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Hill Politics in Northeast India

S K Chaube

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CHAUBE: HILL POLITICS IN NORTHEAST INDIA

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Preface to the Updated Edition

When this book was published twenty-six years ago the primary aim was to present, in general, the social and political history of northeast India and, in particular, of the hill areas—up to the time of the reorganisation of the region. Northeast India still remains mainly a conglomerate of seven political units. However, the sociopolitical dynamics of the region have thrown up some new elements.

When the book was published, some observers noted that it had regarded secessionist violence in northeast India as transient. Indeed, it did not share the alarmist concern of the period about the fate of the region. It was, rather, based on the belief that democracy itself is a great unifier as it instils confidence among marginal social groups and cements national unity. On the other hand, the book was by no means a part of the neo-radical celebration of ethnic autonomy. For, in my view, both nationalism and ethnic particularism are ascriptive, arbitrary and *ad hoc*.

The book's focus was on the contradiction/competition between the traditional chiefs making use of the tribals' love for pristine freedom to preserve their vested interests against the republican wave in India, and a new elite – the Christianised literati – claiming the leadership of a democratically constituted society that would at the same time retain its autonomy.

The situation today has grown complex; the traditional chiefs have been largely sidelined and partly accommodated in the new structure of power. Statehood, the creation of job opportunities

and some developmental activity have only partly satisfied the aspirations of the hill people, particularly of the rapidly increasing numbers of educated youth. Frustration has pushed a section of them to the politics of violence, not necessarily secessionist. Violence has become endemic to northeast Indian politics.

My framework, incidentally, rejects the description of the theme of this volume as 'tribal political'. It also avoids a mechanical quest for production relations for, except in the Bhoi area of the Khasi hills (Meghalaya), no production relation has actually been established though aggrandisement of private property at the cost of the community and the state is rampant.

In this edition I have added a postscript which is an assessment of the situation in the 1990s. I have replaced the tables on the appendix with updated ones and incorporated minor corrections in the text. The text including old names and spellings of the original edition has been retained here.

Preface to the First Edition

This volume is the product of a labour of love that developed during nearly 10 years of the author's working life in northeast India. The burden of his commitment became all the more heavy because of the feeling that there is a sad lack of understanding, in the rest of the country, of the political turmoil in northeast India. The primary purpose, therefore, was to present the maximum amount of 'facts' that one could gather about a problem region of India.

There is also an attempt to interpret the facts very tentatively. The problem has been set in the perspective of the theory of nation-building. Independent India inherited a territorial boundary that had been fixed by the exigencies of an alien imperialistic administrations and inevitably cut across many ethnic consolidations. The problem was intensified by a diffusionist modernizing wave that had practically no relation with the prevailing mode of production and was bound to create a cultural crisis.

One of the demands of modernism is that for territorial loyalty which passes for 'nationalism' and seeks to substitute our primordial loyalties to clan, tribe,caste,race,community and even language. In its heightened form the contradiction results in so-called disloyality to the hitherto unfamiliar values of nation-state.

Modern territorial nationalism cannot be properly understood out of context. In Europe it was the product of industrial revolution that demolished the ethnic barriers of peoples within

the jurisdictions of soverign States. The problem of the developing countries like India is that they inherited the State system from their colonial rulers without the benefit of industrialization. In the most backward areas of such countries the problem becomes all the more acute. And in the case of India, as many of those backward areas lie in the border regions, they are susceptible to the changing waves of international relations. The resulting instability is almost bound to generate exaggerated suspicions about such ethnic minorities.

It is, however, frequently forgotten that ethnic minorities are as much subject to social laws as the majority in a state. Aspirations of ethnic groups are generally determined by the aspirations of the dominant section within such community. But, as the hegemony of any section is unlikely to go unchallenged, aggregation of social goals for any community is a difficult task. It is, at the same time, more than possible that the dominant section of any minority or backward community will set its view on a position favourably comparable to that of the stronger neighbours. The strategy ranges from conciliatory techniques (like subordinate alliance, clientilism and differential migration) to alienation (like secession and civil war). The demand for 'autonomy' offers a fairly elastic middle-order choice that suits the needs of an emerging middle-class in as much as the demands does not militate against national authority but accords them a convenient bargaining position. The elasticity of the concept, however, permits a great deal of misunderstanding. The present volume, it is hoped, will help removing some of these misunderstandings in relation to a sensitive trouble-torn region of India.

The argument of this volume is that the 'tribal' situation in northeast India cannot be properly understood except by viewing it in its historical perspective. Although the British policy with regard to the hill people was one of least interference, the impact of administration and its corollary, the church,significantly corroded their internal system of authority and exposed them to territorial power. A modernistic middle class was its offshoot. The tradition-modernism antithesis was of course rooted in deeper conflicts of interest and, whereas the traditional leaders adopted the romantic reactionary slogan of primordial freedom of the tribes, the new elite clashed with them headlong.

This contradiction was synthesized in the demands for 'regional' autonomy within the framework of a nation-state. The constitutional provision of the Sixth Schedule, evolved in 1950, proved inadequate for the accommodation of such aspirations.

Although the method of this study is basically political, author has made use of history, geography and sociology. Great debt is acknowledged to the numerous ethnographical publications on the peoples of the area since the end of the last century. He has drawn mainly from published materials and official records. But those scattered pieces could not be tied up except through hundreds of interviews with the living personalities who have shaped the political movements in the hills. The views expressed are, needless to say, author's own.

Lastly, author personally considers the use of the terms like 'tribe', Christian', 'Hindu' unfortunate but unavoidable in a work like this. Utmost care has, therefore, been taken to restrict the use of such terms to the denotation of particular cultural conditions. In no way are they associated with ethnic categories.

Acknowledgement is due to virtually innumerable people who have helped author to weave together the pieces of literary material, available at official and personal archives, by submitting themselves to scarching interviews. It is only hoped that this volume will not hurt them in any way. Responsibility for all observations is author's. The book was seen through the press after the author joined Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta, and a helping hand in reading the proof was lent by author's colleague, Dr Partha Chatterjee.

Introduction

Three valleys, surrounded by and interspersed with a number of mountain ranges, constitute the sensitive region known as northeastern India, which could be more appropriately described as eastern India. The 'blue hills'[1] comprised by the eastern Himalayas on the north, the Naga hills on the east, the Mizo and Tripura hills on the south and the Shillong plateau (named in the thirties by the Indian geographer, S. P. Chatterji, as Meghalaya) on the west, form almost completely natural boundaries of the Brahmaputra valley, the heartland of Assam. The district of Cachar lying beyond the Shillong plateau is geographically, historically and ethnically an extension of Gangetic Bengal, washed by the Barak river, and is separated from the Brahmaputra valley by the Shillong plateau. Between the Naga hills and the Chin hills (of Burma) is situated the Imphal valley (the Manipur plains) with an altitude of about 3000 feet.

For several centuries the valleys and hills of northeastern India have been exposed to waves of invasion and migration. 'The province of Assam at the far northeastern corner of India is a museum of nationalities', wrote J. B. Fuller in 1909.[2] Of these, the Garo living in the western part of the Meghalaya plateau have a legend of having migrated from the northwest, that is, the southern side of central Tibet.[3] The Khasi, at least some of them, claim to have migrated from southeast Asia, part

of their route probably passing through Burma.[4] The Kuki and the Chin inhabiting the southern hills of Manipur, Tripura, and most of the Mizo hills are supposed to be from southern China.[5] They are also believed to have contributed to the basic linguistic strain of the Meithei who inhabit the Manipur valley.[6] The Naga, settled in Nagaland and the northern hills of Manipur, and some of the groups in the northeast frontier are mostly assumed to be immigrants from eastern Tibet, whereas most of the inhabitants of the sub-Himalayan and *cis*-Himalayan areas trace their origin directly from southern Tibet.[7]

This is only a very generalised picture. For none of these ethnic groups, due to their long journeys of migration, can claim racial purity. Speculations about their migrations have been widely made and widely contradicted.[8] The salient obstacles posed by stray cultural similarities spotted at random between apparently unrelated groups such as the Garo and the Ao Naga,[9] the Sema and the Kuki,[10]amid hosts of differences of great magnitude, come in the way of drawing a clear picture. There is still a lack of adequacy in the explanation of the different levels of culture and social systems. The matriliny prevalent among the Garo, the Khasi and the Lalung living on the eastern slopes of the Khasi hills and certain small groups like the Purum scattered in Manipur, and the wavy hair of some Angamis are yet puzzles for social and physical anthropologists. The predominantly Austric language of the Khasi has inspired several speculations among philologists.

The religious composition is no less complex. Brahminism reached the valley of Manipur probably in the fifteenth century to which some Manipur Brahmins trace their settlement.[11] A temple of Vishnu at Bishenpur (Vishnupur) on an ancient route between the Manipur and Barak valleys is claimed to be as old as that. Vaishnavism reached the Nocte Nagas of Tirap (the southern district of Arunachal) by the eighteenth century through the efforts of the followers of Sankara Deva of Assam. It even touched the fringe of the Khasi and the Garo hills. The Chakma of the Chittagong hills, a section of whom are now living in the Lushai hills, profess Buddhism. Several sections of the people of northwestern and northern Arunachal belong to the same school of Buddhism as prevails in Tibet. Since the nineteenth century Christianity started spreading fast in the Garo, Khasi,

Mizo (Lushai) and Naga hills and is now the religion of about half the total population. Indigenous faiths persist among the rest.

Advent of British Power

This 'tessellated pavement' was brought under British rule, according to the official British view, because of 'pressing political necessity'.[12] As early as 1869, Alexander Mackenzie outlined what seemed to be the 'manifest destiny' of the British in northeast India. 'Fate seems determined to prove that there shall be no rest for the English in India till they stand forth as the Governors or advisers of each tribe and people in the land.'[13]

Fate had smiled on the East India Company at Plassey. In 1760 the Company annexed the Chittagong Hill Tract from the Nawab of Bengal. In 1761 the combined armed forces of the Company and the Nawab assaulted Tripura. Most of the plains territories of the Tripura king were registered as his *zamindari* (estate) while the hills and a patch of plainsland were left in the occupation of the king as Independent Tipperah or 'Hill Tipperah'. In 1762 Captain Verelst led three companies of sepoys (armed Indian constables) towards Manipur to fight the Burmese and established contact with the Chinese traders there,[14] but had to return from Cachar after a year. In 1765 the Company acquired the *dewani* (revenue collecting authority) of Bengal and its power reached the borders of Sikkim, Bhutan, Cooch Behar, Assam and Arrakan, besides the Garo and Khasi hills.[15]

'When Hastings began his administration of Bengal, in April 1772, the opening of some sort of commercial and diplomatic relations with Tibet had already become an object of Company policy.'[16] The Bhutanese raid on Cooch Behar in that year necessitated British assistance to Cooch Behar. The aggression was repelled and a pacification raid planned on Bhutan when the Tashi (Panchen) Lama, then regent of Tibet, intervened on the side of Bhutan. George Bogle was sent to Bhutan in 1774 with instructions 'to open a mutual and equal communication of trade between the inhabitants of Bhutan and Bengal'.[17] He went as far as Shigatse in Tibet, and established a close friendship with the Tashi Lama 'away from the centre of Chinese influence in Lhasa', but the mission bore no immediate fruit. In 1780 the

Tashi Lama died in Peking, and in 1781 Bogle died in Calcutta. In 1783 Captain Turner was sent to Bhutan. Through a series of treaties signed in 1780, 1784 and 1787, the districts of Falakata–Ambari and Jalpesh were transferred to Bhutan. In 1792 Bhutan's claim over Bijni was conceded, but occasional conflicts continued over the question of the tributes Bhutan was liable to pay for the conceded territories.

The Bhutan episode furnished the Company with the information about Assam trade, which the board of directors had been looking for. The Company was interested in further knowledge about the trade and in 1774 appointed Hugh Baillie as the Company's agent at Goalpara, where he had been an agent of Clive's Society of Trade. Britain's territorial interest too was directed towards the east, along with the commercial. In 1774 Captain Henniker made a punitive raid on the plains territories of the Jaintia kingdom bordering Sylhet, and though the causes were not clear even to Captain R. B. Pemberton,[18] realised fines from the raja. In 1789 the Company intervened in the southern side of the Garo foothills against the oppressive control of the *chaudhuries* (landlords) of Mymensingh. The first Garo chief to enter into a 'treaty' with the Company and to be recognised as a *zamindar* of his area was Renghta.[19]

The minutes of Cornwallis (3 October 1792) show that the Company's first intervention in Assam was in 1792, at the request of the king of Assam and 'for the commercial advantages that Bengal may obtain' by a friendly and open intercourse with that country.[20] Captain Welsh, the commander of the expedition, made a detailed report on the prospects of trade in Assam and hoped that 'a communication with the neighbouring nations might be rendered beneficial to commerce, with proper encouragement'.[21] Although Welsh disfavoured British withdrawal[22] in view of domestic opposition, the Company recalled him in 1794. This 'special' relationship with Assam, till 1826 at any rate, was quite congenial to their flourishing trade.

Annexations

Meanwhile, in December 1812 David Scott, the 'energetic' frontierman of the Company, was appointed judge and magistrate

of Rangpur, the northeastern district of Bengal. In 1813, the East India Company lost its monopoly over Indian trade. A greater trading contact with China, provided by the Sea of Canton, became an imperative necessity. The search for additional trade in Assam was a part of this need. The Gurkha war of 1814–16 opened western Tibet through the acquisition of new territories to the west of Nepal, and the emphasis on Bhutan for a route to Tibet was weakened for a while. But the eastward expansion continued. In September 1816, Scott was appointed as the Governor-General's Agent to the North East Frontier in addition to his post as joint magistrate of Rangpur and commissioner of Cooch Behar, with the duty of exercising 'a general control and superintendence over political relations and intercourse with the petty states in that quarter' including Sikkim, Bhutan, Tibet, Cooch Behar, Bijni, Assam, Cachar, Manipur and Jaintia.[23]

While Scott was engaged in bringing the cotton producing Garo[24] under British authority, a great opportunity opened up in Assam and Manipur with the beginning of internecine conflicts in the royal families of Assam and Manipur, Burmese intervention in these conflicts, and the worsening of Anglo-Burmese relations. The military defeat of Burma and the signing of the Treaty of Yandabo in 1826 led to the renunciation of Burma's claims on the territories of Assam, Manipur and their neighbourhood as well as the cession of Tenasserim and Arrakan to the British. According to the official British interpretation, the Assam hills west of the Patkoi range of mountains came under British possession by virtue of the treaty.[25] In 1852 lower Burma was annexed.[26] In 1862 the ceded territories of Burma were constituted into a chief commissioner's province. On 1 January 1886, upper Burma was annexed to it.

In 1826 David Scott was appointed as senior commissioner of Assam in addition to his existing role. A junior commissioner was posted for upper Assam. Scott's advice for restoration of upper Assam to a subordinate monarchy, with a view to pacifying the Assamese gentry, was accepted by the Supreme Government after a series of revolts had taken place and the position of the East India Company had become shaky in England. In 1833 Prince Purandar Singh was installed but was replaced in 1838 on a vague charge of 'mal-administration'. In 1842

Sadiya and the Muttock territory (Dibrugarh) also were annexed, extending direct British rule over the entire Brahmaputra valley. The Cachar plain was annexed in 1832 and its northern hills in two instalments, in 1839 and 1854. Manipur, however, was not annexed; it was given the charge of controlling the western Nagas.

In the wake of the Burmese attack, the British extended 'protection' to the Jaintia king and secured, from the *siem* (chief) of Nongkhlow, Tirot Singh, permission for the construction of a sanatorium and a road from Sylhet to Kamrup through his territory. But later Tirot Singh grew suspicious of the British intention. He was joined in his resistance to the penetration by some other Khasi chiefs in 1829, but was crushed in 1833, two years after Scott's death. The Khasi chiefs had to enter into subordinate alliances with the British government and in all surrendered 31 villages to the British. In 1835 the Jaintia king was removed and his territory merged with British India. The Khasi chiefships were reduced to 25 in number under four kinds of chiefs : *siem, wahadadar, sirdar* and *lyngdoh*.[27]

In 1837 Pemberton was sent to Bhutan 'to settle terms for commercial intercourse between British India and Bhootan and, if possible, to effect an adjustment of the tributes payable for the *dwars*', that is, the passes being used for trade with Bhutan.[28] The mission achieved little success. In 1841 the Assam duars were attached against an annual payment of Rs 10,000 to Bhutan. In 1863 the Bengal duars were also attached against a total payment of Rs 25,000 per annum. In November 1854, a full-scale military assault was made against Bhutan, forcing its king to sign the Treaty of Sinchula.[29]

Lure of the Hills

Once the organised states in the region were brought under British control, the subordination of the turbulent hill people was a matter of time. Cotton, minerals, wild rubber and wild tea held out prospects for profit from the hills. Shortly after 1826, exploration for coal started in Assam. Though petroleum was discovered, it was not until 1865 that experimental drilling was initiated. (Shortly after that, Assam became a chief

commissioner's province.) Tea received the most immediate attention. By 1830 uncertainty appeared in the East India Company's trade with China, the supplier of tea. Though, as early as 1778 the discovery of indigenous tea was reported from the Singpho area, and during the Anglo-Burmese war a Scottish soldier, Robert Bruce, learnt its preparation from a Singpho chief, tea plantation was planned only after the annexation of upper Assam in 1838. Meanwhile, a bid to import tea seeds from China was unsuccessful but a few Chinese plantation workers who reached Assam were employed under Charles Bruce, brother of Robert Bruce, to develop tea plants. In 1838 Assam tea was opened for private competition and Bruce was sacked.[30] The spread of the tea gardens from the middle of the nineteenth century strengthened the case for a 'forward policy' on the hills.

In the eastern foothills below the Patkoi, as early as 1825, Captain Neufville had met the mutually hostile Khampti (Hkampti), Singpho (Jingphaw), Miri, Muttock and the 'peaceably inclined' eastern Naga.[31] But the area was not completely subordinated until 1843 when the last batch of rebel Khamptis surrendered. To the west of the region, south of the plains of Nowgong, lived the Mikir, in virtual serfdom to the Assamese aristocracy, and behind them the turbulent Rengma (Naga). The former surrendered in 1838, the latter ten years later. In 1839 a 'forward policy' was initiated in the entire central and western Naga belt. The carrot and the stick were alternately used until 1849, when a major flare-up in the Naga hills made the government fall back. But in 1853, a junior assistant commissioner was stationed at Asalu, in the north Cachar hills bordering the Angami country. As a foil to those intransigent Nagas, several Kukis were settled in north Cachar with arms and rent-free land,[32] thus making use of the traditional Kuki–Naga feud for political purposes. The entire Naga hills up to the Burma border however, were not brought under effective administration till the end of British rule in India.

It is necessary to note that until the British advent, the notion of territorial or political authority was unknown in the hills. Thus, the frontier between the sub-Himalayan and *cis*-Himalayan British territory and Tibet was fixed only with the drawing of the McMahon Line in 1914. To the south of the Surma valley, the Chin–Lushai hills, 'a tract of most intricate

hill ranges and impenetrable cane-brakes' was *terra incognita* before 1839.[33] Pemberton reported that the Lushai country east of Tripura had once been under the control of the Tripura ruler.[34] But Mackenzie held that Tripura's authority over the Lushai had never been settled or absolute.[35] Probably, depending upon the feuds, the fluctuating strength and the mobility of the hill people, the rulers of Tripura, Cachar, Manipur and Burma controlled parts of the region from time to time. Consequently, the British advance on the hills was from all these sides. In 1777, for the first time a friendly chief in the Chittagong Hill Tract sought British assistance against Kuki raids. Successive raids on the gardens, and punitive measures since 1869 led to the Lushai expeditions of 1871–72 and 1889 after which the hills were brought under rule.

Thus the hill areas of northeast India entered the age of politics.

Notes and References

1 Acknowledgment to Hem Barua, *The Red River and the Blue Hills*, Gauhati, 1956.

2 Fuller's 'Introduction' written for Major A. Playfair, *The Garos*, London, 1909, p. xiii.

3 Playfair, op. cit., pp. 10–16.

4 H. Bareh, *The History and Culture of the Khasi People*, Shillong, 1967, p. 35; S. K. Chatterjee, *Kirata-Jana-Kriti*, Calcutta, 1956, p. 13; P. R. T. Gurdon, *The Khasis*, London, 1907, pp. 11–12.

5 Anthony Gilchrist McCall, *Lushai Chrysalis*, London, 1949, p. 26; A. W. Davis, *Gazetteer of North Lushai Hills*, Shillong, 1894, pp. 4–7.

It is necessary to note that the northern hills of Manipur are inhabited by the Naga whereas the western and the southern hills are inhabited by the Kuki–Chin. Vide T. C. Hodson, *The Naga Tribes of Manipur*, London, 1911, p. 1.

6 G. A. Grierson, in his *Report on the Linguistic Survey of India* (Calcutta, 1904, vol. iii, part iii, pp. 6–8) insisted on a connection between the Kuki–Chin, the Meithei, the Bodo and the Naga languages, all belonging to the Tibeto-Burman family,

but was inclined to regard Meithei in the broad category of Kuki–Chin languages.

7 Sachin Roy (*Aspects of Padam–Minyong Culture*, Shillong 1964, p. 259) finds two different cultural strains in the north-western and the rest of the territory formerly known as NEFA—respectively Tibetan and trans-Brahmaputran, that is, Naga.

8 J. H. Hutton has speculated a great deal about the routes of migration of the Naga and the Kuki–Chin. He approved of Grierson's hypothesis about the Naga's link with the second wave of emigration 'from the traditional cradle of the Indo-Chinese races of North-Western China' but points out their 'strong cultural affinities' with the natives of Burma and the Philippines without properly linking the points, vide Hutton, *The Angami Nagas*, London, 1921, pp. 6–8. The Kuki, according to Hutton, migrated almost in historic times down the valley of Chindwin from its source to the Bay of Bengal, 'continuously throwing off branches of their race westward', vide his 'Introduction' written for N. E. Parry, *The Lakhers*, London, 1932, p. xvi. E. R. Leach, who worked among the Kachin, described these migration theories as 'preposterous'.

9 Playfair, op. cit., p. 22.

10 Hutton in Parry's *The Lakhers*.

11 T. C. Hodson, *The Meitheis*, London, 1908, p. 95.

12 A. C. Banerjee, *The Eastern Frontier of British India, 1784–1826*, Calcutta, 1946, second edition, p. 12.

13 Alexander Mackenzie, *Memorandum on the North-East Frontier*, 1869, quoted in his *History of the Relations of the Government with the Hills Tribes of the North-East Frontier of Bengal*, Calcutta, 1884, p. 369.

14 Ibid., p. 35.

15 *Report on Indian Constitutional Reform*, London, 1918, p. 25.

16 Alistair Lamb, *Britain and Chinese Central Asia—Road to Lhasa, 1767–1905*, London, 1960, p. 8.

17 Quoted by Francis Younghusband, *India and Tibet*, London, 1910, p. 9.

18 Subsection 2 of section 2 of R. B. Pemberton, *Report on the Eastern Frontier*, Calcutta, 1835.

19 Mackenzie, op. cit. p. 247.

20 S. K. Bhuyan, *Anglo-Assamese Relations, 1771 to 1826*, Gauhati, 1949, p. 301.

21 Quoted by Mackenzie, op. cit., p. 389.

22 Ibid., p. 393. Pemberton (p. 128) also stressed the prospect.

23 Bhuyan, op. cit., p. 458.

24 The importance attached to Garo cotton is stressed even in the *Administrative Report of Bengal, 1872–73*, quoted in Mackenzie, op. cit, p. 266.

25 C. U. Aitchison, *A Collection of Treaties, Engagements and Sanads Relating to India and the Neighbouring Countries*, Calcutta, third edition, 1892, vol. I, pp. 198 and 291.

26 As early as 1835, Burma's importance was recognised by the British when Captain R. B. Pemberton visited the eastern frontier of Bengal seeking:

> In the first place, to give a general description of the great chain of mountains...
>
> Secondly, to describe the nature of the passes and countries by which this mountain-chain has been penetrated...
>
> Thirdly, to describe the countries extending east from the banks of the Ningthee river to the frontiers of China...
>
> Fourthly, to endeavour to estimate the comparative value of the different passes from the British territories into Ava (Northern Burma) and to offer such suggestions as may appear likely to facilitate the rendering to them either lines of commercial intercourse or military operations. And,
>
> Fifthly, to describe the countries of Cachar, Jynteeah and Cossyah hills which have been recently annexed to the British Indian dominion' (Preface to Pemberton's Report).

27 Mackenzie, op. cit., pp. 237–8.

28 Ibid., p. 11.

29 According to Article 2 of the Treaty of Sinchula, 'the whole tract known as the 18 Dooars bordering on the districts of Rungpur, Cooch Behar and Assam together with the hill country on the left bank of the Teesta up to such point as may be determined by the British Commissioner appointed for the purpose was transferred from Bhutan'. The adjustment of boundary with Bhutan was not completed until 1951, when independent India transferred some territories to Bhutan by the Assam (Alteration of Boundaries) Act of 1951. The transferred territory comprised 32.81 square miles 'lying to the South of Bhutan' within 26°45' and 27° North Latitude and 91°15' and 91°45' East Longitude.

30 J. M. Scott, *The Tea Story*, London, 1964.

31 Mackenzie, op. cit., p. 88.

32 Ibid., p. 146.

33 Robert Reid, *History of the Frontier Areas Bordering on Assam from 1883–1941*, Shillong, 1942, p. 3, quoting D. R. Lyall, Commissioner, Chittagong Division.

34 A. S. Reid, *Chin–Lushai Land*, London, 1893, p. 1.

35 Mackenzie, op. cit., p. 286.

In this edition of *Hill Politics in Northeast India* Professor Chaube has updated the story of political evolution of the hills of northeast India highlighting the emergence of autonomies in the region. Since the middle of the nineteenth century the region has grown from ethnocentric tribal organisations to territorial autonomy structures through a profound process of change in all spheres of life and society led by an educated and sophisticated middle class. Notwithstanding the incidence of violence and some of the secessionist overtones, the book is optimistic about the future. Individually, each turbulence is transient and can be seen as a part of an overall trend towards democratic politics.

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