-State actors in conflict situations lacked either the capacity or the political will to protect or assist their internally displaced populations.

Gabriela Rodriguez, Special Rapporteur on migrant workers, presenting her first provisional report to the Commission, stated that violations of the human rights of migrants occurred in many parts of the world and that their protection was the responsibility of States, civil society, international organizations and non-governmental organizations. She said that the first step in preventing the violations of the human rights of migrants was to inform potential migrants of migration policies and their rights and duties. She stressed that special attention had to be given to victims of trafficking in persons and transnational organized crime, asylum seekers and violence against women migrant workers. “The situation of migrant women should be of particularly concern as they were often exposed to sexual exploitation, violence and abuse and trafficking. These practices led to family disintegration and created situations where women and their children were highly vulnerable,” she added.

Expressing concern about the protection of the rights of men and women migrant workers, Gloria Moreno Fontes Chammartin of the International Labour Office said that the total number of migrants around the world now surpassed 120 million and continued to grow. “While many of the constraints to trade and the free flow of capital had been removed, the doors to labour migration had been progressively shut,” she said. “The recent trends in migration patterns indicated an increasing vulnerability of migrant workers and a deterioration of their working, living and employment conditions.” She brought to Commission’s notice that the ILO had last year started a data base on the working and living conditions of migrant workers with the purpose of compiling information on violations of their human and labour rights.

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Prof. K. Warikoo, Secretary General of the **Himalayan Research and Cultural Foundation** said, the forced displacement of the entire Kashmiri Pandit indigenous minority, who were terrorized, killed and hounded out of Kashmir by Islamist terrorists in the name of Jihad, presented a classic case of ethnic-religious cleansing with long term implications for the composite socio-cultural set up and secular polity in Kashmir. This minority community was agonizing in its eleventh year of displacement. The Pandits had lost their land, property, homes, educational and employment opportunities. They had suffered the break-up of families and of social and cultural ties. Not content with cleansing the Kashmir valley of its ethnic and religious minorities these Islamist terrorists, who were sponsored by Pakistan, had been training their guns on the Hindu minority in Poonch, Rajouri, Udhampur and Doda districts of Jammu province. These terrorists had masterminded mass killings of more than 300 Hindus in several parts of this region, leading to forced exoduses of about 8,000 surviving members of Hindu minority community in search of safer places. The people living near the Line of Control in Jammu had also been bearing the brunt of severe shelling from across the border, forcing 55,000 to flee their villages. Similar had been the fate of the Shia population of Kargil, 32,000 of whom had been displaced as a result of Pakistani shelling.

Gianfranco Rossi of the International Association for Religious Freedom raised the issue of terrible terrorist attacks against the Hindu and Sikh minorities in Kashmir. He said that in Pakistan, the Ahmadis were not allowed to be called Muslims and many had been executed. Paul Beersmans of International Movement for Fraternal Union Among Races and Peoples expressed deep concern about the situation of minorities in Jammu and Kashmir. He said that “the people of Kashmir were suffering most of all because they were victims of the worst form of fundamentalism. At the beginning of the last decade, hundreds of thousands of Pandits had to flee the Kashmir Valley because they were the target of religious cleansing. They were still living in inhuman conditions in camps and waiting for better times to come.” He also pointed to a new dimension which was added recently. Sikhs who had lived peaceably



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in Jammu and Kashmir for years appeared to be the latest target. "In the worst single attack on civilians in a decade of guerrilla war, unidentified gunmen massacred 35 Sikh men in Kashmir, moderate Muslims who were propagating tolerance and peaceful coexistence were also the target of the so-called mujahideen," he added.

Saifuddin Soz of Interfaith International said that after a long spell of violence in Kashmir, people irrespective of origin showed revulsion at violations of human rights in the overall social milieu. The vast majority of the Muslims there no longer watched the violation of rights helplessly. The massacre of 35 innocent members of the Sikh community had been condemned as a heinous crime against humanity. There had been many setbacks to the process of normalization but the spirit of communal harmony was alive. As expected in a democratic State, the Government had held an inquiry and the incidents would be investigated by the National Human Rights Commission. The people of Kashmir would most resolutely work for harmony and human brotherhood against conditions that had been generated by the lack of good governance in the State.

M. Qureshi of Afro-Asian People's Solidarity Organisation said that minorities in many parts of the world were becoming vulnerable groups whose human rights were violated. One such case was in Pakistan. During the Government of Zia-ul-Haq, a programme of Islamisation was given concrete shape. The Ulema were given enormous ideological leverage over television, educational institutions and valuable Government property. The Ulema, in conjunction with the ruling group, saw to it that their version of Sharia prohibitions and penalties were turned into law. Thus, since 1974, persons accused of committing blasphemy had often been arrested without warrant and imprisoned for many years. Non-Muslim prisoners who had been sentenced to death were not allowed the normal relief available through Pakistan's criminal procedure code. Nor could they have advocates to plead their case from among the members of their own communities. Subjected to social isolation and legal apartheid, minorities felt extremely alienated. Attacks on Ahmediyas, Hindus and Christians were rampant. Finally, no minority person could aspire to the highest office of the land.

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M.A. Siddiqui of Asian Buddhist Conference for Peace said the Working Group on Minorities had placed emphasis on the importance of helping each minority group maintain its identity and character. The Mohajirs were the largest ethno-linguistic minority in Pakistan and were subjected to repression, discrimination and isolation in the urban centers of Sindh. The Mohajirs had become victims of willful disregard of human rights norms because of the arrogance and hegemony of the ruling group of Punjab. The Government of Pakistan was urged to end its policy of repression, oppression and persecution against the Mohajir nation and the Sindhi nation. Pakistan should withdraw its Punjabi forces from the region and return to true democracy in letter and spirit. It should end the unlawful occupation of Sindh and resolve the Sindh issue through meaningful and sincere dialogue in democratic process.

Having covered a total of 69 meetings the 56<sup>th</sup> session of the UNCHR concluded on 28 April 2000. At the last meeting, concluding remarks were made by, among others, Mary Robinson, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and Shambhu Ram Simkhada, the Chairperson of this session. It was also at the last meeting that the Commission took note of the draft agenda for its 57<sup>th</sup> session. Besides, the Commission considered the draft report on the work of its 56<sup>th</sup> session as contained in documents E/CN.4/2000/L.10 and Add. 1-17 and E/CN.4/2000/L.11 and Add. 1-9. Finally, the draft report was adopted *ad referendum*, and the Rapporteur was entrusted with the task of its finalisation.

# **MAINAM NURSERY**

**NAMCHI, SIKKIM**

***FOR VARIETIES OF ORCHID  
PLANTS, CUT FLOWERS AND  
OTHER RARE FLOWERS OF THE  
EASTERN HIMALAYAS***

**Amerallies, Azealia,  
Anthorium, Carnatian, Eucarius**

Proprietor: Mrs. Tikamaya Chamling

**Phone: 03592-63748**

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## **HUMAN RIGHTS AND INSURGENCY: THE NORTH-EAST INDIA**

*Edited by Ranju R. Dhamala and Sukalpa Bhattacharjee.*

Shipra Publications, Delhi, 2002, 196 pp.. Rs. 400.

Engulfed by insurgency for nearly five decades, the North East region of India has experienced the worst kind of unrest that has led to socio-economic and political instability there. Insurgency in the North East India has been the subject of several studies. This edited volume examines insurgency in the North East from the human rights perspective. The book provides an insight into the politics of tension being felt in the North East region due to insurgency and counter-insurgency moves. The book is divided into three parts: (a) Conceptualising Human Rights, (b) Insurgency and Polity, and (c) Insurgency, Human Rights: Towards a Counter Discourse. Besides, there is an introductory chapter which provides a conceptual framework about human rights and the role of state as the guarantor of human rights and freedom.

Part I of this book contains three essays, almost all of them focusing on human rights education. Two essays *Human Rights and Low Intensity: Conflicts in India* by S.N. Bhargava and *Human Rights: Safeguards and Violations* by Ranju R. Dhamala discuss the Armed Forces Special Powers Act of 1958 and call for spreading the human rights education both among the army personnel as well as the people. The third essay *Human Rights Education: An Integrated Approach* by N.B. Biswas suggests that human rights education should constitute one of the essential components of school curriculum. Biswas lays special emphasis on value education which would help in the character formation of the young people and also make them aware of the concept and practices of human rights.

Part II which includes five papers, deals with the situation as a result of continuing insurgency in the North East and suggests ways to tackle it. In his paper *Insurgency in the North East: Improving Awareness*, Trigunesh Mukherjee concludes that “selfish interests seem to be now ruling insurgents’ policies” and, therefore, “it is important to analyse who benefits from continuing insurgency.” According to him, “Right to protest is well accepted but right of any motley group to usurp authority must be put down severely.” While Sajal Nag in his paper

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*State Atrocities as History* discusses counter insurgency operations and the role of army, Abhik Gupta in his paper *Social Tension in North East India* provides an ecological perspective to the insurgency which has led to the rapid depletion of resources resulting in stiff resource-competition among various groups. Both Chinmoy Kanti Biswas' paper *Insurgency and the Hill Tribes of North East India* as well as Tanmay Bhattacharjee's *Insurgency in North Cachar Hills* highlight the negative impact of insurgency on the hill people in the socio cultural context. They propose several steps for solving the problem by the government. Since the disgruntled youth have been recruited and used by different insurgent outfits, there is need to empower them taking into account the local socio-cultural milieu.

Part III includes five essays addressing issues concerning the human rights violations. Highlighting the problem of minority rights in North East India, Rajesh Dev in his paper *Universalism and Relativism in Human Rights* reflects upon the gap between the principles and practices of human rights as well as between universalism and particularism. Sukalpa Bhattacharjee in her paper *State, Insurgency and (Wo)man's Human Rights* examines the cultural construction of gender in an ethnic community through two case studies from the North East India. *Nations from Below and Rebel Consciousness* is the theme of Prasenjit Biswas' paper in which he gives a perspective on ethnic and communitarian resistance, a subject which he calls as the "new subaltern". *Human Rights and Nationalised Civilisations* by B.S. Butola concludes that realization of human and civil rights within the nationalized civilization is paradoxical and that the nation in the first and the last instance is power in absolute. Goutam Biswas in his paper *Rights Consciousness and the Other: A Parapolitical Approach* maintains that the concept of human rights demands a fresh heed from Gandhian thought.

In sum, one would realize after going through this book that it may serve as a useful tool for both the academics as well as activists who are interested in the subject. The book stresses that "the politics of tension can be resolved by creating a space for dialogue among diverse ethnic and cultural groups for the resolution of human rights".

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**HIMALAYAN AND CENTRAL ASIAN STUDIES** is a quarterly Journal published by the Himalayan Research and Cultural Foundation, which is a non-governmental, non-profit research, cultural and development facilitative organisation. The Journal is devoted to the study of various issues pertaining to the Himalayan and trans-Himalayan region in South and Central Asia or parts thereof, connected with its environment, resources, history, art and culture, language and literature, demography, social structures, communication, tourism, regional development, governance, human rights, geopolitics etc.

While the principal concern of the Journal will be on its focal area, i.e. from Afghanistan to Myanmar including the Central Asian states of Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, China, Mongolia, Nepal, Bhutan and the Indian Himalayan states of Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Sikkim, Uttarakhand and North East states; papers with a broad sweep addressing environmental, social, cultural, economic, geopolitical and human rights issues are also welcomed.

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