

Nationalism in Global Era: A Case Study of Northeast India

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It is often argued in some quarters that nationalism, as an ideology or as a movement, is an anachronism in the age of globalisation. As a result, nationalism-seeking independence or autonomy is gradually dwindling or dissipating. However, empirical evidences in some parts of the world reveal that nationalism emphasizing the right to self-determination not only continues to exist but has even grown stronger. For example, in the Northeastern region of India nationalism calling for either independence or autonomy flourished and gathered momentum among various tribal and non-tribal people during the period of globalisation. In this paper, an attempt is made to focus on the persistence of these different forms of nationalism in Northeast India in the global era.

Globalisation and Nationalism: Conceptual Clarifications

The term “globalisation” is used in social sciences since the 1960s. But as a process the concept of globalisation became popular in the 1980s and 1990s. The interplay of various factors such as the fall of the Berlin Wall and the unification of Germany, the rise of the European Community, the collapse of the Soviet Union, end of cold war, fall of communism and the dismantling of Second World, spread of capitalism and the ideals of liberal democracy and above all the growth of global connectivity brought about by the development in information and communication technology have largely contributed to the emergence of the global era. In other words, the interplay of various political, economic, technological, and socio-cultural factors led to the rise of globalisation (Croucher 2004). But as far as the phenomenon of globalisation is concerned, different scholars offer different interpretations. Some scholars consider that globalisation is an ideological weapon designed especially by

the West to justify global capitalism and democracy. Others argue that globalisation primarily means westernisation of the rest of the world. Still some others note that globalisation is basically a phenomenon which underlines integration of economies and interconnectedness among culturally diverse societies and that it is irreversible and irresistible (Steger 2003). But some people point out that globalisation is nothing new; connections between human societies existed in the past as well. Some scholars also raise ethical issues, i.e., whether globalisation is bad or good, positive or negative, and possibility or inevitability. Some people of course focus on the new forms of inequality, erosion of identity, marginalisation of cultures and the risk factors involved in globalisation process of change (Stiglitz 2002).

But regardless of these divergent interpretations, scholars commonly agree that globalisation is a multi-dimensional phenomenon. In its economic dimension globalisation symbolises integration of national economies and the realization of a global common market based on the freedom of exchange of goods and capital. In this sense it primarily emphasises trade liberalisation, privatisation of ownership, spread of multinational companies and the emergence of a global free-market capitalist system (Bhagwati 2004). In the political dimension, however, globalisation largely underlines the spread of democratic institutions and values, promotion of human and civil rights, borderless political territory and above all the formation of regional or global democratic political structures for regional or global governance. The establishment of the European Union as a supra-state or trans-national governing unit is a classic example of political globalisation. The social dimension of globalisation reflects intensification of social interaction and interdependence across international boundaries so as to create a shared social space or one world society. It depicts greater external influence and lower insularity and isolationism in the international sphere (Parekh 2000). In the cultural dimension, however, globalisation highlights increasing intercultural relations involving deeper cultural exchanges of values, technologies, artifacts, agro-facts and the emergence of a multicultural world marked by global ‘consumer’ culture and materialistic ideals (Berger 1997). On the whole, it can be said that globalisation signifies a worldwide process of economic, social, cultural, political and technological change brought about by expanding facilities for intercommunication and interdependence between traditionally isolate cultures, societies and states.

As far as nationalism is concerned, the political dimension of globalisation is very significant. This is so because some scholars argue that

nationalism as apolitical creed of self-determination was rational and relevant in the world during the 18th and 19th centuries and the first three quarters of the 20th century. But as the world turned into a global unit in the last quarter of the 20th century and more particularly in the 21st century, nationalism has become mostly irrational and irrelevant (Hobsbawm 1990). Those who hold this view maintain that nationalism emphasising the formation of culturally homogeneous independent states or nation-states emerged during early or nascent capitalism. Early capitalism for its survival needed culturally homogeneous independent political units and hence the political creed of nationalism depicting culturally homogeneous states or nation-states emerged out of this need. But capitalism in its matured phase has transformed the world into a single global market and hence nationalism depicting political boundaries along national or nation-state lines has become irrelevant or anachronistic in the global era. In other words, it is argued that global or world capitalism largely contributed to the decline of nation-state, irrelevance of nationalism and the erosion of political sovereignty (Ohmae 1995).

It is true that nationalism originated in Europe during the periods of capitalist growth in 18th-19th centuries and thereafter it spread to other parts of the world during the periods of colonialism and imperialism. However, the height of nationalism was seen during de-colonisation after the Second World War. This is evident from the fact that the membership of the United Nations Organisation (UNO) increased from 55 in its year of foundation in 1945 to 154 in 1980. That means a total of 103 sovereign independent countries were added to the list of members of the UNO in a period of 35 years. Not only this, even in the post-cold war and post-communism global era, which roughly began from 1980, the occurrence of nationalism was seen continuously in several parts of the world. The addition of as many as 38 sovereign countries to the membership of the UNO from 1980 to 2006 testifies unequivocally the occurrence of nationalism in the global era. The increase in UNO membership resulted largely due to the growth of nationalism among several non-Russian peoples in the former Soviet Union, the civil war and the subsequent break-up of former Yugoslavia and the division of Czechoslovakia in the 1990s. The fall of former Soviet Union led to the establishment of the sovereign states of Georgia, Ukraine, Belarus, Moldavia, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan. Similarly, erstwhile Yugoslavia disintegrated into the sovereign states of Croatia, Serbia-Montenegro, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Macedonia. Further, the break-up of Czechoslovakia established the two separate

sovereign states of Czech Republic and Slovakia. The establishment of East Timor as sovereign state in 2002 in Indonesian archipelago is another classic example of the persistence of nationalism in recent times. Besides, Montenegro declared independence from Serbia in 2006 and became the latest member of the UNO the same year. Excepting Vatican City, there are at present 192 sovereign member countries in the UNO. Apart from this, there exist 10 sovereign states comprising six independent states such as Abkhazia, Chinese Taiwan, Kosovo, Palestinian Territories, South Ossetia and four autonomous republics such as Somaliland, Turkish Cyprus, Transnistria and Northern Cyprus. In all these countries strong nationalist movements are going on to secure general international recognition to their sovereign status. It may be noted that Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the two break away regions of Georgia, have recently declared full independence with the help of Russian troops. The Taiwanese people are also continuously fighting for complete independence from mainland China. Similarly, the widespread violent protests by the Tibetan people during the preparations of the recent Beijing Olympics show strong signs of the ongoing Tibetan nationalism for independence of Tibet. Furthermore, as many as 70 population groups have acquired the membership of the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organisations (UNPO), which was founded in 1991 with headquarters at The Hague. Its members mainly consist of indigenous peoples, occupied nations, minorities and independent states and it is committed to equal right to self-determination and human rights.

In addition, nationalist movements showing strong desires for sovereign political states continue to be seen among distinct national groups like the Basques and Catalans in Spain, the Bretons in France, the Ibos and the Yoruba in Nigeria, the people of Darfur in Sudan, the Irish, Welsh and Scots in U.K., the Puerto Ricans in U.S.A., the Chechens and Ingushetias in Russia, the Palestinians and the Kurds in Middle-East, the Balochis, Waziris and the Pushtuns in Pakistan, the Chakmas in Bangladesh, the Tamils in Sri Lanka, the Kashmiris, Sikhs and Nagas in India, etc. Further, national movements for independence continue unabated among the Muslim group (the Moro) in the Mindanao island of Philippines, the Aceh people in the Sumatra island of Indonesia, the Karens and Chins in Myanmar and so on (Ganguly & Macduff 2003). The persistence of all these nationalisms indicates that instead of weakening globalisation has actually led to strengthening of local national identities in various parts of the world. This fact has been corroborated by several scholars. For example, A. D. Smith (1995: 160) observes that the

persistence of the wave of nationalisms in various parts of the world substantiates the enduring nature of national idea in the global era. Mary Kaldor (2004:101) notes that the persistence of nationalism in the global era should be understood as a response to globalisation. She argues that nationalism will not necessarily go away in the era of globalisation. Berberoglu (2004, 2005, 2008), however, argues that nationalism has resurged in the era of globalisation. He points out that in 21st century when the globalisation process is in full swing, some nations and national movements from Western Europe to the Middle-East and from Eastern Europe to the Third World strive to establish their national identity, self-rule and sovereignty; while some sovereign nations pursue for economic and political integration, cooperation and union. Turker (2006) in a recent study on the existence of nationalism in the U.K. and Turkey remarks that contrary to the likelihood of a new era of post-nationalism and cosmopolitan citizenship the patterns of post-communist globalisation have produced more rather than less ethnic, political and religious conflicts. In his opinion globalisation processes are not just homogenizing and supranational; they also increase differences and the importance of local national identities. Kwon (2005) too notes that globalisation exacerbates the potential for conflicts associated with nationalist sentiments; the forces of globalization and the state of underdevelopment are the primary contributors in fueling such nationalisms. Even European globalisation, which led to the emergence of European Union, has not undermined the nationalistic urge among its member nations. The European Union, as a *sui generis* supranational organisation, evolved for economic, trade and commercial ties and hence it does not abrogate the national consciousness or national rights of its 27 sovereign member nations. The French nationalism in Europe and the regional or 'ethnic' nationalisms within France persist under the European Union (Metzger 2000). Similarly, nationalism of the English, German, Spanish, Dutch, Greek, Norwegians, etc., continue to exist distinctly in the European Union. In China also a new Chinese nationalism has emerged in the post-Mao period in the 1990s (Hughes 2006). All these developments suggest that nationalism and nation-states have become stronger than they had been in the pre-global period (Delanty & Kumar 2006).

Apart from the above, another distinct form of nationalism, i.e., nationalism seeking provincial statehood also predominantly exists in some ex-colonial multicultural countries such as India. It may be noted that in India nationalism is mostly articulated at two different levels: at the all-India level, nationalism is expressed in civil-political sense and it is linked with the

concept of sovereign Indian statehood or Indian nation-state, and at the local-regional level nationalism is conceptualised in cultural terms and its goal is associated with maintaining distinct cultural national identity within the provisions of provincial statehood (Nanda 2007). This dual conception of nationalism existed in India in colonial times and it continues to exist even in the global era. The province-seeking regional nationalisms in India are mainly articulated in terms of linguistic, religious and tribal identities and they overwhelmingly continue to flourish in the period of globalisation. Further, in recent times a new form of nationalism, namely, 'autonomy without independence' is also seen among several island countries such as Guam, Samoa, Virgin Islands in the U.S.A., Macau, Hong Kong in China, Falklands Islands in the U.K., etc.

Thus the emergence of several sovereign nations in the last couple of decades and the prevalence of different forms of nationalism among various distinct nationalities the world over prove beyond doubt that nationalism has not become anachronistic or atavistic in the global era. Given the spread of liberal and democratic ideals in the global age, the oppressed, occupied, marginalised and peripheral nations and the nations-without-states would incessantly indulge in the demand for political self-determination in sovereign or autonomous terms. Furthermore, in the present global context sovereign or autonomous nationhood makes tremendous sense for securing socio-economic advantages and equality in a world dotted by plural societies and polities (Oommen 2002). With this conceptual note the prevalence of various regional nationalisms in Northeast India in the global period is examined in the following sections.

Nationalism in Northeast India

Northeast India, comprising the contiguous 'seven sister' states of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura and the geographically isolated state of Sikkim, is a strategically located region with international boundary on three sides. It is bounded by Bhutan and Tibet region of China on the north, Myanmar on the east and Bangladesh on the south and southwest. It is connected to mainland of India through a small corridor of land on the western side. The region covers an area of 2, 62,179 sq. km., which is 7.9 percent of India's total geographical area. The population of the region as per the 2001 census stands at 39,035,582, which is 3.8 percent of the total population of India. The region has an average density of 149 persons which is much lower than the all-India average of 313 persons.

Assam is the most populated state in the region with average density of 340 persons and Arunachal Pradesh is the least populated state with average density of 13 persons.

The average literacy of the region as per 2001 census is 68.5 percent, which is higher than the all-India average of 64.8 percent. The population of the region is vastly rural; only 15.5 percent of the people live in urban areas. As per the 1991 census, the Scheduled Castes constitute 6.9 percent and the Scheduled Tribes account for 25.8 percent of the total population of the region. Out of the eight states in the region, four states, namely, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland are predominantly tribal; the remaining states, namely, Assam, Manipur, Tripura and Sikkim also contain substantial tribal people. Mizoram with 94.8 percent has the highest tribal concentration followed by Nagaland with 87.6 percent, Meghalaya with 85.5 percent and Arunachal Pradesh with 63.7 percent tribal people (Ibid). The people of the region speak nearly 200 languages and dialects. The principal non-tribal languages of the region are Assamese, Bengali, Manipuri and Nepali and the major tribal languages are Bodo, Khasi, Garo, Mizo, Karbi, Rabha, Ao, Angami, Sema, Mao, Tangkhul, Kuki-chin, Kokborok, etc. Out of these languages only Assamese, Bengali, Nepali, Manipuri and Bodo have acquired scheduled status of the Indian Constitution. Apart from diverse languages, four major religions such as Hinduism, Islam, Christianity and Buddhism and scores of tribal religions and the minority religions of Jainism and Sikhism are found in the region. Majority of the people in the states of Assam, Manipur and Tripura are Hindus. But majority of the tribal people in the hill areas are Christians.

Northeast India thus represents culturally an extremely plural set-up; in fact it truly represents a microcosm of plural India. Given this bewildering cultural diversity, the emergence of regional nationalisms in the region demanding autonomy or independence is but natural. The strong associations of linguistic and tribal identities with ancestral or adopted homelands provide effective bases for crystallisation of regional nationalisms in the region. The religious affiliation of some tribal people in the region often strengthens these nationalisms to a great extent.

In colonial times, except for the states of Manipur, Tripura and Sikkim, the remaining areas of Northeast India formed parts of the erstwhile British province of Assam. The British occupied Assam after the first Anglo-Burmese war in 1826. It took more than half a century for the British to colonise all

the areas of erstwhile Assam. Some of the tribal areas in erstwhile Assam constituted autonomous territories of chieftainship. The colonisation of Assam resulted in linking the region more and more with the mainland of India. The British colonial interests and the discovery of tea, oil and coal in the region particularly facilitated this linkage with mainland of India (Hussain 1997). The colonial administration introduced some early infrastructure development in the region. Besides, the Christian missionaries under colonial patronage spread literacy and developed the native languages in the region. Surprisingly, in the colonial period no significant tribal or non-tribal nationalism crystallised in the region. The Assamese people did react incipiently to the early Bengali penetration, but no Assamese nationalism calling for separate province emerged in colonial times. In post-independent period, however, different kinds of tribal and non-tribal nationalisms emerged in the region in unprecedented manner. While some of these nationalisms in the region originated in the pre-global era, others originated and got rejuvenated in the global era.

One of the most important and longest nationalisms in Northeast India is Naga nationalism. It originated in the pre-global era and though dormant since the recent ceasefire it continues with its main ideology of sovereign statehood. In a sense, Naga nationalism gave birth to all other nationalisms in the region. It may be noted that the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution prescribes for special provisions to protect tribal identity and autonomy in Northeast region. Under these provisions the tribal areas of erstwhile Assam such as united Khasi and Jaintia Hills District, Naga Hills District, Lushai (Mizo) Hills District, the North Cachar Hills District and the Mikir Hills District were placed in Part 'A' category and the Northeast Frontier Tract, Tirap Frontier Tract, Abor and Mishmi Hills and Naga Hills Tribal Areas were placed in Part 'B' category. In 1952 Autonomous District Councils were formed in the erstwhile Assam province for the Part 'A' tribal areas except the Naga Hills District. The Part 'B' areas were administered directly by the Governor of Assam. In 1954 the Northeast Frontier Tract with Abor Hills and Mishmi Hills were made into North-Eastern Frontier Agency (NEFA) and Lushai Hills was renamed as Mizo Hills District (Agnihotri 1996).

The Naga tribes rejected the Sixth Schedule provisions and strongly asserted their independent identity on the eve of Indian independence. The Naga National Council (NNC), a common platform of the Naga tribes, was formed in 1946 by some articulate Naga leaders and under its aegis the Naga independence movement was launched vociferously since Indian

independence (Chaube 1999:154). The Nagas comprise a group of nearly thirty segmented tribes spread over a territory that covers the present Indian state of Nagaland, Naga-inhabited areas in Myanmar and the Naga inhabited-areas in the Indian states of Manipur, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. From the early part of the 20th century Nagas believed that their identity was different from that of India. They considered themselves as a distinct nation on the basis of common territory, common culture, common tribal identity, common religion and common origin and historical experience. Going by their common identity, the Naga Club submitted a memorandum to the Simon Commission in 1929 to consider sovereignty for the Nagas after withdrawal of the British from India. In 1946 the NNC accepted a ten-year Indian guardianship over Naga territory on the basis of an agreement with then Assam Governor Akbar Hydri. But soon it changed its stand and declared independence of the Nagas on 14 August 1947. In 1949 A. Zapu Phizo became the president of NNC and under him the Naga movement for sovereignty was launched violently. Under Phizo's leadership the Nagas conducted a plebiscite in 1951 for Naga sovereignty; they also boycotted autonomous district council election and the first general election to Indian Parliament (Ibid). Subsequently, a Naga federal government and a Naga federal army were formed in 1956 to mark the independence of Nagaland. The Government of India reacted to this move strongly and came down heavily on the Naga rebels. Most of the Naga rebels went underground and NNC president Phizo slipped out of India and went to London on exile.

The first major provincial reorganisation in India was carried out in 1956; but the Naga territories remained untouched. Soon after the reorganisation, the armed rebellion of the Nagas escalated vigorously (Dwivedi 2004). The moderate section of Naga leadership, however, did not wholeheartedly support the anti-Indian armed struggle by the hard line Naga leaders. Under the Naga People's Convention this moderate section negotiated with the Indian government and signed a sixteen-point agreement in 1960, following which Nagaland was formed as the 16th Indian state on 1st December 1963. The NNC hardliners rejected outright the formation of Nagaland state as it did not meet their aspiration of sovereign homeland. As a result, their insurgency continued unabated. To solve the Naga nationality question the Shillong accord was signed in 1975 between the Government of India and the NNC; but it failed to bring any solution to the problem. As per this accord, the Nagas unconditionally surrendered arms and accepted Indian sovereignty. The hardliners termed the accord as a total compromise with Naga

sovereignty. Hence to continue the armed struggle for Naga independence the hardliners formed the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) in 1980 and with this a systematic campaign of Naga nationalism began. But internal rivalry divided NSCN into NSCN-IM and NSCN-K in 1988. The former is led by Isak Chisi Swu, a Sema Naga, and Thuingaleng Muivah, a Tangkhul Naga and the latter is led by S. S. Khaplang, a Konyak Naga from Myanmar (Ao 2002). It may be noted that the formation of NSCN coincided with the beginning of the globalization process. The NSCN has not only emerged as the vanguard of Naga nationalism in the global era but has also established more international connections under the influence of globalisation.

Recently, the NSCN leadership agreed to negotiate Naga problem with the Indian government. But factionalism in NSCN caused serious setback to the process of negotiation (Shimray 2005). Nevertheless, a series of peace-talks between the Government of India and the NSCN-IM faction were held from 1995 to 2007 to arrive at a peaceful and acceptable solution to the Naga nationality problem. Representatives of several Indian Prime Ministers starting from P. V. Narasimha Rao, H. D. Deve Gowda and I. K. Gujral to A. B. Vajpayee and Man Mohan Singh negotiated with the NSCN-IM and NSCN-K leaders both inside and outside India. But nothing substantial has been achieved so far except for the cease-fire agreement with NSCN-IM group and NSCN-K group with effect from 1st August 1997 and 1st April 2001 (Baruah 2007). During the peace-talks in Bangkok both the parties - Government of India and the Naga rebel outfits - have agreed on third-party mediation and since 2001 Michael C. van Walt ran Praag, the executive president of the Netherlands-based non-governmental organization Kreddha and the former general secretary of UNPO, has been mediating unofficially in the Naga peace process (Chishi 2007). The peace talks focussed on analyzing the Indian Constitution vis-à-vis giving special status or greater autonomy to Nagaland. Meanwhile, a UK-based group, Quakers for Peace, also started negotiating with the Naga militants for reconciliation. In the latest round of talks in Amsterdam in October 2007 peace process remained deadlocked due to the inflexibility of both the parties. The Naga insurgent outfits attributed the failure of the talks to the insensitivity and insincerity of the Government of India in solving the Naga nationality problem in the context of the right to self-determination (Ibid). The Naga conflict remains unresolved so far because the NSCN leadership considers sovereignty as inalienable right of the Nagas; it also claims that the Nagas constitute an indigenous people/nation and hence the right of self-determination is imperative for them

(Ao 2002). Further, the NSCN-IM has nowadays started using the word 'Nagalim' in place of Nagaland so as to cover the entire Naga-inhabited areas. The Government of India strongly rejects the sovereignty question and the indigenous claim of the Nagas. It has shown willingness to solve the Naga nationality problem in the form of 'Greater Nagaland' within the constitutional framework of the Indian Union.

Keeping the 'Greater Nagaland' demand in view, it was decided in June 2001 to extend the ceasefire to Naga-inhabited areas beyond Nagaland state. But unfortunately, this decision sparked off strong protests in the adjoining states of Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh and Assam. The most violent protest came from the Meitei people of Manipur as the demand of 'Greater Nagaland' include the Naga-inhabited districts of Chandel, Senapati, Ukhrul and Tamenglong, in addition to 26 villages inhabited by Zeliangrong Naga tribe in Manipur (*Hindustan Times* 26.6.2001). The Meitei nationalists insist that the efforts to solve the Naga problem should not affect the territorial integrity of Manipur. The governments of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh also expressed similar concerns about their respective states. Further, in the last eleven years of ceasefire agreement, the NSCN-IM changed its demand from 'Greater Nagaland' to confederation between India and Nagaland and modifications in the Indian Constitution for special federal relations with Nagaland. Interestingly, not all Naga people approve the idea of 'Nagalim' as projected by the NSCN-IM activists. Most of the Nagas are divided on the issues of sovereignty and self-determination. The moderate Nagas do not basically press for complete independence from India; they are willing to accept self-determination in terms of greater autonomy (Kaur 2006). Moreover, internal divisions have begun to develop among Naga people in recent times. This is evident from the demand for separate state raised by the Eastern Nagaland People's Union for the four backward districts of Mon, Tuensang, Longleng and Kiphre. However, the apex traditional council of the Naga tribes, the Naga Hoho, denounced this move of parallel nationalism in Nagaland (*The Telegraph* 25.7.2007).

It seems the Naga nationality question in Northeast India has become an insurmountable problem. The militant leadership of Naga nationalism insists on sovereignty and perceives self-determination in terms of sovereign Naga homeland, the 'Nagalim', comprising all the Naga areas in India and Myanmar. This militant leadership is not satisfied with the limited version of Naga homeland (the Indian state of Nagaland) and is not ready to embrace self-determination in autonomous provincial terms. Naga nationalism combines

the traits of secessionist and irredentist nationalisms. It is secessionist in that it seeks secession of Naga territories from India and it is irredentist because it wants to include all the Naga areas in the present state of Nagaland. It also bears the traits of civil-political nationalism, because the concept of Naga homeland, the 'Nagalim', projected by the Naga militants comprises a conglomerate of segmented Naga tribes and a plural Naga society.

Another vociferous nationalism that emerged in Northeast India in the global era is Assamese nationalism. Nationalism among the Assamese people did not emerge in the context of separate province demand. It rather emerged in the context of: (a) the Assamese-Bengali and the Assamese-tribal people conflicts over the language issue; and (b) the anti-foreigner and illegal infiltration issue. In the last two-and-a-half decades marked by globalization the latter issue dominated Assamese nationalism considerably. As mentioned earlier, colonial Assam covered more than two-thirds of Northeast region and hence no organised Assamese national movement demanding separate province emerged in colonial period. But strong currents of Assamese nationalism sprang up when widespread agitation erupted in the tribal dominated hill districts and the Bengali dominated Barak valley region of Assam following the introduction of the language policy in 1960 and later in 1970 making Assamese the official language, medium of instruction and compulsory subject in the schools and prerequisite for employment in the state of Assam. Protests by the non-Assamese people against the language policy of Assam caused large scale violence and deaths. Subsequently, the North-Eastern Areas (Reorganisation) Act was passed in 1971 following which the United Khasi-Jaintia Hills and Garo Hills districts of erstwhile Assam were made into a new state of Meghalaya in 1972 and the union territories of Manipur and Tripura were granted full statehood status. Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh were converted into union territories the same year (Chaube 1999:121).

Seven years after this reorganisation, Assamese nationalism flared up over the anti-foreigner and illegal migration issue. In 1979, two organizations - the All Assam Students Union (AASU) and the All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP) - came together and launched the most powerful Assam movement of the 1980s against foreign and illegal migrants, especially the Bengali Muslims from Bangladesh (Hussain 1993). The agitators indulged in widespread violent nationalist campaign throughout Assam. They mainly pointed out that illegal migrants caused serious demographic and socio-economic imbalance and influenced electoral politics through vote banks in

Assam and hence these people should be detected and deported from Assam.

Migrations into Assam occurred in colonial as well as post-independent periods; but the protesters considered these early migrations as legal. However, migrations into Assam after the formation of Bangladesh in 1971 were considered illegal by the agitators. The foreign and illegal migrants issue received strong support from various cross-sections of the Assamese society, although the Assamese youth played the vanguard role in the agitation. To end the violent agitation, the Assam Accord was signed on 15 August 1985 between the Government of India and AASU leaders. The accord in the main highlighted: (a) the detection and deletion of the names of foreigners from the voters' list and their immediate deportation; and (b) constitutional, legislative and administrative safeguards to protect, preserve and promote the cultural, social and linguistic identity and heritage of Assamese people (Egreteau 2006). Following the accord, the AAGSP entered into state politics under the new name Ahom Gana Parishad (AGP). The AGP came to power in Assam after winning a landslide majority in 1985 state elections. Subsequently, the Illegal Migrant Detection Tribunal (IMDT) Act was passed and several tribunals were set up to detect illegal migrants. But no positive outcomes in this regard have come so far.

Like the AASU-AAGSP combine, the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA), a militant organisation, also championed the cause of Assamese nationalism over the foreigner and illegal migrants issue. But its strategy and goal drastically differed from the former's. While the AASU-AAGSP operated within the framework of autonomist nationalism and participated in the electoral process to protect the cultural and material interests of Assamese nationality, the ULFA ever since its formation in 1979 till today has clearly followed a secessionist nationalistic ideology which aims at liberation of Assam from the Indian Union through armed rebellion (Gogoi 2004, Baruah 1999). Under the leadership of Paresh Baruah and Anup Chetia the ULFA leads one of the most powerful militant outfits in Northeast India. This shows that the Assamese nationalism advocated by ULFA moves far beyond the anti-foreigner and anti-illegal migrants issue. The Government of India carried out several counter-insurgency military measures starting from Operation Bajrang to military crackdown in Bhutan between 1990 and 2003 to stamp out the ULFA armed rebellion. But so far military measures have not been able to end the secessionist Assamese nationalism led by ULFA. The ULFA chief Paresh Baruah firmly insists on sovereignty of Assam and proposes to have a referendum on this issue. The Government of India headed by the

Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) made a breakthrough and offered to discuss the sacrosanct issue of sovereignty of Assam. Recently, a Peoples' Consultative Group (PCG) on behalf of the ULFA held series of talks with the Indian government for a peaceful political solution of the problem. The talks finally led to temporary suspension of counter-insurgency activities and cessation of hostilities by the ULFA outfit. In October 2006 the central government even declared unilateral ceasefire for some days; but the PCG negotiations with central government failed and the turmoil in the state of Assam still continues. In February 2007 ULFA urged the Government of India to name the National Games as Assam Games and reiterated its demand of Assam's sovereignty; but the Government of India rejected both the demands. The ongoing secessionist Assamese nationalism by ULFA indicates that globalisation has not been able to wipe out secessionist nationalism in Northeast India.

The Bodo movement in Assam (Jacob 1994) is another radical national movement in the region. Bodos are a Tibeto-Burman tribal group settled in the area between the Bramhaputra valley and the Himalayas on the north-west of Assam. They settled in this area long before the Ahom invaded the region and today they constitute an ethnic minority of nearly one million people. Bodo nationalism mainly emerged to protect Bodo language and culture from the threats posed by: (a) the dominant Assamese nationality, and (b) the peripheral groups like the Santhali, Munda and Koch tribes and the Bengali Hindus and Muslims living in Bodo areas (Biswas 2002:147). In the pre-global era, the Bodo Sahitya Sabha and the Bodo socio-religious reform movement popularly called the 'Brahma movement' laid the foundations of Bodo nationalism. The Bodo Sahitya Sabha pressed hard for the recognition of Bodo language as a medium of instruction in schools in Bodo areas of Assam. This was granted at the primary level in 1963 and at the secondary level in 1968. The Bodo Sahitya Sabha also supported the use of Devanagiri script instead of Assamese script for writing the Bodo language.

The Plains Tribal Council of Assam (PTCA) was constituted in 1967 to safeguard the autonomy of the Bodos along with several other plains tribals of Assam. But the council failed to meet the aspirations of the Bodo people. As a result, the All Bodo Students' Union (ABSU) and the Bodo People's Action Committee (BPAC) launched a combined struggle in the 1980s to protect Bodo cultural and political interests. In the beginning, they claimed for a union territory status for their areas, but with the formation of Bodo Security Force (BSF) violent nationalist agitation for separate Bodoland

state started in 1986.

Following the Bodo Accord in February 1993 the Bodo Autonomous Council (BAC) was created to safeguard Bodo interests but the territorial jurisdiction of the council remained scattered as most of the areas covered by it were not contiguous. Nevertheless, the Bodo Volunteer Force (BVF), the armed wing of the BSF, laid down arms and joined the mainstream. But the radical elements, dominated mainly by the Christian Bodos, formed a new militant outfit called the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) and continued their agitation for a sovereign Bodoland state. The NDFB perceives Bodo homeland in sovereign terms only. In contrast, the Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT), which was formed in 1996, pressed for a provincial state of Bodoland within the Indian republic. It also strongly demanded for redefining the territorial jurisdiction and functions of BAC.

Finally, the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) comprising the contiguous districts of Kokrajhar, Bongaigaon, Barpeta and Nalbari was created in Assam by the Government of India. This move is judged by many as prelude to the formation of Bodoland provincial state in future (*Frontline* 22.11.2003). After this development, the BLT turns into a political party called the Bodoland People's Progressive Front (BPPF-H) under the leadership of Hagrama Mohilary and his deputy Chandan Bramha. In 2006 the BPPF-H made an electoral alliance with the Congress party and since that time it shares power in the current government in Assam led by Tarun Gogoi (*The Shillong Times* 14.5.2006). The BPPF-H is now mainly concerned about bringing peace and development to the Bodo areas in Assam. Recently, the BTC is rechristened as Bodoland Territorial Autonomous District (BTAD). The NDFB, however, condemns the formation of BTAD and is not ready to accept anything short of sovereign Bodoland state.

In Manipur, several forms of nationalism are seen in different times. Among some Meitei intelligentsia and extremist groups, secessionist nationalism was and continues to be seen ever since the merger of Manipur with Indian Union (Verghese 1997). Once a powerful kingdom, Manipur comprises three culturally diverse ethnic communities: (a) the non-tribal Meitei community constituting more than 50 percent, (b) the Naga tribes forming 25 per cent, and (c) the Kuki-Chin tribes accounting for 15 per cent of the population. The majority Meitei people are located in the Imphal valley region and the Naga and Kuki tribes dominate the hill areas of the state. Since 1960 the majority Meitei people are debarred from buying and owning land in the tribal dominated hill areas of the state.

The anti-merger sentiment, on the one hand, and the cultural differences of the inhabitants and the economic disadvantage imposed on the Meiteis, on the other, provided a viable platform for secessionist nationalism to grow among the Meiteis in Manipur. Various Meitei insurgent groups such as the United National Liberation Front (UNLF), People's Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak (PREPAK), People's Liberation Army (PLA), Manipur Red Guard (MRG), etc., articulate persistently the demand for an independent socialist Manipur state representing the Meitei (Kangleipak) nation and the other minorities (Ibid). The UNLF, the main secessionist outfit, even favours a plebiscite supervised by the United Nations to achieve sovereignty for Manipur (*The Telegraph* 29.5.2006). Further, these Meitei secessionist nationalist organisations vehemently oppose the idea of 'Greater Nagaland' as a means to solve Naga nationality problem in Northeast India. They reject outright the break-up of Manipur for satisfying the Naga nationalist aspiration. Ironically, the Kuki tribes also fight against the Naga territorial claims in Manipur and they demand for establishment of a Kuki state comprising parts of Manipur and Mizoram.

Apart from the above, several other minor nationalist movements are also going on in different parts of Northeast India. For example, the United People's Democratic Solidarity (UPDS) consisting of two secessionist outfits - the Karbi National Volunteers and the Karbi People's Front - seeks to establish an independent Karbi state for the Karbi tribe located in the Karbi-Anglong and North Cachar Hills districts of Assam. The Koch Rajbongsi people also indulge in nationalistic mobilisation for a separate Kamtapur state in Lower Assam. The All Koch Rajbongsi Students' Union (AKRSU) launched widespread agitation and organised road blockade in recent times for fulfilment of their demand. In Meghalaya, the Hynniewtre National Liberation Council (HNLC) strives to free the Hynniewtrep (Khasi) nation from India and establish a 'Bri Hynniewtrep', i.e., a sovereign Khasi nation. The Achik National Volunteer Council (ANVC) representing Garo nationalism in Meghalaya also wants to carve out a separate Garoland provincial state for the Garo (Achik) tribe. In Tripura, strong manifestation of nationalism is seen among the indigenous Kokborok-speaking tribal people against the economically, culturally and politically powerful migrant Bengali people. Some militant nationalist organisations like the Tripura National Volunteers (TNV), National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT) and All Tripura Tiger Force (ATTF) are formed in the 1980s and 1990s by the native tribal people to protect their ethno-national identity vis-à-vis the dominant majority Bengali

community in Tripura. These organisations particularly demand for the deportation of the illegal migrants, especially the post-1951 Bengali settlers, restoration of land to the original tribal inhabitants and recognition of the tribal Kokborok language (Barpujari 1998). On the other hand, the Bengali people, who claim Tripura as their adopted homeland, formed several nationalist organisations to protect them from the onslaught of tribal militant nationalism in Tirpura.

Similarly, the Bru nationalism, which emerged in Northeast India recently, strongly presses for recognition of the Reang (Bru) national identity in Mizoram. The Reangs came to Mizoram in the 1950s from the Chittagong Hills tracts and they are now the second largest community in the state. The Reangs are ruthlessly suppressed by the Christian Mizos as the latter perceived them as invaders in Mizo territory. For protection of Reang identity, the Bru National Union demanded in 1994 for an autonomous district council within Mizoram. But negotiations with the state government over the issue failed and thereafter violent ethnic clashes between the Mizos and the Reangs broke out in Mizoram (Dutta 2005). To escape ethnic cleansing several thousand Reangs fled to the neighbouring Tripura state and later the Bru National Liberation Front (BNLF) was formed to safeguard Reang national identity vis-à-vis the Mizos. Subsequently, the BNLF entered into negotiations with the state government and a peace agreement was signed in April 2005. Besides the Reangs, the Hmars and the Kuki-Chin tribes are also engaged in nationalist movements in Mizoram.

Globalisation in Northeast India

The above appraisal of nationalism in various parts of Northeast India clearly shows that two distinct varieties of nationalism exist: one, nationalism-seeking independent state and two, nationalism-seeking provincial state. Needless to say, the first variety of nationalism stresses secession from India and the second variety highlights securing provincial political space within the Indian Union. Hence, the argument that nationalism as a solidarity movement for self-determination in sovereign or autonomous terms weakens or disappears or gets undermined under the impact of globalisation does not hold good in the context of Northeast India. In fact, like Northeast India both these varieties of nationalism are abundantly seen in several multicultural polities in various parts of the world.

As mentioned earlier, globalisation as a process of economic, political, social and cultural change appeared two-and-a-half decades ago. Incidentally,

most of the nationalisms in Northeast India continued unabated or got rejuvenated in the last couple of decades characterised by globalisation. Moreover, several new militant organisations spearheading these nationalisms also sprang up during this period. Not only that, most of these organisations and the nationalisms they spearheaded continue even today. In Assam, for example, the AASU-AGP led Assamese nationalism against the illegal migrants and infiltrators still continues. The secessionist Assamese nationalism represented by ULFA also remains very much active in the contemporary global era. Similarly, the Naga nationalist sentiment championed by the NSCN-IM and the NSCN-K remains immensely active both inside and outside India. Apart from this, Bodo nationalism represented by BLT and NDFB, Meitei nationalism articulated by UNLF, PLA and PREPAK, Karbi nationalism represented by UPDS, Bru nationalism spearheaded by BNLF, Khasi nationalism advocated by HNLC, Garo nationalism championed by ANVC and the tribal nationalism in Tripura led by NLFT and ATTF have remained constantly active in the contemporary global era.

It may also be noted that globalisation precisely came to India with the introduction of economic liberalisation under structural adjustment programme (SAP) in 1990. In the post-liberalisation period several developmental schemes such as the opening of technological park, the spread of computer and management education, expansion of road connectivity, cellular phones and satellite television were introduced in a fairly considerable manner in the Northeast. Similarly, a new industrial policy for promotion of entrepreneurship in the Northeast was introduced in 1997. Again, cross-border trade with neighbouring China, Nepal, Bhutan, Myanmar and Bangladesh, and the expansion of economic ties with Southeast Asia under Government of India's 'Look East Policy' are emphasised to integrate the Northeast region with the world market. All these recent developments undoubtedly opened up increasing opportunities for the people of the region at large. But at the same time these developments also enabled the extremist and militant nationalist organisations to further their interests in a better and bigger scale.

Most of the nationalisms in Northeast India are laced with secessionism. These nationalisms see self-determination in terms of political independence only and they want to form nation-states. It is because of the secessionist goal these nationalisms heavily rely on the strategy of armed rebellion or insurgency against the Indian state/nation. Any anti-state armed rebellion requires weapons, training, shelter, finance, organisational set-ups and ideological influence; and all these can be realised to a great extent

through external connections and influences. It goes without saying that external connections and influences have increased manifold in the global era due to increasing interconnectedness and connectivity produced by information technology.

Naga nationalism, which pursues a secessionist goal from the beginning, is linked with external sources to a large extent. It receives moral and material support, weapons and training from sources in China, Myanmar, Pakistan and Bangladesh. These external linkages of the Naga nationalists have considerably increased now. Moreover, the NSCN-IM leadership operates from different locations outside India. To get larger global attention to Naga problem NSCN-IM has also acquired membership of the Nagas in Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organisation (UNPO) in 1993 (Ao 2002). However, like the NSCN the ULFA in Assam, the NDFB in Bodo area of Assam, the Meitei insurgent groups in Manipur, the HNLC in Meghalaya, etc., clearly follow the strategies of secessionism and armed rebellion to achieve their respective nationalist goals. All these militant organisations keep constant external connections which have been accentuated tremendously with advanced information and communication technology, logistics and weaponry system unleashed by the global age. The NSCN-K, ULFA and UNLF run training camps for their cadres in border areas in Myanmar and Bangladesh. Further, these militant organisations mostly adopt undemocratic violent means for achieving their goal of national self-determination. Under the impetus of global communication and mobile network, these militant organisations can be easily linked up with global terror network and militant organisations for organised violence and aggression.

Besides secessionism, some militant organisations in Northeast also adhere to socialism. For example, the Assamese militant group ULFA desires to establish a socialist Assamese nation-state. The Meitei insurgent group UNLF also proclaims to establish a sovereign socialist Manipur. The Bodo militant group NDFB expresses similar ideas as regards Bodoland. From the very beginning socialist ideals are also incorporated in NSCN manifesto. There is no denying that global capitalism has eroded the base of socialism. Nevertheless, in China, Cuba and in few other countries socialism still thrives as a powerful political force. Most of the militant nationalist groups in Northeast receive socialistic ideological inspirations from several sources in China.

Apart from socialism, Christianity as a major world religion and Christian missionaries as global religious forces have continuously shaped

nationalist aspirations especially among the Christian tribal communities such as the Nagas, Mizos, Khasis, Garos, etc. Moreover, under the globalisation process, while the cultural identities of the bigger and powerful nations like the English, French, German and Russian in Europe, the Assamese and Bengali in Northeast India, etc., are getting reinforced, the cultural identities of the smaller and peripheral nationalities like the numerous tribes in Northeast India and elsewhere are facing the challenges of marginalisation and uprooting (Baral 2006). Small wonder, then, that these smaller and peripheral nationalities indulge in nationalist movements to contest marginalisation and uprooting.

Over and above secessionist nationalisms, numerous autonomist nationalisms seeking provincial state in Indian federation also exist in Northeast India. For example, the Bodos, Garos, Rabhas, Karbis, Cacharis, and the Zeliangs are mainly fighting for obtaining a provincial political homeland within Indian polity. The militant Naga nationalists recently also showed some inclinations for accepting autonomy in provincial terms within the Indian Union. The change in stand from separate Naga sovereign nation to autonomous Naga homeland may have come due to the fact that sovereignty in the present Indian context is not possible and that several other nationality groups in India have accepted self-determination in provincial sense. The change in Naga perception may have also resulted due to the realisation that many distinct nationalities such as the Basques in Spain, the Irish and the Scots in UK, the Quebecois in Canada, etc., accepted to remain as nations without state under sovereign polities. Be it the demand for independent state or provincial state, the fact remains that in either case nation and nationalism as living entities are thriving in Northeast India in the global era.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the argument that globalisation spells the demise of nation and nationalism in the world proves to be logically untenable and empirically unviable. Globalisation epitomises external influence and in political sphere it stands for spread of democracy, self-rule, civil society and human rights both in individual and collective sense. Thus, most of the culturally distinct people desirous of protection of identity would take advantage of the global situation and continuously engage in democratic or violent nationalist mobilisation to benefit from the increasing spread of global capital and the urge for the right to self-determination. The logic that globalisation transformed the whole world into a supposedly global village/society has paradoxically strengthened

the tendency among various peoples towards defining themselves collectively in both primordial and modern nationalist senses.

As market is the central institution of globalisation, the people with distinct identities would surely be motivated to obtain a self-ruling space in independent or autonomous nationalist terms so as to get the instrumental payoffs and material benefits and become equal partners in the level playing field of market capitalism. And, the ones with no or amorphous identity will be engaged in constructing a distinct identity to obtain these instrumental and material benefits unleashed by globalisation. The culturally diverse peoples of Northeast region of India are no exception to this tendency. The fight of most of the peoples in Northeast India for recognition of their identities in independent or autonomous nationalist sense speaks volumes about this tendency of securing material benefits within the framework of self-ruling collective identity. And this testifies the persistence of nationalism in the phase of globalisation. It is true that in recent times the character of some nationalisms has changed from a state-aspiring to a province-seeking goal. But this changing trajectory of nationalism is nothing new, and it cannot be solely attributed to any direct or indirect impact of globalisation. For one thing, nationalism-seeking provincial space existed in abundance in various parts of the world, including India before the global era. Thus, whatever may be the goal, nation-state or province nation or nation without state, nationalism in some form or the other will continue to persist in the global era. If modernisation with improved means of communication and print technology facilitated the spread of nationalistic ideals, then certainly globalisation with greater connectivity and increasing external influences created by advanced information technology, satellite television, cell phones, internet, emails and websites would strengthen and not undermine nationalistic ideology. As a matter of fact, the different national identities in the world cannot be obliterated by the process of globalisation.

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