

# **INDIA AND NORTH-EAST INDIA**

**Mind, Politics  
and the Process  
of Integration  
1946-1950**

**Sajal Nag**

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In north east India there has been a general complain that the history and society of north east India was neglected by the mainstream historians, which is justified. Now that the concept of History from below is being practiced in India to discover the pressure from below in shaping the history of modern India, the non-inclusion of north east is all the more glaring. Most of north east India is not discussed in any work where the process of India's integration or even the rise of separatist demands were discussed. Not even in recent book on Modern India, or the truly national history of India written from the perspective of History from below. The section dealing with States People movement does not include Manipur or Tripura. There is a proud depiction of pressure from the masses for integration with India but there too the hills of Mizoram was not discussed. The signing of the Instrument of Accession by the Khasi states or the events led to the signing and fiasco of Akbar Hydari Agreement with the Nagas are nowhere mentioned. There has been thus consistent exclusion of north east India from the history of India. Such neglect prompted the historians of north east India to take up research on the area but they failed to communicate them to the rest of India. As a result north east India continued to suffer from historiographical exclusion. But unless the stories of north east are integrated with the history of the rest of the country, a true national history can never be achieved. Historiographical integration has to be a prerequisite to national integration.

This book, done on the basis of extensive research, details this process of the merger of north-eastern states of Nagaland, Mizoram and Manipur with India.

**Rs. 200.00**

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*Sajal Nag*



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*To*  
*Professor Om Prakash Kejariwal*  
*and*  
*Deblina Bannerjee-Kejariwal*  
*whom I owe so much*

## PREFACE

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This is a revised version of my talk delivered at the Department of Political Science, North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong which was organised by the Indian Council of Social Science Research, North-Eastern Regional Centre, Shillong as part of their Invitation Lecture Series. It forms part of my ongoing research project on the history of Insurgency in North East India.

I take this opportunity to thank Prof. M.N. Karna, Department of Sociology, NEHU who is also the Honorary Director, ICSSR, NERC and Prof. Rupa Borgohain, Department of Political Science NEHU for chairing the occasion. No thanks are however enough to express my gratitude to Dr. C. Joshua Thomas, Deputy Director, ICSSR, NERC, Shillong. But he is a friend and I do take liberties with him.

I hope the book is able to generate the debate it intends to. I tried to attempt a fresh way at looking at the history of the region using old as well as new materials. The responsibility of facts and errors of interpretation are of course mine.

Shillong  
18.2.98

SAJAL NAG

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“The historian who looks back will no doubt consider this integration of the states into India as one of the dominant phase of India’s history”

*Jawaharlal Nehru*  
(Quoted in V.P. Menon,  
Integration of Indian States,  
p. 489)

“We had demolished the artificial barriers between the States inter se and the rest of India and had indeed laid the foundations of an integrated administrative and financial structure. But the real integration had to take place in the minds of the people”.

*V.P. Menon*  
Integration of Indian States  
p. 490

## ABBREVIATIONS

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AICC	:	All India Congress Committee
CPI	:	Communist Party of India
HMG	:	His/Her Majesty's Government
ICSSR	:	Indian Council of Social Sciences Research
INA	:	Indian National Army
INC	:	Indian National Congress
MU	:	Mizo Union
NEHU	:	North-Eastern Hill University
NEIHA	:	North-East India History Association
NERC	:	North-Eastern Regional Centre
NNC	:	Naga National Council
PWD	:	Public Works Department
UMFO	:	United Mizo Freedom Organization

## INTRODUCTION

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Throughout Indian history, right from the first empire built by the Mouryas down to the British empire an ostensible common pattern has been that while the rise of empires were characterised by the integration of diverse regions of the subcontinent, its decline was marked by their disintegration. In other words a centripetal pull was engineered by the rising empires while its demise unleashed a centrifugal tendency. Despite the difference in the time and the nature of empires, it is interesting to note that the imminence of British withdrawal from India led to the surfacing of various schemes which, if actualised, would reduce British India to a conglomeration of independent states. Most important among them were the Pakistan scheme, Azad Punjab or Sikhistan scheme, Pakhtunistan scheme, Gorkhastan scheme, United Bengal scheme, Crown Colony plan and so on. Although Churchill spoke of 'Princistan' implying perhaps one independent state, in reality many of the 562 Princely States sought to withdraw from India and their autocratic rulers dreamt of returning to their medieval days. This was not just a historical situation but also the political climate — often an inspiration — against which the developments in north east India, where many states were undecided regarding their future, have to be understood.

The eve of British withdrawal from India was characterised by two binary opposite trends: a pan Indian sentiment seeking its culmination in the form of an integrated

independent India the other was a separatist tendency seeking its independent existence. Initially the Indian National Congress which was likely to assume power from the British, was not against granting the Right to Self determination and even Right to Secession to the aggrieved constituents and agreed to prepare a constitution "acceptable to all sections of the people" and a "federal one with residuary power vested in the units."<sup>1</sup> But alarmed by the rising number of claims it had to be emphatic that "the Congress cannot agree to any proposal to disintegrate India by giving liberty to any component state or territorial unit to secede from the Indian Union or Federation". The post-Independent Indian State wanted to inherit as much of British India as possible and was not willing to reconcile with any portions of India opting out of India even though it stated "it cannot think in terms of compelling the people in any territorial unit to remain in an Indian Union against their declared and established will."<sup>2</sup>

But the political environment of the subcontinent at the end of the second world war presented an altogether different situation, where it became difficult to effect this policy as popular will was often suppressed by the ambition of the rulers. In September 1945 Wavell had already promised full self government to India. With the assumption of power by the Labour Party in England, the exit of the British from India was on the cards. The announcement came in February 1947 that they would leave India by June 1948. Although such an eventuality was logical and expected, the announcement immediately fanned secessionist tendencies. A number of schemes envisaging sovereign 'Homelands' were already being circulated. Now with the imminent lapse of British paramountcy, rulers of some Princely States dreamt of reverting to their autocratic ways by retaining their sovereignty. The task of the Nationalist government which had just taken over power from the British was to curb these disintegrative potentials, merge them with subcontinental mainland and protect the original territorial limit that they inherited from the British. "Our first task was to prevent the balkanisation of the country and to stop any possible inveiglement of the States by

Pakistan, was to bring the States into some form of organic relationship with the Centre.<sup>3</sup> The effective completion of this arduous task was carried out under the slogan of 'Integration'. A States Department was established under the stewardship of Sardar Patel for the purpose. The "incorporation of Indian states took place in two phases: with a skillful combination of baits and threats of mass pressure."<sup>4</sup> Thus by the 26th January 1950, when the Constitution came into force all the States and outlying areas were integrated fully. "By Partition India had lost an area of 364,737 square miles and a population of 81½ million. By integration of the states were brought in an area of nearly 500,000 square miles with a population of 86½ millions (not including Jammu and Kashmir)."<sup>5</sup>

Patel, who led this process of integration was satisfied with the outcome of the endeavour. "The great ideal of geographical, political and economic unification of India: an ideal which for centuries remained a distant dream and which appeared as remote and as difficult of attainment as ever, even after the advent of Indian independence, was consummated by the policy of integration."<sup>6</sup>

North east India was no exception to this process of integration. Manipur, Tripura and the Khasi states were Princely States. The Naga, Mizo and Arunachal Hills (erstwhile North Eastern Frontier Agency) though not Princely States, formed Excluded Area within British India. After the lapse of Paramountcy, Manipur continued to maintain its sovereign existence until October 1949. So did Tripura. The Khasi States merged with India through the Instrument of Accession. Naga hills initially wanted to experiment life within India for a period of ten years after which it wanted to retain its option to remain independent. Arunachal Pradesh formed a Special entity within the province of Assam. The Mizos toyed with both the ideas of merging with India as well as remaining outside India. But the popular will was in favour of the former, which clinched the issue. It was a significant episode of Indian history, not told to the rest of the people of India. This work details the processes at work within the areas of Manipur, Nagaland and Mizoram which brought about the unification of these areas with the Indian Union.

Contrary to popular notion, the region of north east India did not want an outright severance from India as soon as the British decided their intention to leave India. In fact like other parts of India, north east India also experienced both centripetal and centrifugal trends. For Assam the greatest threat was the Cabinet Mission plan which sought to tag it with Bengal and Bengali dominance. The other threat for it was the growth of Muslim population in Assam and the consequent strength of the Muslim League. Manipur and Tripura were Princely States which at least for the time being would revert to their original status after the lapse of paramountcy. The conglomeration of Khasi states were virtually Princely states; they were to decide their future. That left the Nagas of Naga hills and Mizos of Lushai hills to decide for themselves. But it was not easy. The political development in these areas were not the same as the rest of India. In fact Nagas and Lushais had just been subjugated after prolonged warfare when the Indian intelligentsia was organising a national platform for the Indians. Although the Nagas had been inhabiting the Naga hills from proto historical period, the Lushais migrated to their present habitat only a couple of centuries back. These tribals had interaction with the plains people of Bengal and Assam but had not undergone the process of Sanskritisation or Hinduisation unlike Manipur or Tripura in north east India. They continued to trouble the Ahom, Tripura, Bengal and Meithei states in the precolonial period but were never completely subjugated by any of them. It was the might of a modern State and its military power (the British in India) that subordinated them completely for the first time. With the British Flag came the Bible. The proselytisation efforts of the Christian Missionaries of various denominations was nowhere more successful than in these hills of north east India. By 1947, about eighty percent of the population of Nagas and Mizos were converted to Christianity. Colonialism along with Christianity was able to completely transform these pre-historic people. Right from their dresses to their values were altered. To use the language of B. Pakem<sup>7</sup> and M. Horam<sup>8</sup> the changes which would normally have taken a couple of centuries

were packed and effected within a couple of decades. The result was a socio-cultural upheaval. The people had lost their traditional mooring and identity and were using an identity which was imposed on them by people from without. From their village based, subtribe based identity they now began to identify themselves by a generic identity. The British who they fought against for almost fifty years continually and whom they ridiculed as 'half-backed' people (after their pale skin) had emerged as their father-figures. Hence the possibility of British withdrawal from their land had not only not occurred to them; that they would have to decide their own future political identity was also never anticipated by them. Therefore, the situation created a series of crises for them. It is these crises and the ways the hill people dealt with them which forms the subject matter of this work. An attempt has been made to appreciate the crises and characterise them because it is the resolution of these problems which shaped the course of events in the region. The crises were of identity and autonomy, unification and confrontation, fear and apprehensions, hopes and aspirations. The dilemma and confusion created by the fluidity of the juncture in the minds of the people cannot be understood if we do not delve into the minds of the people, study the structure of consciousness and analyse the socio-political crystallization of their inner conflicts.

Sources for the history of preliterate societies are scanty. Sources which would reveal the minds of people are scantier. To supplement the documentary evidence we have used oral sources and often the regressive method. The areas covered are the hills of Nagaland and Mizoram and the plains of Manipur of north east India where the problems we are concerned with, were most acute.

In north east India there has been a general complaint that the history and society of north east India was neglected by the mainstream historians, which is justified. Now that the concept of History from below is being practiced in India to discover the pressure from below in shaping the history of modern India, the non-inclusion of north east is all the more glaring. Most of north east India is not discussed in any work where the process of India's

integration or even the rise of separatist demands were discussed. Not even in Sumit Sarkar's *Modern India*,<sup>9</sup> perhaps the first national history of India written from the perspective of History from below. The section dealing with States People Movement, does not include Manipur or Tripura. There is a proud depiction of pressure from the masses for integration with India but there too the hills of Mizoram was not discussed. The signing of the Instrument of Accession by the Khasi states or the events that led to the signing and fiasco of Akbar Hydari Agreement with the Nagas are nowhere mentioned. There has been thus consistent exclusion of north east India from the history of India. Such neglect prompted the historians of north east India to take up research on the area but they failed to communicate them to the rest of India. As a result north east India continue to suffer from historiographical exclusion. But unless the stories of north east are integrated with the history of the rest of the country, a true national history can never be achieved. Historiographical integration has to be a prerequisite to national integration.

#### NOTES

1. Resolution of the Working Committee of the Indian National Congress on United India and Self Determination, 12-18 and 21-24 September, 1945.
2. *Ibid.*
3. V.P. Menon, *Integration of Indian States*, Hyderabad, 1956, 1985 edn., p. 485.
4. Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India*, New Delhi, 1985, p. 451.
5. V.P. Menon, *op. cit.*, p. 490.
6. Quoted in *ibid.*
7. B. Pakem, 'Separatist Movement in North East India in T.L. Bose (ed.), *Indian Federation: Problem and Issues*, Calcutta, 1987, p. 207.
8. M. Horam, *Thirty Years of Naga Insurgency*, New Delhi, 1990 pp. 4-10.
9. Sumit Sarkar, *op. cit.*, pp. 365-70 and 450-451.

## CONCLUSION

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The advent of independence in August 1947, did not signify the end of the long-drawn struggle of the Indians against the British. The immediate task was to strive to avert a possible balkanisation of the country by integrating the areas which showed secessionist tendencies. But it was rendered difficult because of the 'weak-links' of these areas with the mainland. Moreover the political climate of the subcontinent was vitiated by the forces of communalism and separatism. In fact the eve of British withdrawal from India was characterised by two co-eval trends: a pan-Indian sentiment seeking the merger of their areas with the mainland; the other a separatist tendency seeking an independent existence outside India. North East India was no exception to this. But the grounds were different in the region. In the hills of Nagaland or Mizoram or the plains of Manipur the prevalence of such tendencies were not due to political reasons or despotic ambitions but more on cultural and metaphysical considerations. Although the Meithies and the Nagas lived in their present habitat from the proto-historic period, the Mizos migrated only a couple of centuries back. Except the Meitheis, the others escaped the influence of Sanskritisation. Even the Meitheis came under its impact only in the eighteenth century. Thus even if there was interaction between the Indian civilization on the one hand and these communities on the other, the latter could preserve their exclusivity to a great extent.

The British opened the exclusivity of these communities and exposed them to the outer world. There was a combined effort by the colonial administration as well as the Christian missionaries to 'change' the Nagas and the Mizos. (They could not do so with the Meitheis as the nature of political intervention was different.) A modern administration was set up to govern them. A new religion introduced. Modern education and social reform followed. Application of modern elementary science and technology was fostered. These changes detribalised the people to a considerable extent and within a short span of time they were a changed people with a new life, new culture, new morality, religion, a modern identity and more important, a consciousness about this identity. Often this identity created metaphysical confusions for the Nagas and the Mizos. The colonial functionaries constantly fed them with the idea that they were not Indians neither in physical appearance nor in socio-cultural terms but at the same time ruled them as part of British India. So long these tribals identified themselves by their Sub-tribal affiliations but now they were given a generic identity. The advent of British rule also resulted in a metamorphosis of the tribal-non-tribal relationship. The non-tribal living in the border areas were subjected to frequent raids, kidnapping and headhunting from the tribals. The tribal Chiefs considered these areas as their sphere of influence and the people as their subordinate. During the British rule they saw the same plainmen as the 'babus' in the colonial administration who invariably frowned the 'loose' way of life of the tribals, often ridiculed their morality and dress codes. Hence, the tribals identified 'Indians' synonymously with these 'babus.'

Manipur was a princely state. Hence colonial-intervention in its internal affairs was restricted. But the Indian business community had an unrestricted entry into it who soon monopolised the core sectors and introduced the practice of hoarding and black marketeering. During the inter-war period they often created artificial food crisis and near-famine conditions. Socially too, even though the Meitheis had embraced Hinduism and absorbed the

Brahmanical order they were not granted equal status as a Hindu and Indian main-land. The result was resentment towards the Indians in general and the exploitative and discriminatory system that it represented in particular. Such was the state of consciousness in the region when the issue of 'merger' emerged. When the British declared their intention to quit India Manipur was reeling under one crisis after another under a feudal order and the oppressiveness of the monarchical system. The people led a State Peoples Movement to successfully install a Assembly of People's representatives and reduce the Maharaja to a nominal Head. There was a rejuvenation of political process with the prospect of Manipur reverting to its pre-British status after the lapse of British paramountcy. The suggestion of Mountbatten to the Princely States to join either of the Dominions (India or Pakistan) and the emergence of such a trend in other Princely States raised a dilemma in Manipur: to join India or remain independent. Given its identification with Hinduism and the following Sanskritisation process, Manipur was already inclined to merge with India. The newly emerged middle class as part of the all-India middle class had a pan-Indian outlook. Hence their political organisation Nikhil Manipuri Mahasabha did not lose time to join the Indian National Congress to expedite the merger. At the same time another trend of apprehension about the prospective life in India was also prevalent. But the post-colonial Indian State preferred to ignore the apprehension as well as the inclination of the Meithies and decided to effect the 'integration' of Manipur in a secretive manner. Despite the existence of Peoples' Assembly, it invited the Maharaja to Shillong, the capital of Assam and used 'bait' and 'pressure tactics' to make him sign the Instrument of Accession. In the process it completely ignored the people and hurt their pride thereby alienating even those majority who were inclined to merge with India.

For the Nagas and Mizos who were complacent under the British rule which they considered paternalistic, there was a similar crisis with the abrupt British declaration to withdraw. Apart from merger and independence, they toyed

with another idea: to join Burma with which they were close in race and ethnicity. Their immediate reaction to the British declaration was to form political platforms from which they could represent their case to the outgoing British as well as the Indian leadership. The Nagas formed the Naga National Council while the Mizos formed the Mizo Union. The Nagas submitted successive memoranda to express their fear that they were different from the Indians in every way — from look to outlook; their number were small and they stand the treat to be overwhelmed by the vast majority of Indians. They feared that their land and in the way of life which was so dear to them would be snatched away. But the British chose to ignore their representation and except for one letter from Nehru assuring of protection, the Indian leadership was silent.

The Mizo leader Vanlawma was invited by the Assam Premier Bordoloi for a deal. Bordoloi offered full-fledged membership to the Mizo leader in the Bordoloi Sub-committee which would decide the protective devices for the tribals in the Indian Constitution. In return the Mizo leader agreed to merge with India. But in the mean time on the issue of perpetuation of Chieftainship in Mizoram, the Mizos were polarised into two hostile groups. Since merger with India promised to abolish the oppressive chiefly rule, the majority of the Mizos favoured integration. The representative of this majority officially integrated with India through participation in the Bordoloi Sub-committee which was part of the Constituent Assembly. But the opposing group considered it a breach of agreement by Bordoloi who promised full membership to the Mizos in the committee but now offered only co-opted membership. They propagated this breach as an indication of things to come and opposed the merger. It is this group which subsequently supported a secessionist movement in Mizoram in the 1960s. In the Naga hills Assam Governor Akbar Hydari managed to bring the Naga leaders to the negotiating table and effected a Nine Point agreement by which the Nagas agreed to merge with India. But on the interpretation of the Ninth Clause, disagreement emerged again. The Naga leaders insisted that this integration was for a period of ten year only fol-

lowing which they would be free to opt out of India. The Government felt that the Clause provided only for a change in the arrangement. Thus while on the basis of this agreement the Naga hills were integrated with the Indian Union, the Nagas continued to view this agreement as void due to mutual disagreement over its interpretation.

As can be seen the seeds of disintegration were inherent in the agreement of integration. The Meitheis had apprehension about the Indians, the Nagas fear while the Mizos had hope from the integration. The belying of this hope or the actualisation of the fear or apprehension could tilt the balance against such integration. Since then, therefore, the integration of these areas had always been fragile and the Indian State always on the edge.

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