



NAGA POPULATION AND INTEGRATION MOVEMENT

U.M. Shimray

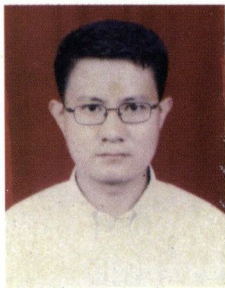
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The 1997 Nāga ceasefire and political talks opened a new political dimension based on ethnic politics and 'territorial politics.' And also marks as revival of Naga civil societies' demand for the integration of Naga homeland. In other words, the old map, which the Colonial had introduced, has become a major bone of contention between the different ethnic groups.

In the Naga political issue, the agenda of integration is very crucial as well as contentious for various reasons. Without uniting the Naga people [of all Naga areas], the peace process would be meaningless. Indeed, Naga integration movement is observed as a 'dangerous' political game of ethnicism and conflict. The *Meiteis* factor to the Naga politics vis-a-vis Naga politics 'conditioning' the *Meitei* community is one political 'puzzle' in the region. The fact is that the 'conditioning politics' among the communities threatens the ethnic-co-existence in the region.

Undoubtedly, ethnic coexistence and mutual relationship is indispensable. Historically, the communities travel and interact among each other socially and culturally as well as economically. Unfortunately, the relationship is in deteriorating form almost reaching its cracking point. Such animosity is encouraged by 'nasty' politics and capitalisation of ethnic politics and hegemony. To be realistic, one cannot isolate the other and maintain an 'exclusivist' attitude.

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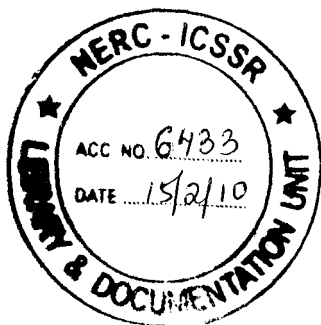


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1

INTRODUCTION

The land of the Nagas is sandwiched between the Indo-Myanmar (Burma) frontier and very little is known of them by the rest of the world, even to the majority of the Indian population. The region has been inaccessible with thick jungles and rugged mountains. British colonial intervention was recorded as early as the 1800s. They undertook series of expeditions to contain the various indigenous inhabitants. Nagas put up strong resistance against the intruders.

The first ever British team to visit the Naga country was led by Captain Jenkins and Pemberton in 1832. The team consisting of 700 soldiers and 500 *Coolies* marched from Manipur side but due to unfamiliar terrain and repeated attacks by the Nagas intermittently hindered the explorations. The British suffering from the daring raids of the Nagas and tired from heavy losses, they decided set up military outpost¹ at strategic locations to quell the strong resistance put up by the Nagas.

British with their superior weapons and organisational skills slowly began to occupy the Naga Hills at different stages. The British along with hundreds of *Manipuri* [or *Meiteis*] troops had to exercise several military expeditions to the Naga Hills [The term *Manipuri* refers to *Meitei* community of Imphal valley. Further details will be discussed in the later section]. The treaty of *Yangdaboo* in 1826 between the Burma and the British-India eventually brought parts of Naga Hills under the colonial administration. Also, the treaty divided the Naga territory into India and Burma. Taking the advantage of the Treaty and annexing Assam, the British speedily consolidated their hold over the fertile valley. But they followed a policy of a cautious and non-interference towards the hill tribes, especially the Nagas. This was not, as the British administrators later conveniently claimed, to protect the hill people from being exploited by unscrupulous

plainsmen, but because annexation of tribal areas and the extension of administration was not considered profitable by the British" (Misra 2000:19).

During 1850-51, as many as ten expeditions were sent under the command of Lieutenant Vinceint. Though some of the Naga areas came to be occupied by the British gradually, they followed a policy of 'non-interference' in the internal affairs of the hill communities in the region. Nonetheless, they continued carrying out their direct expeditions. Subsequently, the region was brought under different political administrative units hitherto unknown in the hill communities. However, Lord Dalhousie did not approve such approach as his Minute of 20 February 1851 reads:

"I dissent entirely from the policy which is recommended of what is called obtaining control, that is to say, of taking possession of these hills, and establishing sovereignty over their savage inhabitants. Our possessions could bring no profit to us, and would be costly to us as it would be unproductive... As it is impossible to contemplate the permanent possession of these hills, so it seems to me impolitic to sanction temporary possession of them" (Elwin 1969).

In 1874, the 'Colonial Assam'² was formed. According to Baruah (1999: 24) this new British Province included the undivided districts like "Goalpara, Kamrup, Darrang, Nowgong, Sibsagar, Lakhimpur, parts of Naga Hills and the district of Cachar and Garo Hills including the adjacent Duars- which was under Bhutanese influence in the early nineteenth century and was annexed by the British in 1866." With the establishment of colonial Assam province under the administration of Chief Commissioner, a number of other periphery areas annexed to the British domain. For instance, the Lhota Naga country, the Angami Naga country, Ao Nagas and other Naga hills in between 1875 and 1889. According to the British Government of Eastern Bengal and Assam (1907) and Gait (1905: 337), "The term Assam, which had originally been applied to the track of country ruled by the Ahoms, and was subsequently used with reference to the area under the control of the Commissioner of Assam, i.e., the six districts of the Brahmaputra Valley, has been given a wider signification, and is now used as a designation of the whole territory which was included in the Chief Commissionership, including the Surma valley, the hill district and Manipur."

The last battle between the British and the Nagas was fought in 1879 at *Khonoma* village of the *Angami Naga* territory. Mr. Damant

who was shot dead by the Nagas led this battle. Khonoma was taken on the 22nd of November 1879. Gait (1905) wrote:

“In October 1878, a more serious outbreak occurred, Mr. Damant, the political officer, was shot as he was attempting to enter the village of Khonoma and some of his escort were also killed or wounded. The Angamis then rose in a body and, advancing against Kohima, invested it for eleven days. The garrison was reduced so great straights for want of food and water, but Colonel Johnstone arrived in the nick of time with a force of 2000 troops supplied to him by the Raja of Manipur and raised the siege.”

By 1878, the British administration established *Kohima* village as the administrative Headquarters of the Naga Hills. Beginning from 1832 up to the time of transfer of power, the British government took 115 years in assuming control over the reluctant Nagas and therefore till 1951 the successor government brought the remaining areas [unadministered areas] that is, Mon and Tuensang region under the control of the government of India. With the eventual expansion of Indian political system and state re-organisation, the contiguous Naga Hills were placed under different political boundaries and administration. As Misra (2000:20) states, “The failure of the Nagas attempt to oust the British from their soil may be traced to lack of unity and the absence of a common organised political authority among the various Naga tribes. At that time, the Nagas were living mostly in isolated village-state, each independent of the other, and more often than not, on hostile terms. Thus, with the British occupation of the Naga Hills, the Nagas for the first time had to accept an alien power right in the midst of their territory. Till then, they had only faced punitive expeditions and had developed their own pattern of guerilla tactics to deal with such situations.”

Region Called ‘North East’

The so-called ‘North-East’ India region is endowed with deeply forested hill ranges and rugged mountains, numerous narrow strip and deep gorges and narrow river valleys. Spate and Learmonth (1972) writes that the region presents the complexities of the sub-Himalayan ranges, the Indo-Burmese hills of Nagaland, Manipur and Mizoram and the eroded surfaces of the Meghalaya plateau, all encircling the Brahmaputra valley. The hills are sharply marked and differentiated from the plains, physically as well as culturally though they share certain similarities and should be treated together to some degree. The Indo-Myanmar (Burma) hills in the east are much imposing as a

relief feature. The hills in this region are aligned in intervening parallel valleys. The altitude of Manipur and Naga hills varies between 900 and 2100 meters. Mizo hills are of much lower altitude, rarely rising above 900 meters. Parts of Tripura and Imphal valley in Manipur represent areas of low relief. The Assam valley is an alluvial expanse laid down by the mighty Brahmaputra and its tributaries. In the northern side of the Brahmaputra valley there are lofty mountains, particularly in Arunachal Pradesh. But it loses height towards the south and ends in the lowly hills of Mizoram in the extreme south. The notable peaks are *Dapha Bum* (4579 mts.) in Lohit district of Arunachal Pradesh, *Japfu* (3048 mts.) and *Saramati* (3926 mts.) in the Naga Hills.

The Shillong plateau and Karbi plateau presents a highly dissected tract. In Shillong plateau, the prominent features are Garo, Khasi and Jaintia hills. The summit levels in these hills rise up to 1300-1800 meters.

In post colonial India, eastern Himalaya and Brahmaputra valley of Indo-Myanmar frontier comprising the states of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura, Nagaland and Meghalaya were identified as a single geographic and socio-economic entity. The political process and administrative re-organisation legitimised the region as 'North-East India'. In fact, the term North East India is of a much recent creation. British colonist was the first to develop the idea of a 'North-Eastern Frontier' after they colonised the Brahmaputra valley and surrounding hill areas. In the colonial period, this frontier is loosely administered more as a 'territorial appendage' as well as economic advantage and strategic policy.

The Indian state re-organisation processes upgraded Naga Hills of Assam Province to a full-fledged statehood in 1963 [The creation of Nagaland state sowed the seed of discontent among the Nagas since many of the Naga ethnic groups were placed under different political units, i.e., Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh and Assam. Further details will be discussed in the later section]. In 1972, the *Khasi*, *Jaintia* and *Garo* hills were clumped together to form the 'abode of the cloud,' the Meghalaya state. *Mizo* hill [now Mizoram] and North-Eastern Frontier Agency or NEFA³ [renamed with a new *Sanskritic* term called Arunachal Pradesh] became a Union Territory. It was subsequently upgraded to full-fledged statehood in 1987. Manipur and Tripura were Princely States during the colonial era; however, in the eventual state re-organisation both were placed under Union Territory of India. A number of Acts were introduced by the Indian

Parliament; notably the North Eastern Areas (Reorganisation) Act of 1971. The Acts were to either create new units or to change the status of existing units. Subsequently, the state of Manipur and Tripura were granted full statehood.

Initially, the concept 'of North-East was geographical but it was political formulised...' politically formulised in 1972 when the North East Council (NEC) was formed through an Order of the President of India. The NEC is an institution that envisages the promotion of strategic security measures and regional development [The NEC was further expanded to include Sikkim state]. The recent changes in the regional order of the region is a creation of new Ministry called the Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER) in 2001.

The Indian intelligentsia and bureaucrats as well as the media began to use 'North-East' as a single social and political entity. In fact, this political legitimisation swallowed the ethnic groups of the region as 'Indian minorities' in the Indian political processes. Baruah (2005b: 4) pointed out that Northeast India has been known this way since a radical redrawing of the region's political map in the 1960s. It was a hurried exercise of 'political engineering' to manage the rebellions by the Nagas and Mizos as well as to nip any possible radical political mobilization among the discontented ethnic groups from the bud itself. From today's vantage point, this project of political engineering must be pronounced a failure. The story then became what is commonly referred to today as the reorganization of Assam and the advent of what is called 'cosmetic federal' regional order.

The idea of North East India is in fact structured on the basis of geo-political and strategic military needs. Baruah (2005b: 214) put it as "the state of diplomatic relation between India and its neighbours turned Northeast India into a sensitive border region requiring special attention based on national security concerns." Its genesis wrought in deeper subtleties of historical conjunctions and thereupon subversive attempts to co-joint a grotesque deviance of experience into popular mass-cultural practice of the Indian nation-state. As mentioned by the Choudhary (1999: 90-97) "Balkanisation of Assam into autonomous units" that became "the initial impetus" "to the coinage of the new nomenclature 'the north-east', leading to "an artificial north-eastern syndrome" and resulting into "ethnic groups, who do not have any inbuilt social syndrome to be part of this syndrome." It weaves a signified-signifier relation of othering and regionalizing the definition of citizenship from an alleged, so-called "mainstream" Indian, as compared to the "peripheral" "north east"

Indians. Phanjoubam (1999: 137-169) argues that "The very idea of a 'mainstream' and the appeals for joining it, already acknowledges that the whole is not one unit. That there are many streams among which there is a dominant one towards which the other streams are desired to flow and ultimately merge."

Secondly, the other level of 'North East' in relation to India is a question of core-periphery relations, which have already laid an indelible mark in the debate on federalism, centre-state relations, developmental politics and majority-minority politics. It is a creation of a cursory oedipal complex, where, "The burden of national integration for a nation in the making is thus to be borne by minorities alone" (Ansari 1999: 131).

The third dimension that requires intense debate is the geo-strategic imperatives of 'North-East' in the emerging power stratum of India in global context and the understanding of 'this' region in the 'mainstream' discourses. The stakes of this issue is perhaps the most comprehensive social knowledge, for it tantamount to examination of paradoxes in peoples' struggle, multi-cultural hybridization of geo-boundaries, and State security [And most comprehensively, the technologisation of 'North East' as an orbital site of Delhi's South Block experimental militarization. This North Eastern geo-strategic terrain of computational GDP/GNP military statistics and expenditures have no objective or subjective desires but remains as training ground for the Indian parliamentary 'talking cures' that mechanically reproduces sensational national gossips from time to time, and that which send military expeditions].

The North East India is also a leitmotif which can be captured in the words of Appadurai (1993: 418):

"Although many anti-state movements revolve around images of homeland, of soil, and of return from exile, these images reflect the poverty of their (and our) political languages rather than the hegemony of territorial nationalism. Put another way, no idiom has yet emerged to capture the collective interest of many groups in trans-local solidarities, cross-border mobilizations, and post-national identities. Such interests are many and vocal, but they are still entrapped in the linguistic imaginary of the territorial state. This incapacity of many deterritorialized groups to think their way out of the imaginary of the nation-states is itself the cause of much global violence since many movements of emancipation and identity are forced, in their struggles against existing nation-states, to embrace the very imaginary they seek to escape."

Having mentioned all these it is imperative as well as a matter of policy and undertaking to note that the wider evaluation of North East cannot inasmuch remain to be recalcitrant postulated in the context of India alone because the various emerging as well as merging contradictions of North East itself a statutory expediency, which matters but nonetheless does not have any significance for rhetoric of 'National Integrity.' This human security paradigm was never a part of the thought amongst the Indian middle class or petit bourgeoisie and it is pertinent to depart for a systematic intra-retrospection of the conflict parameters or the epistome of conflicts in the region, possibly as much without interfering or using the paralogy of dominant definitions. This requires the politics of recognition, the survey of contending voices, the convulsion of repressed histories and, most importantly, the trend setting of establishing conflict resolution and democratisation experimentation.

Regional Population

The North Eastern region manifests unique demographic features in term of ethnicity and socio-cultural settings. The major indigenous groups inhabiting the region are *Assamese, Meiteis* [considered as non-tribals inhabits the Imphal Valley of Manipur], *Nagas, Chins, Kukis, Paites, Zos, Mizos, Lushais, Hmars Bodos, Deori, Kachari, Tripuri, Reang, Jamatia Khasi, Garo, Jaintia, Adi, Apatani, Nissi, Monpa...* etc. [See Appendix I for the list of ethnic groups recognised as Scheduled Tribes in the region]. The indigenous peoples in the North Eastern region are classified as *Mongoloid* stock speaking *Sino-Tibetan* linguistics. These ethnic communities lived in their respective territories and self-sufficient village systems. Among the ethnic groups, Nagas are the largest in terms of population. The Naga Hills stretches from Chandel district of Manipur to Nagaland state, and upto the eastern part of Tirap and Changlang district of Arunachal Pradesh.

The region accounts only 9 per cent of the total geographical area of the country. Since the independence of India, many states experienced high population growth rate. The table 1.1 shows the regional population, size and growth rate. In 2001 population census, the region recorded a total population of 38,444,026 persons constituting a proportion of 3.6 per cent to the country's total population. The percentage decadal growth rate marginally came down from 27.4 per cent in 1981-91 to 25.29 per cent in 1991-2001. However, percentage decadal growth rate in the region is still higher than the national average of 21.3 per cent.

Among the seven states, the percentage decadal growth rate in the decade 1991-2001 varies from a low of 16.03 per cent in Tripura to a high of 64.52 per cent in Nagaland. In States like Mizoram, Meghalaya, Assam and Tripura, the growth rate actually declined. In Nagaland and Manipur, the growth rate increased by 8.3 and 0.7 percentage respectively. Perhaps, the reasons for the high growth rate could be the natural growth rate, but more so the influx of migrants and immigrants in the region has been the cause.

Region/States	Total Population			Percentage decadal growth	
	1981	1991	2001	1981-1991	1991-2001
India	683329097	846387888	1028737436**	23.86	21.54
Arunachal Pradesh	631839	864558	10,97,968	36.83	26.21
Assam	18041248*	22414322	266,55,528	24.24	18.92
Manipur	1420953	1837149	22,93,896**	29.29	24.86
Meghalaya	1335819	1774774	23,18,822	32.86	30.65
Mizoram	493757	689756	8,88,573	39.7	28.82
Nagaland	774930	1209546	19,90,036	56.08	64.52
Tripura	2053058	2757205	31,99,203	34.7	16.03
North Eastern Region	24751604	30682752	38444026	27.45	25.29

* Calculated from the projected figure, as census is not taken in Assam in 1981.

** Including the estimated figure of Mao-Maram, Paomata and Purul sub-divisions of Senapati district.

Source: Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner. 1981, 1991 & 2001. *India, Series 1, Final Population Totals*. New Delhi: Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner.

Ethnic Distribution

The hill states like Mizoram, Nagaland, Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh and hill districts of Manipur, Assam and Tripura is dominated by tribal population. The total tribal population in the region is given in table 1.2. In 1991 population census, the figure recorded was 8,142,181 persons. The latest census is 10,354,493. There is no drastic change in the proportion of tribal population in the last decade.

According to the 2001 state-wise population census Nagaland and Manipur experienced marginal increase. According to the same

census report, Mizoram state registered 94.4 per cent of tribal population, Nagaland 89.1 per cent, Meghalaya 85.9 per cent, Manipur 32.3 per cent and 31.0 per cent in Tripura.

The indigenous population of the region do not share a sense of belongingness with the mainstream India and nor do they have commonness in socio-cultural practices or history. The political boundaries as defined of the British Empire and post-colonial India in the North East left the tribals in segments as an irrelevant adjunct of the territorial question. During the period of colonial expansion and post-colonial state reorganisation, these hill communities were brought under different territorial administration and imposed upon them the concept of state territorial politics and segmentation. For instance, the contiguous Naga Hills fell into the administrative unit of Nagaland, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh and Assam.

Region/States	Total Tribal Population		Percentage of Tribal Population to total Population	
	1991	2001	1991	2001
Assam	2874441	3308570	12.82	12.4
Arunachal Pradesh	550351	705158	63.6	64.2
Manipur	631730	741141*	34.4	32.3
Meghalaya	1517927	1992862	85.6	85.9
Mizoram	653565	839310	94.7	94.4
Nagaland	1060822	1774026	87.7	89.1
Tripura	853345	993426	30.7	31.0
North East Region*	8,142,181	10,354,493	57.3	26.93

*Excluding the population of Mao Maram, Paomata & Purul Sub-divisions of Senapati district.

Source: Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner. 1991 & 2001. *Series 1-India, Part II-B (ii), Primary Census Abstract, Scheduled Tribes*. New Delhi: Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner.

Table 1.3 shows the population of major ethnic groups in the North East region. According to 1991 population census, the *Naga* population account nearly 14,58,097. The largest number of *Naga* population is recorded in Nagaland, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh. The second largest is the *Boros* with a population of 12,67,015. The *Boros* are found only in Assam. The population of other ethnic groups are as follows; *Khasi* and *Jaintia* (8,82,301 persons), *Garo* (5,76,446 persons), *Mizo* (5,17,334 persons), *Tripuri* (4,61,531 persons), *Mikir*

Table 1.3: Ethnic population in the North East Region, 1991

States	Major Ethnic Groups										
	Nagas	Kukis	Mizo	Garo	Khasi & Jaintia	Kachari	Tripuri/Treppera	Boro	Adi	Mikir	Chakma
Arunachal	78282*	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	109196	285811	0
Assam	15354	21883	1031	17998	11358	198619	0	1267015	0	0	4187
Manipur	334085	121994	8240	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Meghalaya	715	4054	3007	546734	870165	3436	0	0	0	7275	700
Mizoram	74	31077	500146	82	420	131	0	0	0	0	54217
Nagaland	1029587	16100	0	2272	0	8244	0	0	0	703	0
Tripura	0	10628	4910	9360	358	0	461531	0	0	0	96,096
Total	1458097	205736	517334	576446	882301	210430	461531	1267015	109196	293789	55200

* The Nagas are Nocte, Wancho, and Tangsa

Source: Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner. 1991. *Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, and Tripura, Special Table for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes*. New Delhi: Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner.

(2,93,789 persons), *Kachari* (2,10,430 persons), *Kuki* (2,05,736 persons) and *Chakma* (1,55,200 persons). One interesting observation is that the *Kukis* are found in most of the states of the region (Shimray 2004).

Ethnicity and Territoriality

Ethnic groups in the North Eastern region is typically a 'homeland societies' (Phadnis and Ganguly, 2001: 19) with a long time occupancy over their territory and thereby claim an exclusive as well as moral right to rule it. The ethnic situation is characterised by size, location, internal cohesion, level of development and religious practices. Smith (1993: 48) propound the foundation of ethnic identity as, "a distinct group name in order to be recognised as a distinct community by both group members and outsiders; a shared belief by group members in the myth of common ancestry and descent; the presence of historical memories among group members [as interpreted and diffused over generations, often verbally]; a shared culture [including dress, food, music, crafts and architecture, laws, customs and institutions, religion and language]; an attachment to a specific territory or 'homeland', and sense of common solidarity." Karna (1999) opines that the process of ethnic identity formation in the region was based on the idea of large group formation. Attempts were made to bring several smaller groups together to project a unified identity. One important formation or rather emergent ethnic identity is the development of generic terms/names along the contiguous geographical territory. The ethnic consciousness leads to identity 'expansion' by merging together of several groups and expand their identity. An important factor in this process of ethnic expansion is development of belief in a common origin as the *Nagas* and *Mizos* have done (Achary, 1990). The most essential element that brings the groups together is their history, socio-cultural affinity and political aspirations. One interesting thing in the region is the concentration of ethnic groups with well demarcated territories of their own.

Milton (1994: 1) comment ethnic conflict states, "From the dawn of history communities organised on putative common descent, culture and destiny have co-existed, competed and clashed." Recent ethnic conflict in the Southeast Asian region is one major challenge that is posing the regional cooperation. India has had to withstand serious ethnic politics and secessionist challenges in Punjab, Kashmir and India's North Eastern region. Phadnis and Ganguly (2001: 11) understands that the challenge of global economic integration may ultimately prove fatal for the survival of plural societies

in the long run, in the immediate future, the unraveling of plural states may occur as a result of the resurgence of ethno-nationalist sentiment and the outbreak of violent ethnic conflict. While all the major regions and sub-regions of the world [with minor exceptions] have experienced some form of ethnic nationalism and conflict, the situation prevailing in South Asia is particularly acute.

In 1980s and 1990s, the region witnessed spate of ethnic clashes and tensions particularly in Assam, Manipur and Mizoram. The main reason behind is somehow related to what Padnis and Ganguly (2001: 7) interprets ethnic tension as, "The process of socio-economic change, the ethnic dimension of the power structure and the policies, strategies as well as tactics adopted by regimes to cope with the urges and aspirations of various ethnic groups provides the wider setting for an understanding of ethnicity and the process of nation building."

Brahmaputra valley of Assam experienced ethnic clashes between the native *Bodo* and migrants *Santhal* and Bangladesh immigrants in 1980s. Phanjoubam (1999:160) comments that the Bodo-immigrants conflicts were because the native Bodos feared of loosing their distinctive identity in the face of constant influx of alien population particularly Bangladeshi and Nepali. Tension arose in traditional Bodo territories in lower Assam where the settlers had made considerable inroad resulting in growing pressure on land and competition for resources. The student community of Assam, which has been spearheading the movement against illegal immigration has been waging a long struggle over this issue of land and resources. In Assam, the ethnic *Bodo* political movement has taken many lives. Indigenous Assamese armed struggle in the form of United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) in upper Assam asserting their political rights. The ethnic groups such as *Karbi* and *Dimasa* are also demanding separate state comprising of Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hill districts of Assam state.

The infamous *Kuki-Naga* clash in Manipur Hills that triggered off in the early 1990s cost hundred of lives, thousand of homes and villages of both communities. During this period, the *Meitei-Pangan* [Manipur Muslims is known as *Pangan*] riot in Imphal valley also took place. The riot spread to the entire three valley districts, that is, Imphal, Bishnupur and Thoubal. And *Kuki-Paite* clash in Churachandpur district.

In Mizoram, the *Hmar* group fought shoulder to shoulder with the *Lushai* [popularly known as the *Mizos*] group. The *Hmar* demanded

a separate ethnic based autonomous region in Mizoram state. The militant outfit, the *Achik National Volunteers' Council* (ANVC) is fighting for regional autonomy in ethnic *Garo* dominant area in Meghalaya state. However, the move for autonomous region is strongly opposed by a major ethnic *Khasi* group who dominates the capital, Shillong and *Khasi Hills*. In Tripura state, indigenous tribal insurgent called National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT) is fighting for regional autonomy.

In recent times, the region experienced the upsurge of social movement based on ethnic politics and consolidation. And such emergence of ethnic assertion and contests for political domination poses serious socio-political problems. Moreover, ethnic based organisation(s) reflects the consciousness of ethnic identity, political aspirations and consolidation. All these organisations operate from their respective ethnic territory and their influence is also limited at that level. Every ethnic group has their own respective ethnic based social organisation and political movements. Honray (1981:29) observes the ethnic consolidation in the region as, "dominance of a particular ethnic groups contest keenly whether it is jobs, politics, etc. this has often aroused mutual jealousy, hostility and thus widened the gap of their relationship." Not only the ethnic based social organisations, but also the insurgent groups directly or indirectly encourages the inter-ethnic conflicts.

Examples of the processes of ethnic consolidation and social movements can be seen in the case of the states of Nagaland and Manipur. In Naga society, the apex traditional ethnic based organisation is called "*Naga Hohd*" representing the whole Naga ethnic group of Nagaland and Manipur. The apex Naga student body is represented by the Naga Students' Federation (NSF). And the Naga human rights organisation is called the Naga Peoples Movement for Human Rights (NPMHR). These Naga social organisations are not restricted within the state political boundaries. The organisations like All Manipur Students Union (AMSU), All Manipur United Club Organisation (AMUCO), United Committee of Manipur (UCM) and *Meira Paiphee* [Meitei women's organisation] are formations of *Meitei* community. The Kuki Students' Organisation (KSO) is only for *Thadou* speaking groups. The *Zomi* Re-unification Organisation (ZRO) is conglomeration of the ethnic groups like *Paite*, *Simte*, *Vaiphei*, *Zou*, *Suhte* and *Chin*. These ethnic based organisations reflect the consciousness of ethnic identities, political aspirations and ethnic survival. These ethnic based organisations function on their respective domain and territory.

The 'territorial politics' based on ethnic aspirations that essentially emerged during the 1990s further gained momentum when Government of India and National Socialist Council of Nagalim (NSCN-IM) announced ceasefire for political talks in 1997. The tag of 'without territorial limit' [that is extension of ceasefire to all Naga areas] with the Naga ceasefire caused a new political dimension, particularly the Meitei community of Imphal valley in Manipur. Meiteis' strong opposition to the extension of Naga cease-fire to the Naga areas of Manipur is based on pre-conceived speculation that the extension of Naga cease-fire in Manipur would lead to the loss or breaking-up of the present political boundary of Manipur. The 18 June 2001 Meiteis' uprising against the extension of Naga cease-fire is one unfortunate incident experienced in the state. This uprising left a deep scar in the ethnic relationship between the Nagas and the Meiteis.

The Nagas' politics of integration and nation-building process is considered as an enthusiastic political ambition. The ongoing Naga ceasefire and political talks opened a new political paradigm based on ethnic politics. And recent upsurge of territorial politics and revivalism of Naga civil societies' demand for the Naga integration now play significant role in the region's politics [detail will be discussed in later section]. Baruah (2005b: 115) mentions, "Meiteis today feel embattled and embittered by the identity discourse of the Nagas that threatens a radical diminution of the state's territory."

The Meitei community under the aegis of All Manipur United Clubs Organisation, *et al.*, demanded clarification over the issue of Naga Ceasefire area coverage. AMUCO called for a rally on August 4, 1997 in the state capital Imphal 'to protect the territorial integrity of Manipur.' The Meiteis' opposition to the Naga peace talks is concern with the protection of Manipur's territorial integrity. Even the Manipur State Legislative Assembly resolved to protect the territorial integrity of Manipur state and declared 4th August as State '*Territorial Integrity*' day in 1997. Further, the Secular Progressive Front (SPF) Government led by O. Ibobi Singh again declared 18th June as '*Manipur Integrity Day*' in 2005. The declaration steered the ethnic politics and animosity among the ethnic groups particularly the Meiteis and the Nagas. The Nagas' stand is that such official proclamation undermined the minority groups particularly the Nagas and termed it as the Meiteis' 'political hegemony' in Manipur. As a counter to the declaration, the Naga students under All Naga Student Association, Manipur (ANSAM) burned down Government Offices in Ukhrul, Senapati, Chandel and Tamenglong districts, and also called for an indefinite 'Economic

Blockade' on the two National Highways 39 & 53, which lasted for 52 days in 2005.

Naga: Geo-Strategic Region

"Geography study boundaries because they are elements of the cultural landscape and because they represent the limits of political sovereignty which have meaningful areal quality over the earth's landscape" Prescott (1965:27). Any nation state's frontier and boundaries are important geo-strategy and have significant political and policy implications. In recent times, border based related problems and tensions have become a frequent phenomenon. In the context of Indian sub-continent, the border issue is overwhelmed and dominated by 'cross-terrorism' in the Line of Control (LoC) in Jammu and Kashmir. Today, LoC is considered as one of the most volatile zone because of active terrorist movement. On the other hand, *Mc Mohan* Line in Arunachal Pradesh faces threat of intrusion by the Chinese. Both these frontiers have experienced inevitable battles with the neighbouring countries.

The Indo-Myanmar frontier exhibits certain problems like poor communication; immigration problem, ethnic turmoil and insurgency. There are also immense inter-regional differences in ethno-social issue and political aspirations. Various ethnic groups possess distinct socio-cultural traditions and customs as well as different stages of economic growth and development. For instance, the Brahmaputra and Imphal valley are endowed with much better economic infrastructure and efficient administration than the hill areas. This further led to economic and social disparity between the hill and valley areas vis-à-vis among the ethnic groups. Either in political premise or economic investment, all the states and ethnic groups cannot be seen as one general political-economic unit.

Inter-border related dispute also depends on the changing social conditions, economic differences and political life. Indo-Myanmar frontier is physically a far-flung region. It also does not come under the category of 'disputed areas.' Though most parts of the region are accessible both physically and administratively much changes are taking place now. The phases of changes are taking place in a rapid manner in terms of geo-political, geo-economic and social conditions.

The Indo-Myanmar frontier stretches nearly 1,450 kilometers touching almost all the North Eastern states viz., Mizoram, Manipur, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh. The frontier passes through deeply

forested hill ranges and rugged mountains. The prominent hill ranges are *Chin-Lushai*, *Naga* and *Arakan Yoma*. There are numerous narrow strip and deep gorges and narrow river valleys. The notable peaks are *Dapha Bum* (4579 mts.) in Lohit district of Arunachal Pradesh, *Japfu* (3048 mts.) and *Saramati* (3926 mts.) in Naga Hills. The frontier is adjacent to the Chin state and Sagaing Division of Myanmar. In Indian side of the frontier, the districts include- Lohit, Tirap and Changlang district of Arunachal Pradesh; Mon, Tuensang and Phek district of Nagaland; Ukhrul, Chandel and Churachandpur districts of Manipur; and Aizawl, Lunglei and Chhimitupui districts of Mizoram [This is based on 1991 population census].

In 1962, NEFA was at the centre of a border-war between India and China. The fact is the war exposed India's 'vulnerability.' Buruah (2005b) opines that the Chinese army made deep incursions into Indian Territory before withdrawing. After India's humiliating defeat, Prime Minister Nehru's policy of indulging in Arunachal's isolation- a legacy of British colonial policy of an Inner Line in certain tribal areas beyond which the state did not extend its standard sets of governmental institutions- was completely discredited.

The North East is a landlocked region and hence, it is strategically important for the Indian sub-continent. The region borders nearly 99 per cent of the international borders with the four countries viz., China, Bhutan, Myanmar and Bangladesh. This geo-political region is connected with the rest of India's main land only by a narrow strip of 22 kms wide, which is usually termed as 'Chicken's Neck' or the *Siliguri Corridor*. As Hazarika (2005) mentioned that this sliver of land is the economic lifeline- gas, oil, tea and other goods flow in pipelines and over the roads and railways; commodities flow into the region through here. Indeed, no other part of India occupies such a strategic position.

The consolidated Naga areas is located in between 93°30' E and 95°15'E longitudes and 24°30'N and 27°0'N latitudes. The Naga areas are mountainous in character with numerous ridges, spurs, peaks and narrow river valleys. We have mentioned that during the colonial period and in post-colonial India, the contiguous Naga areas was segmented into different political boundaries. Today, the Naga hills fall into the administration of Nagaland, Manipur, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. The Naga population is distributed in Tirap and Changlang districts of Arunachal Pradesh State, Nagaland State, Hill districts of Manipur state consisting of Tamenglong, Senapati, Chandel and Ukhrul and part of Karbi Anglong, Mikir Hills, Lakhimpur,

Sibsagar, Nowgong and North Cachar Hills districts of Assam.

In the context of geo-political strategic importance, Nagas find themselves in the tri-junction of the three great nations viz., India, China and Myanmar. Though the position of the Nagas in the political map of the world is 'Just' at the periphery and landlocked, it cannot be undermined. As Longkumar (2004) remarks that "It also stand as a buffer between the two world's region that is, South and South-East Asia, the Naga region was no less important from the global geo-political perspective even in the past. Looking at the Colonial history, it was the advancement of the Chinese, Japanese and the Burmese in the Eastern corner of the Asian Continent on the one hand, and the expansionist interests of the colonial power of the British on the hand, that inevitably added to the strategic significance of the Naga country". In Second World War, Naga country was a strategic battleground. As Longkumar (2004) further puts it, "Nagas themselves had not seriously realised the geo-political locational importance of their territory from the global perspective, while the expansionist powers viewed the region as frontier region and it was targeted from the lens of '*Lebensraum*' or living space or open space providing ample scope for squabbling with their interests which ultimately resulted in the occupation of the Naga areas against the peoples wishes and democratic principle."

It is viewed that this frontier region is comparatively 'peaceful' as there is no boundary conflict between India and Myanmar. However, it is an 'uncomfortable peace', in the sense that there are several ethnic groups having discontentment in this frontier region. Such discontentment created several political movements and armed struggles. As Ghose (1976) explains that the situation is not economic exploitation or religio-cultural interference that led to the various insurgency movements, rather insurgency in this region is unique in having its roots and foundations in political formations and assertions.

Considering the geo-strategic importance, the policy should ensure long-lasting political settlement and cordial relationship with neighbouring countries. For instance, the Nagas have a historical relationship and economic links with neighbouring countries across the border. The fact is to have effective political-economic relationship and trans-cooperation with Myanmar and ASEAN countries. Here, the Naga Hills' location is crucial as it could be the transit zone of the regional cooperation as well as a strategic position considering the internal security factors.

Regional Development: 'Super Highway'

Mr. Jaswant Singh, Minister of Foreign Affairs during the National Democratic Alliance's (NDA) government inaugurated the *Tamu-Kalewa-Kalemyo* highway section which is a part of the long envisaged Istanbul-Bangkok Asian Highway Project. Similarly, several other proposals are being initiated including the rebuilding and modernisation of *Stilwell* Road and the other India-Burma Road. This grand plan for trans-cooperation would have economic advantage, new regional order and development. However, the plan has not made much headway since neither India nor Myanmar seems too keen fearing that it would give leverage to the insurgents as well on both sides.

The Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand Economic Cooperation (BIMST-EC) Summit (2005) at Bangkok pledged to construct a super trans-highway. The Summit called for larger integration of regional economic cooperation and infrastructure development. The proposed 1,400 Kms long Trans-Asian highway would run from Indo-Myanmar town *Moreh* in Chandel district of Manipur, cutting across the ancient city of *Began* in central Myanmar to join Thailand at *Mae Sot*. A major stretch of the proposed super highway already exists as that road was used during World War II. In this matter, India is taking the leading role to connect major business centres in Asia by road through the country's remote North Eastern region.

The National Highway 39 (NH39) starting from Numaligarh [Assam] crossing Dimapur and Kohima of Nagaland state and touching Senapati district, Imphal Town and Chandel district of Manipur will be part of proposed Asian super highway. NH39 being the major route not just for economy but also for commuting passengers has come to play an important role in the political and economic life of Nagaland and Manipur. The highway does not only have a reputation of 'bad road' but it is also one of the most vulnerable and victimised road. Whenever, there is a conflict of political interests and issues the NH39 is easily used by agitators [by various communities] in the form of economic blockade and *bandh*. This is because the NH39 passes through the Naga Hills and Kuki villages before it reaches the Imphal valley where the dominant *Meitei* community live. Finally, the Highway reaches the trouble-torn *Moreh* border [*Moreh* is a transit point of smuggling goods from the South East Asian countries]. Baruah (2005b: 228) pointed out the vulnerability of the region and its sources of the security anxieties. He writes:

“Apart from the China factor and the insurgencies, roads through Myanmar are sure to bring drugs, illegal migrants, infectious diseases, and small arms more easily than before. Already there are signs that smuggling routes for drugs through the Golden Triangle have become more diversified because of the availability of new corridor. Improved roads are sure to worsen India’s HIV/AIDS crisis. Yet one of the peculiar challenges of our global era...that old fashioned notion of border control to obtain security may be a cure worse than the disease.”

In the early eighties, heroin, a narcotic drug invaded the North Eastern states particularly Manipur, Nagaland and Mizoram. Within two decades, these states saw over one lakh drug addicts and over 6,871 HIV positive cases, with Manipur contributing to nearly 8 per cent of India’s total HIV positive cases [Shri. *Makunga, Morung*, Minister of Health, Government of Manipur speaking in the UN’s General Assembly Session on *Drugs Panel on Drug Abuse and HIV/AIDS*, New York, June 9, 1998].

One of the reasons for the region’s ‘vulnerability’ to this menace of drug addiction and HIV/AIDS is its proximity with the ‘Golden Pentagon’ Area [Golden Triangle] and poor socio-economic conditions. The North Eastern region shares a long frontier with Myanmar, which is the world’s second largest producer of opium. Phanjoubam (1997: 53) remarks, “The issue of drug abuse appears to be more dangerous than the decades old insurgency problem in the region.”

A claim to root out terrorism through the concerted regional cooperation and Asian connectivity is not politically tenable. Adhering to the popular statement that the increase of insurgency statistics is due to economic and unemployment problem is a very vague statement. In fact, such conclusions bear no rational explanation to it. If the economic development and infrastructural investment is the answer to the regional turmoil then why did it take fifty years to realise the same. One cannot ignore the importance of economic development and investment but the political space in understanding has to be created first. What is at stake at this point of time is the facilitation political intervention and negotiation for a just and lasting solution. Therefore, without bringing political understanding it would be difficult to put into place the ‘new order’ of regional political-economic cooperation and development.

Remarks

Since independence of India, the North Eastern region has been witnessing socio-political unrest, insurgency and ethnic clashes. The nature of political unrest has two distinct characters- ethnic clashes [among the indigenous groups] and political movement against the state. The demand ranges from basic socio-economic inequality and resource competition [for land] to political rights of regional autonomy to outright secession or independence. The emergence of the ethnic politics in an effort to protect their ethnic territories and its resources has come to represent new complexities. One can evaluate the socio-political unrest and ethnic conflicts in the region as being rooted in the contest over land and its resource, as well as an offshoot of unequal power relations. The 2000s saw an intense political tension between the Nagas and the Meiteis of Manipur over the Nagas' assertion for the political integration of their homeland.

On the other hand, ethnic politics based on 'demographic domination' and power politics led to the process of ethnic domination and subjugation, and majority and minority situation. Politics of ethnic hegemony tends to promote the politics of assimilation of the smaller groups in order to uphold and protect the dominant's vested interest. In this light, it is worth to mention the policies relating to language and culture, particularly in the states of Assam, Tripura and Manipur where the minor ethnic groups are forced to learn the dominant languages [For instance, the tribals of Manipur are forced to learn and speak *Meitei's* language, the *Bengali* language is imposed upon the tribals of Tripura and *Assamese* in Assam]. Hence, the minority groups feel insecure and threatened. This insecurity led to the consolidation of the smaller ethnic groups to create a larger political identity [This is explicitly demonstrated in case of the Nagas, Mizos and Zomis].

The current political assertion for 'self-determination' came into the centre stage in the upsurge of ethnic politics. In such political circumstances and ethnic consciousness, the process of consolidation and integration became a crucial political agenda in the realisation of ethnic aspirations. What has emerged to be most important is the control of ethnic interests and territories. For instance, the dominant Meitei community's opposition to the extension of ceasefire to the Naga areas of Manipur and the protests against the Naga integration movement. The conflict is mainly rooted in the contest over territorial control and 'ethnic hegemony.'

NOTES

1. The first outpost in Naga territory was set up at Asalu [Angami region]. See Appendix XXX.
2. Burauh, Sanjib, 1999, p. 27.
3. In the process of Indian administrative re-organisation NEFA and Naga Hills early was under the direct control of the External Affairs Ministry transferred to the Home Ministry.