

# Ethno-Social Mobility in North East India

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IN  
NORTH EAST INDIA**

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## MESSAGE

### WORKING FOR PEACE

*Archbishop Thomas Menamparampil, SDB*

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Many have asked me over the years to put into writing what I remembered of our common effort at Kokrajhar for the re-establishment of peace after the Bodo-Adivasi clash of 1996. I am sure I have forgotten many things, but I can see the importance of recording something for the benefit of posterity. Once I wrote an article describing more the lessons I learnt from our reconciliation efforts than details of events that took place, though everything you say in this regard will always remain an incomplete tale.

I was in Bangalore in May 1996 working on a *Strategic Plan for Youth* animators along with the CBCI commission for youth when I received a phone-call from Fr. Lukose informing me that there were several violent incidents in the area of Soraibil and that houses were burnt in many *Adivasi* villages in the neighbourhood. As I did not understand the seriousness of the situation, and since I was very much involved in drafting the document, I asked him to do what was possible for the moment until I would return after a few days. He phoned again to tell me that the situation was really serious and that my presence was required in order to make any worthwhile decision in response to the problem. Reluctantly, I took leave of my colleagues who were working

on a document for youth, and flew back to Guwahati. Only on reaching Guwahati did I realize how terrible the tragedy was and how entire villages had been wiped out, and that hundreds of people had died. The first thing I did was to rush to Soraibil itself. A veritable war was going on there.

The news grew more and more alarming as we approached Soraibil. People were crowding into the field near the market for security. The army was there, but they had no orders to act. A new Government had taken over that had promised to send the army out of Assam the day they took over the reins of affairs. There was a change of government also at Delhi and leaders were busy with ministry-making, and no one had time for a corner of Assam where some poor people had got into trouble.

Next day, as I was on my way back to Gossaigaon and Guwahati, I stopped at Sapkata field. The *maidan* was already covered with shacks. Crowds of *Adivasis* and Santals were moving in to stay together and seek protection from each others' presence. They brought with them only a few things that they could carry and looked worried and helpless. I stopped with them for a while, and speedily a group of Catholics gathered to greet me. At that given moment I did not know what I should do or what I should say. Mentally, I was assessing the situation wondering what we could do really to help. The problem seemed too massive, and we had never handled a situation of this nature and this scale earlier. We needed to reflect some more time before we could meaningfully get involved with a measure of self-confidence. Stopping at Gossaigaon, we discussed with the fathers what we could do. There were no ready solutions in anyone's mind. Not even the State government seemed equipped to handle the situation, how could we ever step in confidently?

As we were on the way back to Guwahati, we could see that the conflict was spreading westwards. Will it reach the end of Assam and engulf the entire valley? Our hearts sank to think of what could possibly happen if the conflict did not stop somewhere. We began to hear of more and more camps spontaneously coming up in different parts of the conflict area where thousands rushed to seek shelter putting

up shabby thatch or plastic roof over their heads. Gradually there were some 42 of them, the crowds in some camps like the one at Salakati numbering over 20,000. There were similar ones at Runikatta, Kochugaon, Sapkata and other places. Back at Guwahati we were mobilizing prayers, seeking advice, but very few were able to take in the massive nature of the problem. There was more a sense of helplessness than of confidence in our ability to offer some manner of help of any significance. I exhorted the parishes to try to attempt some assistance in the best way they could. I heard Bengtol was trying to help the crowds in the Runikatta camp, and that the sisters of Nazareth Hospital had made a short visit to them with medical assistance. As the Nazareth teams were on the way to Shillong, they stopped at the Archbishop's House to share for a while their experiences. The situation in the camps was fast deteriorating. Hygienic conditions were abominably low. Sickesses were spreading. Government medical services had not yet arrived. Someone concluded the evaluation in this manner: 'Most of the children are sick, and all of them will die'. Those words summed up the general impression. It was this statement that seemed to hit me in the jaw and woke me up. Can we allow this to happen? Even if I am unable to do anything, should I not go and at least die with them?' Such was my thought.

Finally I was able to gather a handful of seminarians on holidays and move to Bongaigaon in early June to attempt the impossible. What we could do, we were not sure. Whether it was safe for these young people to move from camp to camp or offer services going into the camps, we were not sure. Whether the government would allow us to intervene directly, we were not sure. Whether we could be effective, whether our work would be appreciated, whether it would serve a purpose in the context of such a mighty disaster, we were uncertain. But we said, 'we will attempt the impossible'. We settled in St. Aloysius Seminary.

Next day we went into the Salakati camp with over twenty-thousand people in wretched conditions. We were shocked beyond words. We were almost in tears. We had never seen human misery descending to such depths. How

could we help these people in total misery, that was our chief concern from now. But we too were helpless. The people needed food, medicine, clothes, and shelter. We had almost nothing. Partly, the government also had been caught unawares, but mainly, the governments at the State level and at the Centre were busy politicking, in the midst of power-struggle, ministry making, and key appointments. We had nothing with us ourselves. Fortunately, we had with us an expert nurse, who had brought with her some medicines. I exhorted the other brothers to go round the camp, meet individuals, families and groups, listen to their woes, and encourage them to hold on with patience till better days would come.

One thing I decided to do from the beginning was that we would work in collaboration with other groups in the field and refuse to compete even if someone was determined to do so. But how happy we were to learn that the other churches' approach to this idea was equally warm. As we began moving to the camps day after day, we met the church leaders and other relief workers on the road; we kept sharing what we were trying to do, what we had succeeded in doing, what we thought we ought to do. We agreed to collaborate at every level. A little later, we agreed to work together even more closely, sometimes moving to the camp in the same vehicles, distributing relief material or preparing food for the children.

The ecumenical sharing was not formally organized, but there was much spontaneity in substituting each other. Occasionally all the volunteers met together and proposed plans for the next phase of action. Our collaboration had a cumulative effect, and the district administration was quick in noticing the efficiency with which we were beginning to reach out to more and more camps. The Deputy Commissioner (DC) began calling a meeting of the heads of various teams that were helping in the relief work and to divide responsibilities. That is how in a short time the government of Assam began taking note of what we were doing at Kokrajhar. When Mr. Mahanta, the new Chief Minister of Assam, visited Kokrajhar, he was keen on meeting me and

thanking us for our contribution to relief. He would do so again several times.

The news of what we were doing spread like wild-fire and we began having volunteers from all over the country who brought money, clothes, medicines and other things. Seminaries and houses of formation began sending us brothers, sisters, novices, candidates, students, and youth groups as volunteers to go and help in camps. Some came for a week, some for two weeks, some for longer times. They came from Guwahati, Shillong, Kohima, Jakhama, Dimapur, Dibrugarh, Haflong, Siliguri, Kalimpong, Darjeeling, Kolkata, Ranchi, Raigarh, Ambikapur, Delhi, Mumbai, Pune and many other places. Nurses came in groups. Doctors too came. Something like 400 volunteers worked during 4-6 months immediately following the ethnic clash.

As the volume of work increased, the DC gave us buses to move to the camps every morning at 8.00 A.M. and return by 6.00 P.M. I was very particular that they all return to their base at Gossaigaon or Bongaigaon so that they could have a good rest and be ready for the next day's hard work. I didn't want them to stay on in the camps for the nights and get malaria, and bring the entire venture to an early end. Days were very hot and sticky. Each day we were taking responsibility for more and more camps, until we counted 42 camps and close 250,000 (mostly *Adivasis* and Santals, but also Bodos) people we were looking after.

The government was already beginning to supply food and other material to the riot-victims. But rice and dal did not exactly suit the needs of children. It was a turning point in the history of our relief work, when we decided to undertake the direct feeding of the starved children in the camps. They were already emaciated, sick, reduced to skin and bones, and reaching the stage of the dying Ethiopian babies whose figures we had seen in pictures. Death was beginning to catch up with these babies as well. It called for great daring to launch a baby-feeding programme in all the 42 camps: buying adequate number of large vessels, getting milk powder and sugar in adequate amounts, collecting firewood and lighting fire in places often completely wet

and covered with water. But, for all the trouble, there was great joy in the faces of the volunteers when in the evening we sat together for an evaluation of the day. They had seen starving children gulping down the food with enormous satisfaction, the mothers beaming with joy, all elders delighted at the entire venture. New life came into the children.

As we sat for evaluation every evening, so too we had a short prayer in the morning together: mass with a short exhortation. I called it the "*Mysticism of the Brief Moment*". That short spell of God-experience, of mysticism, that brief encounter with God, kept the team motivated and united during the several months we worked together. We needed it.

We needed it also because, in spite of the fact, that we were almost killing ourselves with work, we were criticized. The leaders of the VHP would be putting the cause of the Kokrajhar clash to the Christian missionaries. Speaking from Delhi, Bhopal, Nagpur, Kanyakumari or even from Guwahati, they would be saying the Missionaries were behind the ethnic violence, while pretending to be peace-makers and pious relief-workers. But none of them would dare to visit Bongaigaon or Kokrajhar. Since we were working with the district authorities, we were acquainted with many of the officers, and shared information, skills, medicines and equipments with them. We had decided never to give the impression of wanting to compete with any government agency or outshine others, but always to collaborate with all.

Such contacts, and friendships based on them were to help us a great deal when we moved from mere relief work to peace-efforts. Though we were not close to the armed young people who had launched the conflict, I would make an all effort to meet anyone whose opinion seemed to count with the two communities. I remember, on one occasion, crossing some forest areas and rivers to reach the place of a young person who seemed to hold very radical position with regard to paying back for the injuries received, and whose view, many said, were very decisive. I didn't mind spending the whole day walking, and having arrived, waiting

for this young man, as though he was the most important man in the world for me at that moment. He indeed was. The issue we had in hand was the life and death of hundreds and possibly thousands people. He was overwhelmed that I had taken so much trouble to come and meet him. Of course, I had nothing much to say. All I wanted to do was to listen, and then add a humble word of exhortation that the problems could be solved through dialogue.

Gradually that was the simple message we kept repeatedly giving to those who seemed to wield any influence in society: anger is not productive, remembering the past is not helpful, shall we begin to look forward, is there possibility for a dialogue? Gradually we came to know more definitely which leaders were respected in both societies, who exaggerated, who was unreliable according to public esteem, who was controversial, who was known to have ulterior motives. We as a Church would never have thought we would be in a position to initiate negotiations, since our community was small, and all the Christians put together formed, may be, about 10% or less of either tribe. But by now we had acquired some credibility. We had a respected image before the two communities, before the government, before the local administration, to some extent even before the radicals. Even the last group knew that we were neutral in the issue and were eager only for the common good.

The leaders of the various relief groups were supportive, the administration was encouraging, and even people who seemed to be close to the radicals did not seem to be opposing. So we decided to call for a meeting of some 40-50 leaders (about 25 from either side) at Guwahati. But who should come? Who should be invited? The armed young men would surely not come. Those who were close to them could not easily be persuaded to come. We were sure that it was worth having a meeting only if people who mattered in society came for the discussions. I persuaded my colleagues not to invite people who were controversial in society or had a questionable reputation, even if they wielded great influence in society, e.g. radical political leaders. I thought it better to bring together those who were respected in society, e.g.

professors, writers, poets, artists, cultural leaders, and socially important people, who had untarnished name and were not inclined to exaggerate in one direction or the other. While it was easy to describe the ideal person in this manner, it was not always easy to find such a person, much less, persuade him to come. However, we did not limit ourselves to sending out letters to some leaders, but went personally, talked to individuals, coaxed and cajoled, begged and pleaded, argued and tried to persuade, tried all of sorts of human stratagems to make sure that certain significant persons would not be missing. We were eager that the strength on either side of number and of social influence would be evenly balanced. Since we had a personal approach, we succeeded to some extent. A number of people who really counted came.

There was a great discomfort for persons in conflict to come and live together under the same roof for three days, when it came to having meals together, sitting in the same hall together, when it came to relaxing together in the evening. Meantime, in any case, the mood of the group had changed, and the participants were ready for an attempt at dialogue.

We, organizers, would take no specific stand nor suggest any specific solutions: who should compromise what, whether there should be compensation, who should go back to where. We would limit ourselves to facilitating the entire process, ensuring certain studied presentations on the theme of peace, partly based on religious faith and partly on good sense and human experience of the past. We would indeed urge that some sort of compromise was required on either side, showing that in life there was no possibility of living together and achieving anything together without an attitude of compromise. We were not asking either side to compromise on their essential goals, but to give up some lesser goals for greater benefit. We often pointed to the advantage in having the other community around, for the evident reason that they played a complementary role in the economy and social life to one's own. One important reason why they would listen to us was that we did not begin by condemning either side. We showed absolute sympathy for those who suffered.

We also spoke with respect about those who had certain goals for the advancement of their own people and were committed to the economic, social, cultural and political interests of their own community: whether it concerned land ownership, job opportunities, marketing possibilities, education opportunities or election chances. We showed sympathy even for those who took to violence since they could see no other way of solving their problems. We tried to argue, not at the first stage but after discussions and deliberations, that if we reflected and discussed long enough, we would find other ways of solving the problems than violence. If we were truly creative, a hundred other ways of handling the anxiety would open out before us.

Very often peace negotiations fail because the peace-makers bring readymade answers to the problem. I have seen peace animators rushing to condemn the fighters, trying to prove that the fighters are unprincipled, hard-hearted, wicked; that they are terrorists. Such peace-workers may be right, but they probably lack psychological wisdom. Political leaders too, who begin to deal with the issues in this manner, fail. They gloriously fail to make an impression, to convince. They are not using a pedagogy that will work. Once you condemn, you have no possibility of dialoguing with them any more. But if we are non-judgmental, if we go to the point of even appreciating the young radicals' commitment to their own community, the suffering they and their people have gone through, and the compulsions under which they took to violence, it would be easier to talk to them. This takes time, it calls for patience, it calls for understanding the psychology of persons who have opted for violence. Here I am not speaking of 'actual terrorists' with whom I do not like to compare those young men whom I know who are merely in search of answers.

If the matter is merely anger between two communities, whatever the grievance, it is somewhat easy to handle. We can always make a human appeal to the two human groups that are having some human problem among themselves. But if a political party(ies) is behind one group or another, if the government is encouraging one side for some (negative)

policy reasons, if some mighty economic interest is happy to keep the two groups striving against each other...in other words, if there are other forces at work, a simple humanitarian intervention becomes much more difficult. The situation becomes impersonal, and a human appeal does not easily make an impact. If, in the same way, some anti-Christian group is determined to make sure that Church efforts end in failure, it becomes even more difficult. However, we were fortunate that in the Kokrajhar conflict, we did succeed to make an impact on the leaders of the communities in conflict who came to Guwahati for dialogue, and through them to assist the rest of the communities gradually to re-think their positions. It was decided in the meeting that each leader in his own area would cooperate with his counterpart to organize bigger gatherings of the local people and make similar appeals for peace.

Meanwhile also the government was making their own efforts. Both communities began meeting each other at least in public places, e.g. market, bus. However, the camps continued to exist for months and even years, partly because the community leaders insisted on conditions that were not easy to fulfill, and partly because they were from forest areas and the government could not allow them to re-occupy the forest. But the tensions relaxed. New problems came up, inner-community anxieties took away the bitterness of inter-community conflict, until the events 1996-97 became just a part of history.

### **Churachandpur: Kuki-Paite Conflict 1997-98**

The Kokrajhar experience went into Christian memory in a mighty way. Many communities remembered that the success of the relief and reconciliation effort was much due to the fact that we worked unitedly for a common cause. The Kokrajhar model was repeatedly referred to in situation of tensions. That is how it happened that in 1997 when the Kuki-Paite conflict erupted, many leaders in Manipur invoked the Kokrajhar model to ensure success in peace-negotiations. Dozens of villages and hundreds of houses had been burnt. About 500 people had been killed. There was a measure of

helplessness when hostilities broke out so fiercely between these communities that were ethnically so close. I proposed that, if the leaders were able to bring some significant persons of both groups to Guwahati, I would host a reconciliation meeting at one of our institutions. This was a great encouragement to them. They mobilized the needed resources and flew 28 participants for the proposed meeting at Guwahati. The two groups had been so alienated from each other that they had separate meetings during the first day, working out their own strategies for the following days. By the second day the two groups met together in a common hall. Summarizing the discussions, we may say that the assembly passed a few resolutions, each participant promising to take these to his own people and try to persuade them to respect them. After all, these were proposals of a large number of church leaders, and they called for respect. We prayed and parted. We heard later that the resolutions of the meeting were heard with respect, but the mood had not yet come for the cessation of hostilities.

As Christmas approached, we were still hearing about the continuation of the conflict. So, soon after Christmas, some of us of the Joint Peace Team from Guwahati got up early morning at 2.00 A.M. and made a dash to Churchandpur. Really, a war was going on in Churchchanpur. The little town was divided into two—a Kuki zone and a Paite zone, and firing would begin around 10.00 P.M. and go on till around 3.00 A.M. Some of us went to meet a group of Paites on the first day. I was asked to lead at the prayer and say a few words in exhortation. Then began a prolonged discussion during which nearly all of the 30-40 Paite delegates who were present spoke. They thanked us for coming to help them, for the good advice we gave, admitted that it was wrong to fight, but asked us to see what the Kukis were doing. They gave a long list of complaints against the Kukis. After a very long session, we had a meal at about 3.00 P.M. which confirmed all that was said. The next day, when we went to the Kukis, they had a similar list of complaints about the cruelties and excesses of the Paites. Though both parties respected our call for ceasefire for New Year, they continued hostilities immediately after that. We

went back to Guwahati and wept. We prayed. We sent our prayers to Churachandpur.

Young men had to keep awake day and night to defend their communities. A moment of exhaustion comes for everyone. Arms were running short, resources were limited, a new government in Manipur pressed for peace. The combatants began to think that the advice of the peace-makers was valid. Gradually wisdom dawned on them. The local Peace Team we had set up met again and again, came to certain conclusions about peace, signed an agreement, had a meal together. A little later they wondered why they had fought at all.

### **Haflong: Dimasa-Hmar Conflict 2004-05**

We had thought that inter-ethnic conflicts were becoming a matter of ancient history when all of a sudden there broke out a bitter conflict between the Dimasas and the Hmars at Haflong. Kukis and other communities too from Manipur were on the side the Hmars. The Dimasas are the ancient settlers in North Cachar hills. They own the land. But the Hmars who came later were well-educated and were able to get good jobs in the local administration. They were also good cultivators, industrious in work, and prosperous. Meantime the Dimasas were becoming conscious of their identity like the Bodos, and of their ancestral domain. Whatever was the immediate flashing point, here again not less than 400 people were killed and large numbers had rushed to camps for shelters.

The Joint Peace Team was asked to help. Gradually it became possible for any of us, even one person, to represent the entire team when there was an emergency and many were too busy to be immediately involved. Mutual confidence had already been built. We seemed to think alike and often spoke in similar fashion even when we had not made any previous agreement. The Shillong Peace Team too decided to merge with us and make a single Joint Peace Team for the region representing all the churches of the Northeast. This development enabled us to intervene fast enough in every circumstance, and get involved in many more things.

We did a lot of work contacting the leaders of the respective communities. When the Dimasas actually came to Guwahati, they were offended by what some Hmar leader had said as they found in the day's paper, and went into a hotel to stay apart on their own. They refused to come up to where the rest of us were staying. I went down and spent the whole morning pleading with them to come at least for a short time and make it possible to listen to each other. Finally they consented. Once they came, they were eloquent. And though the points of view of both parties were irreconcilable, we agreed that all further violence should cease, that all threats be stopped and that both parties should cooperate with every peace effort. Though this was the least that we could agree to, hostilities ceased and dialogue began between the two groups under the aegis of the government. Except for a few individual incidents, peace returned to the North Cachar Hills.

### **Diphu: Karbi-Kuki Conflict 2005**

There seem to be no end to ethnic conflicts: this time between the Karbis and the Kukis. Even as the Haflong troubles were ending, we had heard of possible problems in Diphu. The Kukis have always been a tribe that moved. During the recent years, when Manipur was in turmoil (Naga-Kuki, Kuki-Paite conflicts), many Kukis had begun moving down to Karbi Anglong in search of living space. Many of the Karbi leaders had settled them in remoter hilly areas, receiving some money in return. Being hard-working cultivators, the Kukis began doing intense cultivation of ginger and other spices in the hills and earning impressive sums in consequence. Armed young Karbis began levying a tax on them, which they kept raising from time to time until it became unendurable. Then trouble arose. This is one version. In any case, mutual killings and burning of houses followed and people of both communities rushed to places around Diphu and settled themselves in camps. The story was the same all over again. The Joint Peace Team visited the camps, announced relief with the help of local peace teams already working there, called for peace and appointed local leaders who would go out to convince the armed young men to

cease fighting. Miracles happen. With many failures, one following the other, success came at last. Peace has returned.

### **Karbi-Khasi (Pnar) Conflict and Others**

The Karbi-Khasi tension arose more or less at the time of the Karbi-Kuki conflict. Though the entire Joint Peace Team was not involved in assisting during this tension, some of the members did go to the place and offer help. Similarly our Peace Team intervened in a helpful fashion when the Bodo-Muslim clash took place around Udalguri 2008 and the Zemei-Dimasa conflict occurred in 2009.

### **Conclusion**

Those from other parts of the country may not be able to understand the context in which the above mentioned conflicts take place. Social activists are confused, the know-all intellectuals are annoyed. Ideologically led thinkers suggest solutions that are contradictory, administrators try to bribe or browbeat the more vocal or the more violent. We need today the gentle voice of anthropologists, psychologists, sensitive educators, intelligent administrators. We need the assistance of person having convictions in deep ethical and religious principles. We must not be satisfied with the answer that the human being is inclined to violence, until we have sufficiently explored the other most important truth that the human person is also sociable, kind, understanding, forgiving and eager to live in peace with other. Those that believe in this dimension of humanity today will make a major contribution towards the solution of some of the most worrying problems in human society.

## MESSAGE

*Prof. Saroj Chaudhuri*

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I propose to start my message by paying homage to one of the greatest analytical intellects of our time — Claude Levi Strauss, who has passed away on the 30<sup>th</sup> of October 2009. I am not a scholar of his specific discipline, but genius like Levi Strauss never remain confined to narrow branches of knowledge. Levi Strauss was one among the founders of semiology: study of the life of signs within the society. The approach may help us in understanding a society better in terms of predicting its reaction at a given situation. In understanding social group conflicts, this foresight may be useful at times.

But only at times, for, unfortunately the causes and characters of conflict are so varied that in most cases we have to resort to deconstructing causality. We apprehend causes from the effect. More often than not, the diagnosis is only partially correct and right causes are identified. Till the causes are comprehensively known, right remedies can not be prescribed. The general cause behind conflict is a binary opposition inlaid in our very thought process. With each I or We, there is an 'other'. From this concept of the other generate fear and covetousness. Conflicts in the name of retaining identity or existence grow out of fear; conflicts leading to evicting people and military campaigns result

from desire for domination and gain. Individual conflicts, by themselves, often look innocuous to the society; but each conflict, however small, holds in it the explosive power when joined by number of similar motive. If we look around we find the conflicts arising out of either or both of the motives. Even the conflicts between the extremist outfits and the established governing authorities contain in them the same motives.

In the North East India we have more than our share of conflicts. In last quarter of a century we have seen ethnic conflict of 1980 in Tripura, Bodo-Santhal conflict of 1996, 1998 and 2004, Karbi-Dimasa conflict of 2005, Bodo-Muslim clash of 2008, Zemi Nagas and Dimas conflict of 2009, Manipuri-Naga conflict, Muslim-Chakma conflict and Mizo-Reang conflict. Even when I was starting, I heard of hordes of Reangs coming over the borders of Mizoram and Tripura. The pity of the whole situation is: nobody is left better as result of these conflicts. Therefore, it is very relevant for us to think of this ailment and its remedy. Awareness of difference has been identified as one of the potential sources of conflict; now, this awareness of difference is being interpreted as our identity from our early childhood. Each one must have the pride of identity – ethnic, religious or otherwise. That stands at the very root of the personality. Only the concept of natural opposition between the two different ones needs to be removed. As a way to evade conflict, non-resistance has been suggested. Here again, there is a problem of proper interpretation. Non-resistance to evil is sin. Non-resistance is also equated with cowardice. It is to be made clear what non-resistance is, and where it is to be practiced. Non-resistance should operate only in case of difference. Non-resistance does not mean complacent passive acceptance of all and sundry. Proper interpretations do not come naturally. They need schooling, and should be included in the very process of education.

When we speak of education, naturally we are faced with the questions: When and How. When a personality has already been formed no amount of schooling can change the care of its beliefs and thoughts. Therefore, such education

should start early. But how early? From our experience we know, very small children do not recognize difference. It is only after they are recognized as individual members of the family they own the collective thoughts and beliefs in the society. Psychologists can tell better, but the time is around 6+. The schooling should consistently continue through the adolescence years, that is up to 16+, when they will come across the cross-currents of thoughts and practice of the world at large. But for guidance, they are likely to borrow the current thoughts and beliefs. Next important question is, how to conduct that schooling? What should be taught and told? In the earlier years abstract thoughts and interpretations are likely to fail. Concrete examples are more fruitful than abstract advice. We find examples for children are often drawn from very old history, myths and mythologies. These create no deeper impressions than the flying horses of fairy tales. Even the contents of such schooling need expert planning and grading. From known to unknown, from concrete to abstract should be the basic principle. Contemporary or near contemporary examples are received better by smaller children. Scope for independent reasoning should come in the mature years. Contents can be accommodated in texts; but distance of texts from real life—practices in our country is a widely known fact. Discussions have been found more effective in such cases; but the discussions have to be consistent and continuous, not sporadic.

Our objective of such education is to forestall the unfounded apprehension about all different and strange people and objects. Extension of a friendly attitude towards growing into a universal man may sound too ambitious, but a general friendly attitude needs to be cultivated. This may come from a sense of mutual respect and from a practice of tolerance. The teachings, unless very carefully administered, may sometimes come in conflict with identity pride and national feelings; may even impair the righteous courage. It is to be made expressly clear that there is no essential conflict between them. Rational approach has to be developed at proper time. Coming at a later stage of education, these principles will remain matters of academic interest rather than life-tools. As such, general education itself has the effect

of widening the mind. The pupil gets an idea of the wide world beyond his/her immediate surroundings. Supplemented by purposeful teachings we may hope for easier resolution of conflicts; and such education should start early.

There is yet another point to consider. Education useful for life cannot remain confined within four walls of the school and in the text books. The lessons should, as well, come from the family and the society. Family is the immediate unit of the society that has immense influence on the child mind. Therefore, the principles taught to the child need to be practised at home by the members of the family. A child mimics instinctively; when family practices contradict the preaching, the confusion is worse confounded. We dream of a conflict-free future; even if there are conflicts, there should be the generation who can resolve those conflicts. Proper early education is our way to that goal. 'Give Peace a Chance'. This endeavour is indeed praiseworthy from the part of *SANSKRITI*, Guwahati and I wish you all the success as you partake in this most timely and engaging exercise of bringing to light various perspectives related to social unrest on the one hand, and peace initiatives on the other.

## FOREWORD

*Cyprian Pinto SVD\**

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The theme discussed in the larger canvas of North East India demand a thorough knowledge of the emerging socio-ethnic movements and its various ramifications in the context of the individual universe of the study. The papers throw open a number of themes and perspectives in the wider spectrum of identity issues over arching against the backdrop of culture and society in North East India where cultural diversities play a key role in understanding both social unrest and peace initiatives.

In the contemporary North East India, ethno-social aspirations have raised hidden tensions within communities and some of which have emerged as open and sporadic conflicts in various intensities. Observing and evaluating the people's movements for a number of years, say a decade and more, one can obviously fathom the arduous journey and the growth pangs on the one hand and the disillusionment due to the failure to cope up with the local socio-cultural, economic-political aspirations. These voices of the people springing up from a given context calls for a listening ear, an understanding heart, a reasoning mind with an ability to read the signs of the times. Leaders — both political and

religious categories — have greater duty than ever to guide their fold towards amicable settlement of small differences to great antagonisms. And this will eventually make way for peace and prosperity. Let us pledge that we each one of us proactively intervene in the peace building measures.

One earnestly hopes that this volume will be found useful not only for anthropologists and social scientists but also policy planners and administrators who will have to undertake works of welfare and development in manifold dimensions. I place on record my appreciation to *SANSKRITI* for conceptualizing the pertinent theme of this national seminar and congratulate the editors and the writers of each of the papers presented in this timely publication.

\*Regional Superior,  
SVD North East India  
and Chairman *SANSKRITI*,  
Guwahati - 781 014

## INTRODUCTORY PREFACE

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*"Peace is not made at the conference table, or by treaties,  
but in the hearts of human beings,"*  
(Herbert Hoover)

Peace and Development are two sides of the same concept of welfare. If one hopes to build a sound nation devoid of insurgency and narrow-mindedness we have to creatively move towards shunning arms and search for alternatives. Our leaders — political and religious — have to play a proactive role for weaning away the misguided youth to learn to live in multi-cultural communities. We also need to understand the reality that people move towards unrest when their social cultural, economic, and political aspirations are chocked. As our societies are fast modernising, our aspirations have risen, everyone puts a higher premium on the greater training skills so as to make a mark in the community and society in which they live. As B.G. Verghese rightly says, "when the tranquillity is established, people who made a decision to give up arms once and for all should find an arena to make their hard work bear fruit" (2004:438).

At different points of historical time, our country has experienced emergence of great souls who not only mobilized the society through their saintly acts, but also they remained

in the minds of people as agents of change. Therefore, a fresh look on the condition of social unrest and peace initiatives in India became imperative to understand the situation in North East India as our special area of interest. This also gave us an opportunity to understand the ethnic situation of the North East where cultural diversities play a key role in understanding both social unrest and peace initiatives. We realized the fact that among the people of North East India this journey took quite a long and arduous path treading through unknown paths with much turbulence and desperation.

No one will blindly believe that the government as such is interested in situations of absolute peace... which will put the government officials and bureaucrats on the toes of development. They can not wish away the projects which are sanctioned from centre and other agencies without action plan and completion reports. On the other hand the turbulence is allowed to remain up to a certain extent that under the shadow of these anomalies much more resources can be amassed and utilized for reasons other than the project proper. Now, surely this is a case existing in the north eastern part of our country. Anyone who keeps a track record of social unrest among the people of North East can not but notice the innermost craving for peace with justice and development. This is to reaffirm that one of the major concerns of North East India today is Peace. Many well meaning people think and propagate that civil society has no power to decide for peace and thus this engaging theme of building peace rest with both state and central governments. Some on the other hand put the complete responsibility with the central government who rush to the spot with large contingents when the scenario is too grim for the State to handle. But what is the best way to intervene when there is conflict and discord. Obviously there is a need to see and understand the fact and answer the question: what exactly is the underlying problem on which the unrest axle is revolving?

The United Nations General Assembly proclaimed the first decade of the 21st century and the third millennium, the years 2001 to 2010, as the International Decade for the Promotion of a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the

Children of the World. We at *Sanskriti* wanted to be a part of this endeavour of promoting peace not only for the Children of the World but all the people, with special reference to North East India. This takes us to the various papers presented in this volume. No one is so naïve as to think that they have given all the answers to all the problems of unrest. Still, we know that once again a new effort is made to re-emphasise that peace is possible in our day, only we need to make a commitment and work harder with greater focus and creativity.

## II

*Gautam Kumar Bera* in his *Key Note Address* discusses the interaction of the major historical, cultural, economic and political factors underlying the social movement among communities living in this country. He particularly mentions regarding the social movements among the tribes, castes, and peasants. It would appear that the social movements, which took place in this part of the country, tend to serve several interests at the same time. Generally, anthropologists search for satisfying and rational truths and structured explanations based primarily on Western scientific models. It was, therefore, felt that nothing but a special paper on ethno-social movements, devoted exclusively to the subject, could attempt to give a theoretical backdrop to some of the movements that occurred in India. The common threads involve the conflicts between the social scientist and humanist, between differing values, realities, and actions of cultural appropriateness, and between what we know from our culture and history and what we have learnt by understanding other cultures and their histories.

In 2008 NEICR commemorated the birth centenary of Prof. Stephen Fuchs SVD who was an eminent anthropologist. It was then decided to host a memorial award in his honour to be conferred upon a scholar of eminence. The awardee remains responsible to deliver the *Memorial Lecture* in his honour. *S.M. Michael SVD* in his Memorial Lecture rightly observes that from the beginning of the existence of SVD the study of cultures of humanity was one of the major concerns of its members. Father Wilhem Schmidt SVD, a

linguist turned ethnologist gave a sound footing to this endeavour with his manifold involvements. Anthropos Institute and *Anthropos Journal* are well known to the academic world especially to the Anthropology, Folklore and other social sciences. Among others who joined Schmidt were Stephen Fuchs SVD, Mathias Hermann SVD, Kloster Mayer SVD, Stanislaus Wald SVD, George Praksch SVD and Jungblo<sup>t</sup> SVD. The anthropological tradition of Fr. Wilhelm Schmidt SVD has been perpetuated in India by his German SVD scholars. Among them Dr. Fuchs' contribution is something very special. The Institute of Indian Culture, Mumbai and other young Indian SVD anthropologists in India have a rich legacy to be continued.

The second *Memorial Lecture* in honour of Prof. Fuchs SVD was delivered by *Gautam Kumar Bera* on 20th December 2009 at Agartala, Tripura. Since the topic of the lecture was confined to an aspect of non-directed phenomenon of social change delimiting in the territorial jurisdiction of North East India, it has been incorporated in the present volume. Arguing in favour of one of the most influential agents of social change that has been put forth in the last century the author has brought into light a major aspect of social mobilization to delineate the tutelary cults of Tripura sovereignty. Citing anecdotes from scriptural texts he refers to Sanskritization as a process that engulfed the sovereigns and subalterns in Tripura through propitiation of their tutelary cults. The cults of the state principality emerged out as a process of secularization and universalization over a long range of historical time frame, and have been understood here as an integral part of the whole process of social evolution rather than as self-congruent and self-contained domains that generate non-assimilative meaning. As a result the cults have emanated through the cultural process of progressive Sanskritization over ages. It also manifests the process of existence of polity through an assimilative attempt of ritual performances stabilizing a culture in a particular frame of time that goads towards Sanskritization.

In the *Special Theme Address* delivered by *A.C. Sinha* one can observe that looking for Peace in North East India is a very serious and important national task that may be held

in the process of nation building. He has followed three steps to look into the aspect of peace starting from the year of independence till date, analysis of aspects of peace, and finally true governance of the region meeting the genuine regional aspirations under guidance from constitutional framework. Historically speaking following sporadic as well as organized armed insurgency as a mode of social unrest the North Eastern States' Reorganization Act was passed in 1971 that led to emergence of independent states in this frontier region. This, however, was again followed by a demand for regional autonomy at a further micro level. All these aspects have been dealt upon in detail by the author who delineated the need for peace for true governance of the region.

*Ngazekmi Vashum* has brought into relief early education for conflict resolution in North East India. The author has discussed the factors lying behind conflicts in a group or a community and has suggested some view points for its resolution in a generic sense. Along with that steps to promote conflict resolution in North East India have been highlighted by the author. He emphasizes upon social responsibility at all levels as a concluding remark to understand conflict as a social reality.

*Joy Anne Gonsalves* writes saying the richness and resourcefulness of India's North East is threatened by unrest which is escalating by the day. Unrest and its manifestations in almost the entire region are presently subjected to heightened scales of violence. The many efforts underway at different levels and from various quarters, and many of these have not proved to be successful and have not appeared to have the desired lasting effect. It is within this complex mix of evolving variables within the ethnic groups that the need for identification, celebration and protection of the common, shared, deeply unique elements of group name, culture, language and land upon which the group executes — its socio-political existence becomes imperative.

*Grace Thumra Shatsang* as a social activist observes that there are many factors causing conflicts, tensions in the world between individuals, groups, communities, and between rulers and the subjects. She highlights a few realities, especially

with special reference to conflicts arising from social, economic and political differences and aspirations in the context of her experiences from Manipur and Nagaland. She also speaks of amicable settlement and peace resolutions as a 'culture of peace' through several factors including promotion of customary laws and interventions of women wing of the society for bringing peace in the society.

*Bhaskar Athparia* in his paper observes that the conflict is a theme which has occupied every aspect of human society. Such conflicts pose a threat to a community's continuing life and its recurrence destroys the community's total cultural backbone. Inter ethnic conflicts thus imposes heavy burden on the civic population. It brings up social unrest which causes social disorganization, namely, increase in juvenile delinquency, attitudinal changes, drug use, homelessness, etc. leading finally to economic instability arising out of poor management of resources, hampering normal trade and business, free flow of goods and essential items, unemployment due to incapability of the system leading to poverty. This is an attempt by the author to see what the areas of conflict in the industrial sector and how they are handled by the management.

The question of nationalism, subalterns and subalternity has been discussed in detail by *Ankur Tamuli Phukan* who views that the nationalist upsurge does not represent the real subalterns. He conceives of subalterns as people living in the lower strata of the society with an imagination and consciousness that is different from the dominants of society. In a world where there is historically uneven development, the imaginative frame depicts multiplicity which creates a relative autonomy of the subaltern groups. On the contrary, nationalism creates a ground for the elites of the peripheral communities to hegemonies its lower order. Thus, there is formation of an elite history, which is the history of the dominant group. So, there is a domination of core over periphery where, if necessary, history is rewritten in its own manner.

*C.P. Anto* highlights the five decade long journey of Naga society towards peace and promoting human rights. Anto says for the Naga a tragic history of war and bloodsheds

without and within that took thousands of lives and generations of youth times. Wisdom seems to have finally dawned upon us after decades of bloody experiences. Today, every Naga is proud of being Naga as the peace processes has established their identity in the international community. The major issue of their unrest is also related to the Government of Independent India that took over the Nagas against their wills promising fundamental human rights enshrined and rooms for self-determination within its Constitution also became the major source of human rights violation.

*Bibhash Dhar* studies the situation in the Indo-Bhutan border in the Baksa district of Assam. He observes that in many of the over-populated countries the international borders become the habitats of multi-ethnic communities. Peace and amity is, however, maintained on the borders at their own interest because creation of ethnic or communal upheavals may result in mass eviction from the borders which would cause a major breakdown in their economic life. It is to be noted that in most of the multiethnic habitats on the international border two types of human environment prevails. Apparently it would be found that the communities are leading a life of amity and understanding but on further enquiry it would be found that there is an air of uncertainty and anxiety in their minds about their future due to various political developments.

*Sourajit Roy* observes that the first voice of secession in North-East India was heard from the land of Nagas, the next was the tribals of Lusai Hills district of Assam followed by tribals of Tripura who experienced marginalization in their own home land. While in Manipur, the ethnic unrest took shape as a reaction of perceived deprivation from Central Government which was deeply rooted in left ideology. The author writes that in its initial stage, the ethnic movements in North-East India were primarily motivated to fight against the hegemony of Indian state and maintenance of cultural autonomy as well as the control over the territory, which they perceived as their own. They were also oriented to reconstruct their own concept of nation as against the nationalism propagated by Indian state. But, in due course,

these movements have re-oriented to spread their hegemonic power to grasp all the benefits provided by state agencies for their own respective groups. The paper ends by observing that in the process of conflict resolution, not only the contending groups, but also the civil groups and commoners have to be involved to find out conclusive solution.

*Kedilezo Kikhi* passionately explains that the Nagas underestimated how Delhi would interpret their being made a part of India at the eastern fringes by the British against their wishes when the bureaucrats would eventually discover the stand the Naga pioneers had taken. Before the Nagas realized what was happening the struggle gave birth to the state of Nagaland. To the majority of the Nagas it was an illegitimate birth. The state was Delhi's response to the challenge and crisis that the Nagas presented to the newly established Indian Republic. The question is who is actually paying for the extorted money? Again, the different factional groups have entered into ceasefire with the government of India, but there is no ceasefire among them. Is it not important to recast ceasefires in the light of the factional killings and the unfortunate distractions that have occurred due to the internecine skirmishes? This paper is a modest attempt to address some of the questions raised above.

*Rahaman Hasibul* says that Arunachal Pradesh which was a peaceful state for a long time has awakened to the ethnic identity axle. His objective of the study is to know the most leading factors for tribal unrest in Arunachal. Among the major ones he mentions mistaken identity, number of many tribes, prominent differences in census records, disharmony among the tribal social structure, development work and inter-ethnic disharmony, influx of non-locals and ethnic disharmony, reducing trend in the per centage of tribal population and Refugees and outsiders in Arunachal and ethnic disharmony.

*Vincent Darlong* argues that the tribal communities of Northeast India had different challenges of under development and development-isolation. They generally remain starved of the social and physical infrastructures needed for the people to play a role in India's growing modern economy.

This made them becoming fertile ground for elements opposed to Government control and seeking return of tribal lands and tribal autonomy. These groups, especially be it the Naxalites in the mainland tribal areas or the various socio-ethnic based insurgent groups in Northeast India, have resulted in serious security problems for Government and donor officials in tribal areas and, as a consequence, have made it difficult to provide the development services needed. Since 1988, exclusive tribal development models were designed for interventions in the conflict-prone areas of Andhra Pradesh, Orissa, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and Northeast India in the states of Assam, Manipur and Meghalaya.

Over the last century the frontier state of Tripura has witnessed some socio-political upheavals that encompassed both feudal Tripura and democratic Tripura. As a logical conclusion to all these, *Sankar Bhattacharya* has given a detailed picture of socio-political movements and the emergence of left front government in Tripura in a historical frame of time. The movements have succeeded in fulfilling the democratic aspirations of both the tribals and the non-tribals of Tripura and both unitedly struggled for any of their just and legitimate demand, because a vast majority of the tribal and the Bengalee people in Tripura believe in democracy and in united democratic movement. In his study he observed an evolutionary picture transcending from one phase to the other and highlighted the attestation of socio-political and constitutional rights of the people belonging to both indigenous society and contemporary society.

*Lincoln Reang* argues that in the North Eastern part of India among different ethnic communities there is a strong sense of fear of loosing identity. This factor has led to a number of ethnic clashes which inturn lead to social unrest are escalating relentlessly day after day like Naga-Kukis, Kuki-Paites, Naga-Meiteis, Bodo-Santhals, Dimasa-Hmar clashes in Assam or the Mizo-Reangs conflict in Mizoram. While delimiting himself in the arena of Bru/Reang, the author takes us through a number of unrest situations beginning with the Reang Rebellion of 1942-43, the displacement factor and finally the case of Reang refugees

who immigrated to Tripura in 1997 as a large scale exodus from Mizoram. Lincoln gives a clarion call to find out the problems relating to different ethnic identities and the root causes of social unrest.

*Sriparna Chakraborty* and *Baisakhi Chanda* in their study on the Threats in the Positive Development of the Riang Refugees of North Tripura dwell at some length on the genesis of social tension in the study area. The major findings of the study are truly disturbing to any well meaning citizen of our country. Various socio-economic problems engulfing the affected people are to be treated with adequate humanitarian grounds on the one hand and with greater pace as well. This will no doubt throw up challenges for both the government and the civil society for a long time to come.

*Sharmishta Ganguly* in her paper on Perspective of Social Exclusion among the Riang Refugees of North Tripura calls an attention to the Riang crisis in the given district which is the study area as well. The scholar brings into light various pathetic situations faced by the people who are displaced and exhorts the authorities that it is not enough at all to include them in education and health care but they too need to take into consideration the present political and cultural transformation taking place in both the places of their origin and in the place they are presently living in. A number of recommendations presented in the paper give a clarion call to provide them with adequate support system so as to make their lives meaningful and happy.

*Vijoy S. Sahay* in his *Valedictory Address* confesses that he has relied on the secondary data to prepare for his address, yet he rightly observes that North East is truly 'unique and unparallel'. He says in this part of the country where Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity, all have their respective strongholds. This land of great religious tolerance is amazing to behold a land, the flora, the fauna, the soil, and climate with every physical, social, and cultural element in it. On the other hand he observes that it is an indication that all is not well in the northeast; therefore, there is need of peace initiatives. While asking a pertinent question, 'Do we want once again foreign hands to take advantage of

such disunity among the Indian population in general and that of the Northeast in particular?' one does not fail to hear the sobbing of his heart. He exhorts every leader to shun every form of corruption and gently reminds us the need of the hour is to think 'homocentric', and formulate 'homocentric values' which will be the beginning of any peace initiative.

*Mita Sarkar (Das) and Palash Chandra Coomar*, in their paper discuss about a Sema village, Longtong in Dibrugarh district of Assam. A group of retired Sema Naga soldiers from British Indian Army in 1923 settled in that village, and their paper studies the changes in their life-styles, customs and socio-economic conditions in the village society. They have imbibed many influences from their Assamese and Nepali neighbours. The study also shows some cultural differentiation from their original counterparts from Nagaland.

It is some time since we are sharing the sufferings and anxieties of our brothers and sisters in India, most particularly in North East India. Some of us are following it up from the last many decades. As civil society we are concerned about the intolerance which has affected thousands of people in North Cachar Hills, Karbi Anglong, Nagaland, Manipur and elsewhere. Peace as an organizing principle is a revolutionary idea that if applied at the National, state, regional, block, village and individual levels, would radically change the world we live in. Peace does begin inside each and every one of us because we all carry the seed of peace within. As with other universal human ideals, like Justice, Freedom, Beauty, or Truth, Peace is one of those 'capital-letter' words that speaks an yearning and a striving within every human beings that cuts across all boundaries of culture, ethnicity, and religion. While we might define and understand 'peace' differently, we all hold it as one of our highest values.

We are sure this volume at the fag end of the decade of the international year for the culture of peace is a timely intervention among many others to understand the intensity of Social Unrest in North East India in the context of Peace Initiatives with special reference to case studies from individual states which have shown ways and means to proactively intervene in the peace building measures. Our

initiative at *SANSKRITI* was to make a point that we need to network with many others including Government and Non-Government agencies, activists, scholars, professors and researchers to make understanding between communities more cohesive that peace prevails to promote development and vice-versa. Today we are much more convinced that the concept of early education for conflict resolution need to be given a very sound footing by building up initiatives in schools and other educational institutions. Later on other institutions of higher learning should carry forward lessons of peace and harmony with justice.

At this juncture we want to place on record our gratefulness to all the collaborators—Indian Council of Social Science Research, Shillong; Anthropological Survey of India, Kolkata; SVD our parent Society and our learned scholars who presented papers based on the in depth studies they had undertaken in the immediate past. A number of people lend their helping hand in organizing this National Seminar, among them John Bosco SVD, Manoj Anthony SVD, Julius Ekka SVD, Cyprian Pinto SVD, Shri Nabajit Deka, and others deserve special mention. We gratefully acknowledge the kindness with which Prof. Birinchi K. Medhi of Gauhati University and Dr. R.P. Athparia of Anthropological Survey of India, Shillong who encouraged us all through this work and Rev. Fr. Cyprian Pinto SVD who graciously wrote the Foreword for this volume. If the academic world take notice of our efforts and disseminate some of the ideas to ease out unrest by which peace can be reinstated in our homes, neighborhoods, villages, towns, states and the country, and why not in other parts of the world as well, our efforts will be highly rewarded.

Guwahati  
February 2010

K. Jose SVD & Gautam Kumar Bera  
*SANSKRITI-NEICR*

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# 4

## PEACE IN NORTH EAST INDIA: ISSUES AND POSSIBILITIES

A.C. Sinha\*

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Peace, according to *Webster's New World Dictionary*, means many related aspects of human actions such as calm, quiet, tranquility; freedom from war or civil strife; a treaty or agreement to end war; freedom from public disturbance or disorder, public security, law and order; freedom from disagreement or quarrels, harmony, accord; and an undisturbed state of mind, absence of mental conflict, serenity. There are two aspects of the above definition: one, pertaining to the individual state of mind, and the second refers to an invisible 'others'. The individual's peace, his/her mental frame of mind, may for the moment be left for the psychologists to tackle. At the moment, we are concerned with the aspects of peace affected by the 'others'. No body will deny that an individual's disposition may be disquieting to other, but the challenge posed by 'others' to the individual's mental frame is certainly more intimidating, as others are represented by a host of very powerful institutions such as society and polity. Coming to the theme of the meet, looking at prospects of peace in India's Northeast region, individual and society

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appear to stand together in opposition to the regional polity. One may pose some very basic questions in this regard: Why is it so pressing to deliberate on issues of peace today? Is it so that region is bedeviled by the absence of peace? Who are the actors/institutions, which pose threat to the peace in the region? What happens when the present state of affairs are continued in future? Is it possible to overlook issues of peace for the time being and concentrate on remedial urgent concerns of regional economic backwardness and nation-building projects? After all, it is the national priority to speed up pace of development by removing all pervasive regional backwardness.

Looking for peace in the region is a very serious and, at the same time, an important national task, which has to be taken with all seriousness. We take pride for having a democratic constitutional framework, which guarantees fundamental rights of the individuals and we pride ourselves for having an open civil society, in which judiciary can punish erring functionaries. Still India's Northeast region remains on the margin of the national social and political map. Out of seven states five are confronted with armed insurgency ranging from 60 to a couple of years. The region is controlled by the armed forces through infamous Armed Forces special Power Act, 1958. There have been a dozen of official accord/agreements leading to more discord and disagreements. The regional states continue to be 'governed' mainly by the superannuated officers either from armed forces, police or intelligence wing of the federal administration. The Government has earmarked huge amount of money to be spent on various aspects of development and administration in the region. Still the region is marked by economic backwardness, armed insurgency and other forms of violence. Instead of jumping with quick fix solutions, we propose three steps in our presentation. Firstly, taking cue from Timothy Ash, Fellow of St. Anthony's College, Oxford, we propose to write a brief 'history of the present Northeast region of India: from 1947 to 2009'. Secondly, we propose to analyze the aspects of peace, which we should endeavour to cultivate for the region as the minimum requirement of an honourable living condition for the Indian citizens. And,

lastly, the people of India have given a flexible constitutional framework to us, which has to be utilized for redrawing new provisions suitable to the changing times for meeting the genuine regional aspirations and providing at least part answers to the reality on the ground. Time has changed and new generation rightly aspires for decent living conditions with dignity. It is the duty of every right thinking citizen to come forward and create an atmosphere, in which future looks secured. In this context, we plead for re-examining the political and administrative contours of Northeast region within the Constitutional frame of India.

### **History of Present: Northeast India between 1947-2009**

Imagine seven states of the Indian Union's nestled in its North East frontiers in mid 1940's as the British colonial province of Assam plus two princely states of Manipur and Tripura. Suppose, the British colonial power did not withdraw from its Indian Empire in 1947. Imagine a situation, when the Japanese forces were not defeated in the Second World War and were able to drive the British away from India. Suppose, the Coupland Plan of the 'crown colony' proposed by the Governor of Assam, covering tribal areas from the Himalayas to the Arakan Hills, and Garo Hills to Upper Burma, was accepted as a territorial political arrangement in 1947. Suppose for the sake of argument, Pakistan, and in course of time, its successor state of Bangladesh, was not created on its western frontiers as another sovereign country. Suppose, while leaving the country for good, the British would have handed over their Indian possession to the descendants of the early rulers from whom they had got the territories some more than a hundred year back. Let us presume, Assam with its six districts in the Brahmaputra valley, two in the Barak valley and five hill districts plus the Frontier Tracts of Sadiya, Balipara and Thuensang remained a province as it was in 1947. And for the sake of argument, Indian National Army of Subhash Chandra Bose had managed to defeat the British and driven them away from the region. What would have been the shape of the things politics in the region? Had there been no declaration of independence by the Naga National Council on August

14, 1947? Had there been no provision of the Sixth Schedule for the tribal hill districts of the region? Had the province of Assam been not reorganized in five states plus two former princely states turning into states? Then, had there been insurgency in Naga Hills and followed by others? Even then, had there been reign of terror perpetrated by the insurgents and the states on the common citizenry in the region?

Let us think aloud for a moment. Today it appears improbable, but one may think of a situation, when the British rule would have continued in this part of the country. How long had the composite British Province of Assam been continued? Had there been no demand for carving out state of Nagaland, followed by others? Had the region remained as it was, say, in 1930's, when there was neither insurgency, nor any form of tribal violence? In case of impending withdrawal from India, the British would have carved out a 'Crown Colony' in the region, had it been a viable happy home of the regional tribal folk devoid of violence and conflict? How had the regional folk reacted to the possible victorious Japanese forces? There had been no division of India into India and Pakistan, and thus there was no another country such as Bangladesh on its western borders. Had there been still extensive Bangladeshi immigrants in the region causing immense social upheaval? Had there still been an appreciable presence of the Christian missionaries and Christians in the region? What type of interaction would have resulted with other states in the present Indian Union outside north east region? Had region still been following the local barter economy outside the monetized financial world? Had still the traditional tribal leaders such as the chiefs like the Angs, Lyngdohs, Syiems, Lals etcetera continued to remain as effective as they used to be? One wonders why and how the good old world of seven-eight decade old changed in such a way that it is impossible to imagine the region without conflict and violence. What were the options available to the various ethnic groups in the region at the time? Question of individual ethnic groups such as Khasi, Garo, Angami, Ao, Lushai or others like even Tripuri or for that Meiteis (Manipuri) acquiring independence for them did not arise at the moment. Then options were to join Burma, Pakistan,

even to some extent China or India. With exception of the NNC, all others were roped in territorially to India. Even to the extent that the Mizos consciously chose India instead of Burma. May be it time for ethnic leaders to imagine their fate in Bangladesh, Burma or China and then to grapple with the present reality of small ethnic groups in an open democratic system, in which they have an equal stake.

### **How did all this Happen?**

The British did vanquish the Japanese forces in the war and there was no hope of the Japanese substituting the British as the regional rulers by the middle of 1940's. Similarly, the British Empire was considerably weakened to the extent that it had no energy left to rule over India any further and, in fact, it was uprooted from Burma. Naturally, there was no strength left among them to experiment with the grand idea of 'crown colony' for the Assam and Burma tribes. So, the idea of crown colony remains just a historical reference point for an untested hypothesis. Similarly, acceptance of agreement hammered by Sir Akbar Hydari would have been that disastrous for the Nagas and the India state, as both came to a working relation in spite of strong reservation. From the hind sight, it appears today that while Nagas were head strong on their non-negotiable uniqueness, New Delhi was callous to ignore local/regional sensitivity at its cost. When the dissenters such as Saikh Muhammad Abdullah, Dravidian Munetra Kazhagam (DMK) and Lal Denga of Mizo National front (MNF) could be persuaded to work within the Indian Union, it was perhaps reasonable to expect even A Z Phizo to find a way out to be together. However, there was a built-in problem with the leadership of the emergent Indian Union: most of them were headstrong on their claimed non-violent achievement of independence. Those were the heady days of moral superiority, non-violence, heightened putative national pride, a hollow claim of ancient great peace loving civilization and above all, an unrealistic sense of superiority. Look at the fact: the Assamese leaders should have been the first to be sensitive to the current thinking and acts of their tribal cousins before the distant national leaders, but they had a grand design of a mono-linguistic state of Assam

inclusive not only the hill districts, but also the two former princely states of Manipur and Tripura.

Another problem sprung up from the initial well-intentional endeavour of the constitutional provision of the VIth Schedule for the scheduled tribal districts by creating the District Councils. In fact, leaders from the plains and hills, both, were insincere to let the constitutional provision function for a while so that its merits could be assessed in time. But while the leaders from the plains saw it as victory in denying temporarily the hill men's demands for carving out hill states out of composite state of Assam, the tribal leaders saw the district councils as the transitional arrangement on way to statehood. So the provision of the District Council was never given a fair trial for its success with the result that barring some exceptions, all the areas under the district councils have turned into states. However, the tribals of these states are having their cakes and eating them also, as in spite of statehood they continue to have district councils in the new dispensation. In this way, they take the advantage of both statehood and district councils at the cost of the federal government and nobody has time to look in to it. This initial provision for the beleaguered hill peoples of the composite state of Assam has of late been vulgarized in such a way that a number of (district?) councils have been created for small scheduled tribes in the plains of Assam on the one hand, on the another, the concept has been extended to into Boro Territorial Council on the northern bank of the Brahmaputra in the plains of Assam. Further, a largely non-tribal community of Nepalis/demand for the district Council in the district of Darjeeling. And of late, even a commission has recommended that the entire state of Sikkim be declared as the Scheduled area (Roy Burman, B.K. 2008).

Some landmark dates in the present history of the Northeast scenario:

1. Signing a 9 point agreement with Sir Hydari Akberi, the Governor of Assam by Naga National Council (NNC) in June, 1947 and different interpretation of its clause 9 by NNC and Government of India.
2. Declaration of independence of Nagaland by Naga

National Council (NNC) on August 14, a day before the independence of the Indian Union.

3. January 26, 1950: Adoption of the Indian Constitution providing special provisions for safe-guarding the interests of the Scheduled tribes through the Sixth Schedule.
4. Boycotting of the first and the second general elections by the NNC and taking to the arms.
5. Holding of the first (August, 1957), second (in May, 1958) and third (in October, 1959) Naga People's Convention (NPC) and agreement a 16 points charter for creation of a separate state of Nagaland.
6. Continuation of the insurgency and imposition of Armed Forces Special Power Act in 1958.
7. Birth of All Party Hill Leaders' Conference (APHLC) in 1950's. Passing of Assam Official Language Bill in 1960.
8. Creation of state of Nagaland on December 1, 1963.
9. Armed insurgency by People's Republic of Kanglepak (Manipur) in 1960's.
10. Insurgency in Mizoram in February, 1966 by Mizo National Front (MNF).
11. Passing of North-Eastern States (Reorganization) Act, 1971.
12. Creation of States of Meghalaya, Manipur, Tripura, Union Territories of Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram and establishment of North Eastern Council (NEC) in 1972.
13. Shillong Accord between NNC and the Government of India (GOI), 1975.
14. Formation of National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) on December 31, 1980 from across the border in Burma with a view to opposing Shillong Accord and establishing a National Socialist state of Nagaland through armed struggle.
15. All Asom Students Union's (AASU) anti-immigration movement in Assam in 1979.
16. Birth of United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA),

- an armed insurgent group in Assam on April 7, 1979 at Sibsagar.
17. Insurgency in Meghalaya and Tripura in 1980's.
  18. Signing of Accord between GOI and AASU in 1985.
  19. Signing of an Accord between GOI and MNF in 1985 and MNF leader, Lal Denga forming the state government.
  20. Creation of state of Mizoram, 1985.
  21. Birth of Arunachal Pradesh as a state in Indian Union in 1987.
  22. Agitation for regional Autonomy/Statehood/ Insurgency among the Boros in the plains districts of Assam in 1990's.
  23. Khasi and Garo join the armed the armed insurrection in 1990's.
  24. Flushing out of ULFA rebels by the Royal Bhutan Army hiding in eastern Bhutan in December, 2003.

### Genesis of Violence and Conflict

1. *Political culture*: Hunting, feuds, revenge; inter-clan, inter-tribal feuds leading to revenge; high values attached to chivalry leading to violence and defiance of difficult natural conditions are some of key ingredient of their traditional system. By definition, frontier peoples and zones have over-lapping cultural and social moorings, and in fact, by its very nature, the state cannot control it fully. It is imperative that rest of the country understands frontier character of the region, where violence is not considered unethical. Rather it is considered to be an honourable way of settling feuds/disputes. Hunting, archery, catching of the games, physical prowess, strength and stamina are considered prized attribute of an individual's leadership qualities. One may contrast this tribal instinctual attributes with that of ahinsa and non-violence. Not for nothing, Verrier Elwin pleaded for Gandhian reformers not to insist on spinning for the tribesmen.

2. *Sudden social change through the mediation of the Christianity at individual and group levels:* Christianity provided a novel world view with its new pantheon, divinity, taboos, ideals, morals, sacred beings, scripture, and a modern/urban/western outlook to judge themselves and others. It as well provided the new converts with a confidence to deal with the world, neighbours, plains folk and outsiders with a sense of confidence, if not superiority, equality.
3. *North East as a limited theatre of war during the Second World War:* The tribals of the region, especially from Indo-Burmese frontiers, saw the one of worst type of modern warfare during the Second World War from close quarters. They were in a way witness to the most humiliating defeat of their British colonial masters and watched closely their humiliating retreat from Burma. So their awe for the British superiority vanished by the end of 1945. Then they saw the new rulers in New Delhi getting engaged in War with/in (East) Pakistan/Bangladesh, which resulted in Bangalis crossing to Northeast in a massive way causing immense misery to local population. Some years back, Indian Union fought a bloody war with the People's Republic of China over north-eastern borders. These events made the tribes men extremely anxious of their future.
4. *Extension of welfare administration, bureaucratization and over-administration:* In spite of the Nehruvian caution, not to over-administer the tribal areas (Elwin, V. 1964), unlike the British, the new rulers decided to push the regular administration even to the farthest tribal regions on the frontiers on the plea that as Indian citizens, the tribes as equal citizens of free India, they must be brought at par with rest of their Indian brethren through extent of welfare programmes and democratic process. In the process, the distant tribal areas with limited capacity to absorb so much outside influence was inundated with the various sets of bureaucratic functionaries, causing dislocation of normal local life style.

5. *Availability of an opaque and strange political system (indirect democracy), in which tribal representatives were strangers and they used to meet and were supposed to work with strangers; inadequate and ineffective voice to convince others of their genuine apprehensions:* This refers to the democratic mechanism of choosing representatives for the State Assemblies and the Parliament by casting one's votes and the elected candidates to be accorded special privilege to take part in framing the laws. The decisions in these houses were taken by the majority, in which by nature shy tribes men/or women contribute in a limited way, but these laws are enforced by the bureaucracy, which the tribals find it strange. In a way for them, old practice of all powerful bureaucrats continues to be confronted with. So inter-relation between legislative and executive remained a mystery for tribesmen for a long period of time. This creates an artificial problem, because in spite of electing their representatives, who are supposed to take decisions, the tribals are confronted with dealing with impersonal bureaucrats, who invariably refer to some vague rules before taking decisions.
6. *Introduction of a plethora of nation-building schemes, but absence of accountability of the funds allocated for the purpose leading to frustration among the regional youth:* A series of schemes for welfare, development of social and physical infrastructure and nation-building projects were assigned to the tribal regions; funds were allocated; some progress being made was visible, but monitoring of the progress of the schemes and accountability of the funds spent on them was so impersonal and bureaucratic that the tribesmen lose all the patience with them. Once their faith in the system is uncertain, they conclude within no time that the entire efforts are being made to cheat them, as they fail to understand when the promises were made; funds were made available, work started, but the results were not visible...

7. *Mismatch between the national concern for lack of law and order and backwardness of the region and regional anxiety for loss of distinct identity and real/putative of history:* There is a contrast between the national and the regional expectations and concerns. For example, national obsession with empathic law and order prevalent in the region does impress upon the regional psyche, as this has been the normal state of affairs in the 'distant frontiers areas' even during the hay days of the British rule and the administration would ignore it to an extent or send an expedition to punish the culprits, who might have run across the mountains. Similarly, the national continuous emphasis on regional backwardness does not touch the hearts of the people; as they are used lead a deprived life for ages. So much so that even construction of road in the roadless difficult terrain is seen not as the harbinger of commercial possibilities, but as a device of subjugation through armed forces. There is a perception in the region, in spite of its being run by the regionally/locally elected representatives, any formal structure represents an outsider intervention, which does not get instant support. Not for nothing that the elected governments and functionaries may have formal legitimacy, but they do not command universal loyalty. When the issues of regional concerns are being debated among/along with the regional intelligentsia and aspiring youth, invariably the first issue is tossed in front is that of loss of identity of an ethnic group. And for that, they are quick enough to discover some real or putative 'evidence'/instance of injustice from the past. Whether one likes it nor not, the regional youth does not appear to be convinced with the repeated national concern for regional backwardness, as they see steps for 'development' as precursor of influx of non-local skilled personnel further inundating the unskilled small ethnic groups (Sinha, A.C. 1994).

The above provides a synoptic view of the drift of events leading to present scenario in Northeast India. One may

find the above schema rather sketchy; in that case further details may be added.

### Peace: Aspects of its 'Why' and 'What'

India has a population as per 2001 census 1.1 billion persons with dominance of the Hindus and a strong minority of the Muslims. The Union is divided into 28 states and 7 union territories. However, unlike rest of the country, two states of Jammu and Kashmir and Nagaland are governed by constitutional provisions of articles 370 and 371 respectively. At the other end of pendulum, there are 474 District (Zila Parishads) Councils and 227,698 Village Councils, which have been empowered constitutionally to manage their affairs (Goswami, N. 2009:62-63). It has a three tier system: Federal, States and Villages. Women have fifty per cent reservation for their representation in their village councils, who participate on the basis of universal adult franchise. States have legislative assemblies directly voted by the citizens on the same principles. However, there are seats reserved for the minority communities in the state assemblies or for the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, considered socio-economically backward. The federal structure is the epitome of Indian people's representation, in which people choose their representatives, who form the government. Indian Union is one of the few countries in the world, which has consistently and regularly held elections for the last six decades. It prides itself on its open civil society, trained and skilled man power, vibrant economy, and concern for less privileged segment of its people. However, there are dark aspects of Indian life, which are again universally known: its oppressive in-equality, social discrimination, regional disparity, grinding poverty, and unequal opportunity to its 'formally all equal citizens'.

Among the many dark spots on the Indian national map, one is that of Northeast Indian region, popularly known as 'land of seven sisters'. The problem was in fact inherited from the British colonial period. The then premier of the state, Sir Syed Mohammad Saadulla, in his eagerness to increase the population of Muslims encouraged land hungry immigrants from East Bengal to pour in Assam under his

now infamous Land Settlement Policy (Hazarika, S.: 1994: 49-60), by which they could occupy any land: forest, public or even private property. In his policy to court favour with the colonial regime, Saadulla opened floodgates of immigrants to Assam on the slogan of 'Grow more food', which was aptly termed by the then Governor General, Lord Wavell, as "Grow more Muslims". Even after partition of India, immigration of Bangladeshis has gone unabated, causing social unrest, economic exploitation and political upheaval in Assam. With the result that for the last three decades, anti-foreigner agitation, initiated by AASU and leading to emergence of ULFA insurgency, is on and not only state of Assam, but the entire region is in the grip of political turmoil.

The policy makers in New Delhi claim to be immensely concerned with the state affairs and would like to remove its backwardness as quick as possible and for that they have envisioned a number of nation-building projects. However, a political observer with long insight in affairs of the region, Sanjib Barua, notes: "The idea that Northeast India is economically backward and underdeveloped and that its ties with the national mainstream are fragile, whatever their validity, lends legitimacy to today's disorder. The democracy deficit, for instance, can be justified as being the result of an exceptional circumstance that would disappear when the region catches up with rest of India—economically and emotionally—whatever that might mean. Yet arguably, the region's informal structures of governance, the underpinning of durable disorder today, are fairly well-articulated with the institutions of the Indian state especially those, through which money for the region's development is channeled. However, whether the insurgency dividend can win hearts and minds and promotes Indian nationhood apart from providing financial foundation of durable disorder, is another matter" (Barua, S.: 2005:25).

There is a growing concern that peace is the minimum necessary condition for any honourable social interaction and for a normal social behaviour. Imagine, the contrast, when the person/persons are under threat of physical violence, how will they react in an intimidating environment. Thus, peace is a must, but even on that there are differential

views. For example, Ted Gurr begins with the following issues in his famous work, 'Why Men Rebel':

1. What are the psychological and social sources of the potential for collective violence?
2. What determines the extent to which that potential is focused on the political system?
3. What social conditions affect the magnitude and forms, and hence the consequences of violence? Then he recounts: The primary causal sequence in political violence is first the development of discontent, second, the politicization of that discontent, and finally, its actualization in violent action against political objects and actors. Discontent arising from the perception of relative deprivation is the basic, instigating condition for participants in the collective violence. Relative deprivation is defined as a perceived discrepancy between men's value expectations and their value capabilities. Value expectations are goods and conditions of life to which people believe they are rightfully entitled. Value capabilities are the goods and conditions they think they are capable of attaining or maintaining given social means available to them. Societal conditions that increase the average level or intensity of expectations without increasing capabilities increase the intensity of discontent. Deprivation-induced discontent is a general spur to action. Psychological theory and group theory, both suggest that the greater the intensity of conflict, more likely is the violence. The specificity of this impulse to action is determined by men's beliefs about the source of deprivation, and about the normative and utilitarian justifiability of violent action directed at the agents responsible for it" (Gurr: 1970:12-13).

Ted Gurr comes to conclude: "There is not much support for the view that political violence is primarily recourse of vicious, criminal, deviant, ignorant, or under-socialized people. Men and women of every social background, acting in the control of every kind of social group on an infinite variety of motives, have resorted to violence against their rulers. Nor is political violence "caused" by pernicious doctrines,

or at least by doctrines alone. Discontented men are much more susceptible to conversion to new beliefs than contented men. Not all new beliefs prove justifications for violence, and most that, are derived from people's own culture and historical experience rather than alien sources. The belief that some kind of social arrangements or political institutions are intrinsically immune to violence or capable of satisfying all human desires is only a partial truth. Political violence is not uniformly and irretrievably destructive of human well-being. Many groups have resorted to political violence at one time or another in their historical development with positive long-range results. Men's resort to political violence is in part unreasoning, but does not occur without reason. Ignorance is almost always among its causes: some times ignorance of its consequences by those who resort to it, more often ignorance by those who create and maintain the social conditions that inspire it. But political violence is comprehensible, which should make it neither necessary nor inevitable, but capable of resolution (Gurr: 1970: 358-359).

So the region needs peace, is it not? But what is peace? At its minimum level, peace means stopping violence, and particularly war, and at a positive level, it means 'overcoming social injustice'. But Ranabir Samadar (Samadar, R. *et. al.* 2001) raises some pertinent, but basic questions: "Can one rest content with a prevention of war? Or, can one be satisfied with local knowledge at grass roots while working for peace? No, question of peace gets increasingly pushed back to the issues of power, injustice, structural violence and war. Further, to keep peace, democracies may wage war. Therefore, ideology, forms of power, forms of weaponry, technique of war (like covert operations, development of small arms, intelligence gathering), and exclusivity/hierarchy of certain rights, are as important as the formal presence of democracy. Thus, democracy as a theme of peace is thus, not without problem. To put this succinctly, it means that peace as the signature-theme of democracy problematizes democracy. In the era of human rights rhetoric, do democracies advance the cause of peace? Does political participation guarantee tolerance? If not, in the absence of participation rights and tolerance in promoting peace, democracy, civil rights and

political rights may not be an adequate guarantee for peace. And lastly, gross social inequality destroys the legitimacy of a rule. And an illegitimate rule cannot promote the culture of a non-pacific mode of resolution of conflict. In short, illegitimacy dissuades dialogue. Thus, peace is not a settled concept, as it cannot produce a manual of non-violent conduct of men and women that gradually turns men and women into non-violent agencies. Thus, peace studies are not a reformatory. Its pedagogic and programmatic aspects are intensely contemporary, and historically conditioned. Emanating from contexts, peace does not reside outside the reaches of power, an organized power as the state, but in its fault lines, in the contests that this power incessantly produces.

Similarly, Emmanuel Hansen reporting on ambitious studies undertaken at the instance of the United Nations University in 1985 on peace, conflict and development in Africa, records: "The peace question has to be seen in two aspects: peace should be conceptualized and perceived not only in the negative sense of minimizing or resolving conflict, but also it is positive sense of creating material conditions which provide for the masse of people a certain minimum condition of security, economic welfare, political efficacy, and psychic well-being" (Hansen, E.:1987: 4). For him, 'the basic starting point for the study of peace is conflict and resolution of conflict is only a minimalist condition for achievement of peace'. The first real condition is to understand the nature and the character of conflict in Africa, which implied two things: an identification of the salient issues and adoption of the appropriate methods to eliminate it. Again, removal of conflict is the only minimalist condition for the attainment of peace. For a lasting and reliable peace to be attained, it is important to fashion economic system which can guarantee sustained economic growth, guarantee for the mass of population a certain minimum of material existence or basic needs. This would not in itself remove the conflict, but it will eliminate some of the causes of tension, which lead conflict (Hansen, E.: 1987: 16).

Barua warns the optimists of nation-building efforts: "The futuristic talk of economic development and of Northeast India joining the 'national mainstream' contrasts sharply with

the vision of the militias that mostly hark to history...Such contrasts over history and memory underscores the inherent tensions in, all national projects, including the pan-Indian projects. Continuing with the failed narratives of national development and nation-building can be quite dangerous in the present global conjuncture. Policies that continue to be framed and legitimized by these failed narratives can also make the situation much worse" (Barua, S.: 2005:26). And then comes the poser: 'Are there ways of imagining Northeast India's future outside the failed narratives of nation-building and national development?'

### **Looking Afresh on what we have: The Indian Constitution**

Granted that we are dealing with an Indian problem, so one has to limit one's analysis within the constitutional perimeters provided by the Indian Constitution. The Indian Constitution claims to be flexible enough to incorporate emerging demands from its citizens with changing times. It did commit itself to safe-guard the special requirements of the socially, economically and regionally backward units. Here we refer to the constitutional provisions for taking care of special needs of the scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and Northeast region. Among them, we refer specially to the provision of the VIth Schedule of the Constitution providing safeguards to the customary rights, land, forests, minerals of communities and exempt them from paying income tax to the federal government and at the same time, the members of the said communities continue to receive all the benefits entitled to the members of scheduled tribes. Keeping in mind the emerged aspirations of the Nagas, the federal government took steps to create the State of Nagaland, ignoring the demands of the economic viability of creating small state on ethnic ground. This was further extended to the similar demands for Meghalaya, Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh. Similarly, against the recommendations of the State Re-organization Commission, Manipur and Tripura states were created keeping in mind the historical sensibilities of the concerned citizens of the two states. Same is the story of creation of the district councils. To an extent, ethnic demands for creation the district councils have been met, but every

big and small community raises such demands and there is no stopping of increasing demand for creation of new states in the region. There must be a bottom line, below which the system will cease to operate and perhaps, we have reached such saturation. Can demands for creation of district councils by small ethnic groups and dispersed communities mixed with others and creation of new states on ethnic lines be indefinitely entertained ignoring the fiscal viability and effects on other communities?

Answers to the above may be yes and no, both depending on circumstances and location of the individuals.

Can we think aloud to re-examine the Indian Constitution in view of the changing times and new demands made for it? After all, Constitution has been amended on scores of times to incorporate the new provisions as per emerging contingencies. The Indian Union has developed in to a flexible system, which has accommodated some of the most threatening demands made on it such as Telangana movement in 1948, DMK separatist agitation in 1950's, Khalistanis' separatist demand in 1980-90's and the like. Even for accommodating some of demands of the Northeast region, the Constitution has been amended about half a dozen times. In terms of money, material and men, the country has already paid a very heavy price for indecision on this issue ignoring the realities. Can we do something a fresh such as reframing constitutional instrument, recognizing the ethnic groups as the units, and not the territories such as the districts, and sort the conflict out among the social and public leaders and not by the armed forces and intelligence officers? After all, the Constitution does recognize the ethnic groups as the units. When one looks at the genesis of British administration in Assam, one may note that the Collectors' main job was to collect basically land revenue from the thickly populated and well-cultivated districts in the plains and Deputy Commissioners (who happened to be either soldiers or police men) were responsible for garnering meager capital/house taxes on commission from the hill districts to begin with.

There is another aspect of the seven states *vis-à-vis* national political structure. Barring Assam, which may be compared with Haryana, Punjab, Jharkhand, or Chhattisgarh for its

representation to the national parliament, rest of six states in the region send 10 members to the *Lok Sabha* and six to the *Rajya Sabha*. One or two representatives from these small states irrespective of their individual caliber feel lost to espouse their cause in comparison to the states such as Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, West Bengal, Tamilnadu, Andhra, Bihar etcetera, which send more than 40 members each to the lower chamber of the national parliament. S.C. Jamir, Governor of Maharashtra and long serving former Chief Minister of Nagaland, suggested in May, 2008 to an intelligentsia gathering of the Northeast region at Shillong to devise some mechanism to appear before the other states and the Indian nation as one unit collectively for its representation. One wonders whether a serious thought was given to a sensible suggestion based on political experience. It is high time, the national policy makers realize that by allocating 10 % national budget to the Northeast region and by creating DoNER (Department of North East Region) in the Union Cabinet, unrest, insurgency, distrust, conflicting concerns and litany of conflicting claims will vanish, they are mistaken. The problem is serious and it needs serious consideration by those, who are held responsible for guiding and guarding the destiny of the Indian Union.

In another context, a scholar had suggested some two decades back to re-examine the ethnic issue afresh and consider it for political representation in the formal structure. After all, the Constitution agrees not to interfere with the customary rights over land, forests, other resources of the Scheduled tribes of the region and he suggested Naga model of representation and development (Ao, A.L.: 1993: 215-235). Prof A.L. Ao at that moment was concerned with the rot in the Nagaland through his empirical analysis from the grass root. However, the region at large is to be seen as a unit and serious efforts are to be made address the six decade's old problems. Maybe the regional structure should be maintained as such. After all, states have been created after a lot of struggles by the concerned peoples. Similarly, old migrants such as the tea plantation labour and communities such Bengali speaking communities in Barak valley, tribesmen dispersed in the plains, Indians from other states working

in the region, their interests have to be kept in mind. Again, the over-lapping regions between distinct areas of two communities, where mixed population is bound to be found, require special treatment. While according authority to the ethnic units within a distinct limit, care has to be taken of small and very small ethnic groups. Moreover, ethnic groups have been in ferment for quite some time; while some former distinct units have coalesced to form identities such as Adi or Mizo, there has also been fragmentation in many of former larger identities. But there is no reason why distinctly and ethnically compact areas should not be recognized in place of faceless districts named accidentally after the important villages/or *qasbas* (market places). May be these efforts will create further chaos for the time being, but ignoring the remedial steps will not help anybody and moving ahead will open new possibilities. And for that regional intelligentsia should come forward and make a plea for peace of their choice. Let us give peace a chance.

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The sphere of socio-cultural changes is a field wherein scholars of inter-disciplinary spectrum finds pleasure in understanding change in an existing structure. Therefore, the study on Ethno-Social Mobility is a decisive mapping of the movements of the people for socially shared values to bring in change in a given social system. This book brings into relief some observations on social and political movements of North East India in the contemporary period. Each contribution from the scholars of various disciplines such as History, English, Anthropology, Sociology, Education, and Social Work portrays detailed account of individual ethno-social movements over a sphere of time. It is hoped that this volume which is knit together in the back drop of peoples movement towards peace paves way for desirable social change in the years to come.

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