

**The North-East and the  
Indian State  
Paradoxes of a Periphery**

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# The North-East and the Indian State

## Paradoxes of a Periphery



*Edited by*  
**P. S. Datta**



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*Green*

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For  
Generations of LBSNAA Alumni  
Who *loved and cared*  
and even *sacrificed* their lives  
to ensure that  
*tomorrow the birds will sing*  
in the  
Frontier regions

## Preface

The Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration at Mussoorie, the premier national institution for preparing the future administrators of the country, was set up in 1959, incorporating the Indian Administrative Service Training School, Delhi, and the Indian Administrative Service College, Shimla.

The quarterly journal of the Academy, *The Administrator*, completes its thirty-ninth year of publication with the October-December issue of 1994. Since its inception, *The Administrator* has had the following theme-specific issues:

- (i) Policy Analyses and Formulation (Vol.33, No.2)
- (ii) Minimum Wages in the Unorganised Sector (Vol.34, No.2)
- (iii) Housing and Shelter (Vol.34, No.3)
- (iv) Gender Bias in India (Vol.35, No.1)
- (v) Village Study (Vol.35, No.3)
- (vi) Communalism (Vol.35, No.4)
- (vii) Land Reforms (Vol.36, No.2)
- (viii) Decentralised Planning (Vol.36, No.3)
- (ix) Language and Linguistics (Vol.37, No.4)
- (x) Training and Research (Vol.38, No.1)
- (xi) Tribal Land and Forest Rights (Vol.38, No.2)
- (xii) Panchayati Raj (Vol.38, No.4)
- (xiii) Public Policy (Vol.39, No.1)
- (xiv) Human Rights (Vol.39, No.2)
- (xv) North-East (Vol.39, No.4)

The above shows that though the preference for deciding specific themes has generally been sector-oriented, regional-specificity has also not been ignored by the Editorial Board of *The Administrator*.

As the present editor of *The Administrator* it is all the more gratifying for me to mention that all the special issues of 1994 are being published as books (*Public Policy*, theme editor: Shri V.K. Agnihotri, *Human Rights*, theme editor: Dr V.K. Gupta and *North-East*, theme editor: Dr P.S. Datta). I sincerely congratulate the members of the Editorial Board of *The Administrator* and

also offer from the core of my heart a very special thanks to Dr N.C. Saxena, Director of the Academy and Chairman of the Editorial Board and our other colleagues on the Editorial Board—Shri V.K. Agnihotri, the Joint Director, Professor V.K. Gupta, Smt. Sarojini G. Thakur, Deputy Director, (Senior), Professor Atindra Sen, Professor Harsh Mander and Shri Amarjeet Sinha, Deputy Director for not only planning the issues but also implementing the same with a sense of purpose and conviction. It has been always a joy for me to work in company with such dedicated members on the editorial board.

I am also thankful to all the contributors who responded with such sincerity to our request for the project on the North-East, initially to be used in our journal and later to be reproduced in the book. Those who could not find time to work on a new piece were gracious enough to allow us to use some of their well known writings produced for some other occasion earlier. In any case we remain thankful to all of them.

I am grateful to Shri Bahadur Singh and Kumari Maya Kandpal of the Journal Section of the Academy for all their support. However, the major responsibility regarding preparation of the manuscript for this publication was shouldered by my young and alert colleagues in the Land Reforms Unit. Of them, I must put on record my appreciation and gratitude to particularly Shri Pradeep Kumar Bhandari, Shri Ramesh Kothari and Shri Dilip Singh Bisht—all sons of the hills of Uttar Pradesh—who have no exposure to the North-East at all but have tremendous love and affection for that part of the country (perhaps due to the affinity they would have identified in the compulsions of history and geography of both regions). For sharing many odd editorial responsibilities I remain grateful to my former student and present colleague Dr Chandana Bhattacharjee.

We only hope that this humble attempt at delineating the panorama, contextualising the tradition, mapping the exasperation and ferreting out the paradoxes will be of some use to our countrymen in general and the administrators and investigators in particular.

P.S. Datta

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## Abbreviations

AASU	All Assam Students' Union
ABSU	All Bodo Students' Union
ACMS	Assam (Asam) Chah Mazadur Sangha
ACSP	Ahom Chah Shramik Parishad
ADC	Autonomous District Council
AGP	Asom Gana Parishad
AICC	All India Congress Committee
APHLC	All Party Hill Leader's Conference
ASEAN	Association of South East Asian Nations
ASS	Asom Sahitya Sabha
ATTF	All Tripura Tribal Force
BAC	Bodo Autonomous Council
BEC	Bodoland Executive Council
BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party
BLP	Bodoland Legislative Party
BNRP	Bharatiya Nepali Rashtriya Parishad
BPAC	Bodo Peoples' Action Committee
BSF	Border Security Force
BdSF	Bodo Security Force
BSS	Bodo Sahitya Sabha
CDC	Chakma District Council
CEZ	Common Economic Zone
CHT	Chittagong Hill Tract
CID	Criminal Investigation Department
CPI	Communist Party of India
CRPF	Central Reserve Police Force
DHM	Democratic Hill Movement
EITU	Eastern India Tribal Union
GATT	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
GNC	Garos National Conference
GNLF	Gorkha National Liberation Front
HNF	Hynniew-Trep Nation

HPC	Hmar People's Convention/Conference
HPU	Hill People's Union
HRDP	Human Resources Development Programme
ILO	International Labour Organisation
INC	Indian National Congress
INTUC	Indian National Trade Union Congress
J & K	Jammu & Kashmir
JKLF	Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front
JMM	Jharkhand Mukti Morcha
KNA	Kuki National Assembly
KNF	Kuki National Front
LDC	Lai District Council
LRC	Land Reforms Commission
MDC	Mara District Council
MNF	Mizo National Front
MoS	Memorandum of Settlement
MPP	Manipur People's Party
MUF	Muslim United Front
NABARD	National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development
NC	National Conference
NE	North East
NEC	North Eastern Council
NECCC (I)	North East Electric Power Corporation
NEEPCO	North East Electric Power Corporation
NEFA	North East Frontier Agency
NEHU	North Eastern Hill University
NEICC	North East India Christian Council
NGOs	Non Government Organisations
NNC	Naga National Council
NNO	Naga National Organisation
NPC	Nagaland Peace Council
NSCN	National Socialist Council of Nagaland
NSCN(M)	National Socialist Council of Nagaland (M)
OBC	Other Backward Classes
OLB	Official Language Bill
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PREPAK	People's Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak
PTCA	Plain's Tribal Council of Assam
PTCA (P)	Plain's Tribal Council of Assam (Progressive)
RSS	Rashtriya Swayam Sewak Sangh
SAARC	South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation
SIB	Subsidiary Intelligence Bureau

TBCU	Tripura Baptist Christian Union
TNV	Tripura National Volunteers
TTAADC	Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council
TUJS	Tripura Upajati Juba Samiti
ULFA	United Liberation Front of Asom
UMF	United Minorities Front
UN	United Nations
UNLF	United Liberation Front
UTNLF	United Tribal National Liberation Front
VDB	Village Development Board
VHP	Vishwa Hindu Parishad
VVK	Vivekananda Vidyalaya Kendra
VVF	Village Voluntary Force



## Chapter 1

# Introduction

*P.S. Datta*

The North-Eastern Region, covering a total area of 2,55,037 sq. km., inhabited by a population of 3,15,47,314 (excluding Sikkim whose population is 4,06,457) belonging to a number of religious, linguistic and ethnic groups, remains a backward region within general framework of underdevelopment of the country as a whole. Although the North-East is full of potentialities (the actual extent of which is yet to be explored), it continues to provide an interesting case of backwardness within backwardness. The fact that it shares more than four thousand kilometers of India's international boundary with Tibet (China), Myanmar, Bangladesh and Bhutan makes the case a further complicated one.

The ethnic situation in the North-East is unique. The region is reported to have 209 scheduled tribes (Arunachal Pradesh - 101, Manipur - 28, Assam - 23, Nagaland - 20, Tripura - 18, Meghalaya - 14 and Mizoram - 5) apart from a number of other ethnic groups not recognised as such though many among them are gradually becoming vocal about the justification of their inclusion in the list.

From the ethnic point of view the seven units of the north-east may be conceived as comprising three distinct groups: (a) Assam (ST: 12.82%) and Tripura (ST: 30.95%) having a majority non-tribal population and a minority Scheduled Tribe population; (b) Nagaland (ST: 87.70%), Meghalaya (ST: 85.53%), Mizoram (ST: 94.75%) and Arunachal Pradesh (ST: 63.66%) having a majority Scheduled Tribe population, and (c) Manipur (ST: 34.41%), the bulk of whose non-tribal population is concentrated in and around Imphal valley while the smaller proportion of Scheduled Tribe population is the concentrated in the hill areas. Sikkim, whose total population is 4,06,457, has a 22.36% indigenous scheduled tribe population spread over vast ranges of the hills in the state.

The spirit of egalitarian adjustments in the predominantly Indo-Mongoloid and traditionally *jhumiya* societies in the hills of the north-east must have

been determined by the compulsions of *jhum* economy. The very system of *jhumming* underlines the fact that with the help of a set of almost primitive tools and instruments of production, the volume of production from land under direct or indirect communal ownership cannot be raised to such a level as can bear the burden of an economically lazy class. And probably due to the above compulsion the *jhumiya* societies of the pre-British north-east (which were altogether free from caste-like ascribed groupings) did not report socio-economic differentiation of any significant consideration. Of course, different types of chieftainship were in practice in all these societies but the institution of chiefs could never imagine or afford to be on the same wavelength of the feudal institution of monarchy or the like. Some ingredients of differentiated economic relationship were certainly in their granulating stage yet the overall relation of production was necessarily pre-feudal, at best somewhere in the tribal-feudal continuum and there were strong defence mechanisms in almost all societies to diffuse any ulterior motive on the part of the political authority to convert itself into an autocrat. The colonial interest did not find direct intervention in the socio-economic arrangements of these societies profitable enough and as such maintained a sort of a distanced indifference with regard to the land management and cultivation process. However, in order to locate and consolidate their allies in the hills of the north-east, they identified the chiefs in various societies and consolidated their position from outside by offering them certain concessions in exchange for their loyalty to the colonial flag. And probably that was the time when most of these chiefs and the other supporting categories in these societies graduated from the rudimentary class-in-itself stage to class-for-itself stage though the commoners were yet to appreciate the situation and take cognisance of their changed status. However, the market economy, into the overall framework of which these *jhumiya* societies were brought by the colonialists, expedited the process of differentiation within, though the consciousness of the commoners could not grasp the reality and the spirit of traditional egalitarian practice persisted along with a continuation of *jhumming*.

✓ Colonial interests provided a common political map to the culturally related but independent peoples of India. They played with the geography again and again and grouped and regrouped the territories and the peoples according to their interest of cost minimisation in administration and profit maximisation in economic ventures. Nothing else did count in this colonial game. In matters pertaining to administrative regrouping the colonial rulers identified certain nodal points around which they tried to weave the administrative network and, in the process, the nodal points emerged as relatively large and strong units in comparison to others. In eastern India Bengal happened to be such a nodal point whereas in north-eastern India Assam enjoyed the same position. One point must be borne in mind—that this position was neither earned by

Bengal or the Bengali-speaking population in eastern India nor by Assam or the Assamese-speaking population in north-eastern India, nor was it granted to them by the colonial rulers on grounds of special love and affection. It was a simple colonial arithmetic and the people had nothing to do with the decisions at the time.

Consolidation of colonial rule in north-east India took a long time and at different points of time different units came under British rule viz, Assam Plains in 1826, Cachar Plains in 1830, Khasi Hills in 1833, Jaintia Plains in 1835, Karbi Anglong in 1838, North Cachar in 1854, Naga Hills during 1866-1904, Garo Hills in 1872-73, and Lushai Hills in 1890.

Assam itself had to go through a lengthy granulating period before emerging as a nodal point in British administration of north-east India. On 6 February 1874 Assam was put under a Chief Commissioner by taking away its management from the Lt. Governor of Bengal. In 1905, to make Assam an economically viable administrative unit, Bengal was partitioned and Assam became a part of the Province of Eastern Bengal and Assam. In 1912 Assam was again converted into a Chief Commissionership and, finally in 1921, it became a Governor's province as per the provisions of the Government of India Act, 1919.

However, the areas around Assam that were brought under British administration at different points of time were always treated by the British administration on a separate footing. And for this purpose successive legal and administrative decisions were taken between 1874 and 1935, highlighting the separate and distinct identities of the areas in the north-east.

Under Scheduled District Act, 1874, it was decided to remove the remote or backward tracts of British India from the operation of General Acts and Regulations. The Assam Frontier Tracts Regulation, 1880 empowered the Chief Commissioner to remove any part of this area from the operation of enactments in force therein. As per the suggestions of the Montagu-Chelmsford Report, 1918, the Government of India Act, 1919 inserted Section 52 A in Government of India Act, 1915. According to this section the Governor-General in Council may declare any territory to be a backward tract and deny application of any Legislative Act in the areas such declared. Consequently, under Section 52 A(b) of the Act the following territories in the province of Assam were declared as backward tracts: (a) the Garo Hills District, (b) the British portion of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills District (other than the Shillong Municipality and the Cantonment), (c) the Mikir Hills (in Nowgong and Sibsagar Districts), (d) the North Cachar Hills (in Cachar District), (e) the Naga Hills District, (f) the Lushai Hills District, and (g) the Sadiya Frontier Tract, (h) the Balipara Frontier Tract and (i) the Lakhimpur Frontier Tract. The administrative position pertaining to these backward tracts was examined by the Indian Statutory Commission, 1930 (popularly known as the Simon

Commission) and it felt that no legislature should be given powers to pass legislation on these areas; instead the administration should be more centralised through the Governors. The Government of India Act, 1935 accepted certain recommendations of the Simon Commission and in place of the term 'backward tracts' regrouped the same areas under two categories, 'excluded' and 'partially excluded' areas. As per the Government of India (Excluded and Partially Excluded Areas) Order, 1936 the backward tracts of Assam were regrouped as follows: Excluded Areas - (a) North East Frontier (Sadiya, Balipara and Lakhimpur) Tract, (b) the Naga Hills District, (c) the Lushai Hills District, and (d) the North Cachar Hills sub-division of Cachar District; Partially Excluded Areas - (a) the Garo Hills District, (b) the Mikir Hills in Nowgong and Sibsagar Districts, and (c) the British portion of Khasi and Jaintia Hills District (other than Shillong Municipality and Cantonment). The basic point in governance of these two areas was that the powers of the provincial legislature were not to extend to these areas. The excluded areas were to be administered by the Governor himself in his discretion while the partially excluded areas were to be his special responsibility.]

The provisions contained in the Government of India Act, 1935, dealing with these areas were, by and large retained by the Indian (Provisional Constitutional) Order, 1947, except for the discretionary powers of the Governor with regard to administration of the Excluded Areas.

The Constituent Assembly considered with much seriousness the future of these areas. The Bordoloi Committee, appointed to report on the North-East Frontier (Assam) Tribal and Excluded Areas, submitted its report to the Advisory Committee on Fundamental Rights, Minorities and Tribal and Excluded Areas for the consideration of the Constituent Assembly. The recommendations of the Bordoloi Committee were incorporated in the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India.

According to Section 20 of the Sixth Schedule the 'tribal areas' of Assam were specified in Part A and Part B of a corresponding Table. Part A included (a) the United Khasi and Jaintia Hills, (b) the Garo Hills, (c) the Lushai Hills, the (d) the Naga Hills, (e) the North Cachar Hills, and (f) the Mikir Hills. Part B included (a) North-East Frontier Tract including Balipara Frontier Tract, Abor Hills and Mismi Hills Districts, and (b) the Naga Tribal Area. According to Section 19 of the Sixth Schedule the Governor was to ensure constitution of an autonomous district council for each of these above areas.

Of the above areas (included in the original list of tribal areas of Assam) to be covered by the Sixth Schedule, Nagaland (1962), the United Khasi-Jaintia Hills and Garo Hills (as Meghalaya, 1970 Autonomous State within Assam and 1972 fulfilled state), Lushai Hills (as Mizoram U.T. in 1971), North-East Frontier Tract (as Arunachal Pradesh U.T. in 1971), have all, except the North Cachar Hills and the Mikir Hills, emerged as States of the

Indian Union with their own Legislatures except. Till 1970 there was only one District Council for the Mikir Hills and North Cachar Hills. In 1970 the new district of North Cachar Hills was inaugurated. Today, when one refers to the Hills of Assam it is to these two lone survivors of the original Frontier Tracts of 1880, Backward Tracts of 1919, Excluded and Partially Excluded Areas of 1936 and Tribal Areas of 1950 which are yet to attain full control over their own legislative future. The story of the Hill areas coming out of Assam has already merited a significant place in the current history of political management of socio-economic tensions experienced by the Indian Polity since 1947 and as such has drawn enormous attention from all quarters. The Naga-Mizo-Khasi-Jaintia-Garo dimensions of self-determination are by now epoch-making on their own merit. But the granulating exercises of the self-determination aspirations of the Karbis (Mikiris) and Dimasas of Karbi Anglong (Mikir Hills) and the North Cachar Hills of Assam are yet to receive due attention of the general Indian public.

Separateness, consolidated and routinised during the prolonged colonial rule and a sense of economic and other related deprivation in the region have long been causing a deep-rooted urge for withdrawal from the system. Manifestation of this urge for withdrawal is commonly known as insurgency. The oldest case of insurgency is provided by Nagaland. The Naga National Council (NNC) raised its banner even before the transfer of power in 1947. The NNC later divided in its approach and the NSCN emerged. The 1960s saw the birth of the MNF in Mizoram, the PLA, PREPAK and KCP in Manipur, and the TNV in Tripura; ULFA in Assam is the youngest of the organisations, having emerged in the late 1970s. In this canvas of an insurgency prone North-East, only two states—Meghalaya and Arunachal—are yet to report any instance of serious insurgency, although a tendency towards it is quite visible today.

However, the problem of the plains particularly in the Brahmaputra Valley, is somewhat different from that in the hills. In the case of the hills, since independence, the problems basically concerned the integration of a population not only to a market-oriented economy but also to a political system in which it was never a serious partner during the prolonged phase of colonial rule. In the case of the Brahmaputra valley the problem was not necessarily that of integration but of ensuring a mechanism for the distribution of the fruits of such integration both at the micro-and macro-levels. At the macro-level development-negotiations with the system as a whole continued for a long time, culminating in the much publicised Memorandum of Settlement of 1985. The more serious dimension of this development-negotiation in Assam today is at the micro-level involving various ethnic groups that have been neighbours for centuries.

Assam is burning today. The demands of the Bodos, Karbi-Dimasas, Mishings, Rabhas and Tiwas for autonomy and the demand of the Koch-Rajbongshis, tea-tribals, Muttak-Morans for the status of scheduled tribes are, together, causing this bonfire in Assam today. To cap it all ULFA continues to provide that magical extra-Constitutional touch to this already surcharged situation. Assam in the 1990s presents altogether a different picture than that of Assam during 1979-85.

But the 1985 Memorandum of Settlement, in a sense, opened up a Pandora's box and new forces came to be known to the countrymen for the first time spearheading movements against a very much 'Assamese' Government, demanding redressal of the conditions that caused oppression, deprivation, subordination and marginalisation (supposedly meted out to them) by the Assamese elite in particular. From where and why does all this talk about preservation and protection of interest and identity of a number of population groups, that were made to become known as 'Assamese' all these years, arise? Are these not Assamese then? This particular question brings to sharper focus the interlinkage between political boundary and social boundary and throws a whole new set of challenge to all brands of social science researchers and political and administrative decision-makers.

—The North-East today appears to be passing through a phase of lack of confidence—lack of confidence in the 'system' manifested through various insurgency movements and lack of confidence in the 'nature of our togetherness' manifested through various autonomy movements. A researcher or an administrator is a secular category in himself and it is as such our bounden responsibility to dispassionately see for ourselves and for others what went wrong where and why. We are sure that together we shall be in a position of strength to face all myths and illusions nurtured so cleverly over the decades and, with sufficient conviction in our purpose, we shall be courageous enough to not only identify the real maladies but also to rectify there in an atmosphere of mutual respect and understanding.