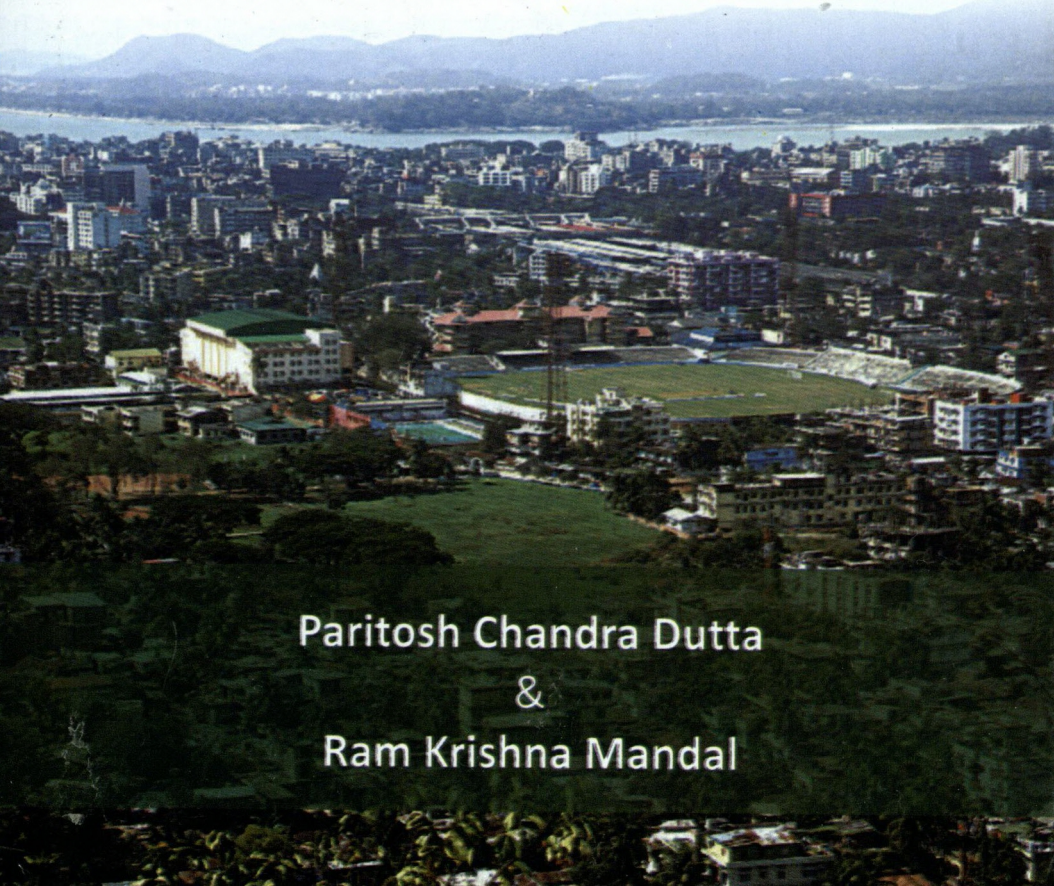




GLOBALISATION,
GROWTH AND INEQUALITY IN
NORTH EAST INDIA

In 2 Volumes



Paritosh Chandra Dutta
&
Ram Krishna Mandal

This book consists of twenty one papers and divided into five sections: socio-economic development, economic disparity, demographic profile, environmental degradation and agricultural scenario. Basically, it concerns economic disparity, poverty, human development, level of living, employment and wages, literacy and education, morbidity, disability and nutrition, effectiveness of public services, education and health care etc. of the people of north-east states. Multi-dimensional changes during post reform period were undertaken over centralized and nationalized of socialistic pattern of development which led to corruption and economic inefficiency and inequality in this region. Protection, subsidy system and aid have encouraged permanent dependence rather than growth. Hence, this region is facing the dilemma of economic efficiency versus social and regional inequality. There are differences in natural resources, climate, topography, vegetation and density of population in different regions. The forces of regionalism have become strong and the gravity of the problem has increased to such an extent that it has been threatening the political stability. Sustainable development, which stands at the root of its beginning, aims at improving human well-being, particularly through alleviating poverty, increasing gender equity, and improving health, human resources, and stewardship of the natural environment. When the whole world is crying for the mercy to get rid of current state of environmental degradation in the form of depletion of ozone layer, global warming and climate change, it is found that accessible natural forests particularly in the foothills of this region are under great threat to a large scale due to extraction of timber and illegal felling of trees.

₹ 1800 (Set)



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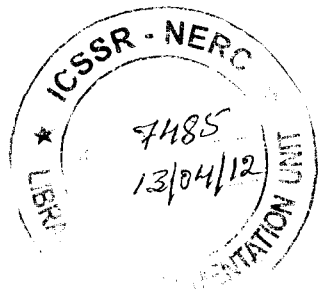
GLOBALISATION, GROWTH AND INEQUALITY IN NORTH EAST INDIA

(In 2 Volumes)

(Volume-2)

**Paritosh Chandra Dutta
and
Ram Krishna Mandal**





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Demographic Changes, Racial and Linguistic Conflicts in Assam of North Eastern Region

Introduction

One of the most debatable topics in the Indian Sub-Continent is increasing tension and turmoil in north-east India arising out of ethnic crisis among the people of the region. The geographical situation in north eastern region of India (NER) has given the region its special position and importance as the region is surrounded by the foreign countries like China, Burma, Bhutan and Bangladesh. Situated in the north-east corner of India, popularly known as the CHICKEN NECK, the NER is like a sentinel of the country and most sensitive as the states of NER have been suffering a state of insecurity since time of independence. It is a meeting ground of the people with different cultures, religions, languages etc. The region is unique in the sense that the migration to the region was mainly from the east whereas migration in the rest of India were from the west to the east. Immigration or influx of foreign nationals into the region is not a recent phenomenon but has a long historical past. The entire North Eastern Region inhabited by numerous ethnic and linguistic groups have grievances, economic, political, cultural and administrative. Planning based on the flow of quantum of money and achievements measured in terms of expenditures incurred remains a matter of criticism by the politicians as well as by the economists. It is the apathy, indifference and neglect by New Delhi which has

produced frustration among the growing middle class of people of different ethnic groups. Too much oppression on a particular minority group will help fragmentation with powers hostile to India. The Centre should act with prudence to avert greater crisis. No linguistic or ethnic group should be haunted by a sense of alienation. A very significant fact about the region is the assimilation of Indo-Aryan and Mongolian cultures. However, the present day ethnic composition is something different from the region of the past.

The whole population of NER can be divided into two broad racial types like—(i) the Caucasoid and (ii) Mongoloid as it is not easy to determine the real ethnic affinities of the population of the region. Broadly speaking, scheduled tribe population in the hills as well as in the plains have mongoloid features and the Aryan speaking people in the plains have mainly Caucasoid features. However, in the western side of the plains, there is a blend of Caucasoid and Mongoloid features. The Caucasoid type is represented by the cast Hindus, the Muslims and some professionals.

The Indo-Mongoloids can be identified by yellow brown colour of the skin, stretched or flat wave and coarse hair of the head. The broad face has scanty hair growth, the body hairs are also scanty. After assimilation, most of these communities have not lost their tribal characteristics. The major tribes of the region are – Adi, Aka, Apatani, Bongro, Hill Miri, Khamti, Miji, Mishng, Nishi, Nocte, Sherderphen, Singhphò, Sulung, Tagin, Wangcho, Ashinh, Galong, Minyong, Padam, Tangsa etc in Arunachal Pradesh, Boro-Kachari, Chutya, Dimasa, Karbi, Lalung, Mech, Mishng, Rabha etc. in Assam, Garo, Hajon, Khasi, Jaintia in Meghalaya, Hmar, Mizo, Pawi-Lakhar, Ralte, Kuki, Riang, Lusai etc. in Mizoram, Aimol, Anal, Chiru, Chothe, Hmar, Kabui, Khairao, Maram, Maring, Paite, Purum, Thangkhol, Thadou, Vaithei, Mao, Gangte, Kacha Naga etc. in Manipur Angami, Ao, Chang, Dimasa, Kuki, Konyak, Lhota, Naga tribes, Phom, Rengma, Sena etc. in Nagaland and Chakma, Hollam, Magh, Riang, Noatia, Tripuri, Jaintia, Kuki, Lushai etc., in Tripura. Thus, NER presents a unique picture of multi-

ethnic region in India. But since the advent of the 20th century there had been ethnic crisis in the region and due to which the society of the region is in a state of tension and turmoil till the advent of the present century. Sometimes these social tensions pose a serious threat to the unity and integrity of the region by changing its geography and history. Demands have been raised in different ways for autonomy, separate state-hood and secession from the Indian Union and no viable solution to the problems appears to be insight. North-eastern Region of India is the home to peoples of diverse ethnic communities (within as well as between the States) who, while sharing many common historical experiences and cultural orientations follow different religious, speak varied languages, and live in societies with different political and economic structures.

The political history of Assam is a history of annexation of territories and integration of small states. "M. S. Aney ... said that in India, provinces were formed not on scientific basis nor on linguistic affinity but for administrative convenience and on financial expediency" (page 287, **Political History of Assam, Vol. II**). It is clear from the above that the State of Assam was never a homogeneous unit but a composite one of heterogeneous communities and tribes. 'Without any strong linguistic, cultural, economic or any other kind of affinity, "Assam stands out in all India as a miniature League of Nations'. "Assam, originally, meant the land," conquered and consolidated in 1228 by the Shans. When the British, after occupation, constituted the new Province in 1874, they extended the name to the whole territory that came within its purview. Needless to state that history is a record of the past over which lies the foundation of the present.

From the study of formation of Assamese nationality it would appear that the bulk of the population of Assam is of Mongoloid origin. However, most of these communities through assimilation have lost their tribal characteristics. The two broad categories of castes are the Brahmins and the Koch represents a heterogeneous type. Many people believe that after Hinduisation of different tribes, they were included

in the Caste-fold Assamese Society. But, the Rajbanshis claimed themselves that they have separate entity since long past. The Assamese muslims are medium saturated having leptorrhine nose and mesocephalic head. With the recognition of the immigrants muslims as the Na-Asamiya, four groups of Muslims are found like the Syeds, the marjas, the Sheikhs and the Na-Asamiyas.

According to the constitutional Amendment Act of 1976, 14 tribes like Chakma, Dimasa, Cachari, Garo, Hajong, Hmar, Kukitribes, Khasi-Jaintia etc, Lakhar, Man, Mizo, Mikir, Naga, Pawi, Syntheng were scheduled in the autonomous districts of Karbi-Anglong and North Cachar. The 9 tribes scheduled in the plains of Assam are like Burmans in Cachar, Bodo and Bodo-Cachari, Deori, Hojai, Cachari and Sonowal, Lalung, Mech, Miri and Rabha. The Ahoms now occupy special position in respect of distribution in Upper-Assam districts. Originally Thai or Shan speaking Ahoms soon become Hinduised and accepted the Indo-Aryan Language- Assamese.

Although the roots of the social tension in the region are traced to the geographic, demographic and socio-cultural distinctiveness of the region by different scholars, the role of foreign countries, Christian and other missionaries involvement in the ethnic conflict are deliberately ignored with. Further, few attempts have been made to define the term "ethnic" or "ethnicity" by establishing a link with the ethnic conflicts and social tension in the region.

In the border areas of Nagaland and Mizoram, there are Naga and Mizo people speaking their respective Naga and Kuki-Chin languages. Broadly speaking, the population of the plains of Brahmaputra and Barak Valley speak Assamese and Bengali of the Indo-Aryan family. Thus, Assam presents a unique picture of multi-ethnic state of India. But since the advent of 20th century and till now there is a crisis of ethnic identity in the state of Assam. Sometime it poses a serious threat to the unity and integrity of the state by changing the geography of Assam. Due to ethnic conflicts, the geographical boundary of the State has been reduced to such extent that

present Assam cannot be identified by the readers of other provinces who have gone through the past history.

In this paper an attempt has been made not only to identify various racial and linguistic groups of Assam but also to examine the causes for the growth of resentment and dissatisfaction among these groups. Finally, attempt has also been made to explain the consequences of such conflicts in the state of Assam resulting in the further decadence of the state. The study, based on statistical data and other secondary sources, has been concluded with some findings and suggestions for the minimization of social tension in the state in particular and the region in general.

The concept 'ethnic' and 'ethnicity' are frequently used today by the politicians, sociologists and academicians. But the terms give the impression of meaning different things to different people and in different contexts. While in American society, ethnic groups are meant for minority groups, but in the expression of ethnic conflict the meaning is totally different. The dictionary meaning of the term 'ethnic', is like "of or relating to large group of people closed together according to common traits or customs". Thus, the ethnic group is essentially a culture-based entity. In the sense in which the term 'ethnic' is used by sociologists and social scientists today, it refers to a social group, which consciously shares some aspects of common culture and is defined primarily by descent.

Ethnicity is a new concept in social science. It was first used by David Reedman in 1853 as referred to in the 1972 supplement of the English Oxford Dictionary and subsequently by Cynthia, H. Enloe and in India by J. Dasgupta. Before 1953 other terms like 'ethnic communities' by Caroline E. Ware in the Encyclopedia of Social Sciences of "Ethno-Centriam" by Edward Byron Reuter in a modern hand book of sociology were used. Since 1953, other terms are used "ethnic Groups" by H.S. Morris in the International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences (1968) and other Writers like Max Weber and Talcot Parsons; "Primordial attachments" by Clifford Geertz; Communal Group by Daniel Dell and 'minority groups' by Preston Valien.

However, all these terms aim at identifying a particular social group and it becomes difficult when we apply the term ethnicity to the communities of north-east India.

Barth (1969) defined ethnic group as a population which-

- (i) is largely biologically self perpetuating,
- (ii) shares fundamental cultural values, realized in overt unity is cultural forms,
- (iii) has a membership which identified itself, and is identified by others, as constituting a category distinguishable from other categories of the same order.

Glazer (1976) observed that ethnicity is something that is determined by the prevailing socio-cultural and socio-political trends. If awareness about ethnicity was formerly handed down consciously but silently from one generation to another, it has today become a matter of open declaration. Ethnicity, as apart of culture, always had to be taught. One group learns from another picks up its language, its demand, its resentments, its form of organization.

Dutta (1985) mentioned that much of anxiety of the smaller ethnic groups, particularly of the tribals of NER has been associated with the identity crisis which they have been facing due to various economic, social, cultural and political factors. In search for their roots sometimes they have been forced to take the agitational path.

Singh (1982) in his study of the ethnic movements in NER found that the first stage of ethnic movement is to assert the identity around certain social problems and the second stage is to criticize the identity by forming an ethnic association. The third stage is to claim separate administrative arrangement so that the group concerned can preserve their cultural heritage, language etc. The fourth stage is to demand a separate administrative unit comprising the areas where the ethno-cultural groups form a majority.

Thus, the above authors left the questions unanswered that whether after formation of the state or achievement of

autonomy, common identity has developed or not and whether any chance of ethnic conflict there or not?

One must realize that north-east is a mini-India. There are more than 75 major population groups and sub groups, speaking approximately 400 languages and dialects, of which there are about 168 in Arunachal Pradesh, 95 in Nagaland, 87 in Manipur, 100 in Tripura and 200 in Assam, Meghalaya and Mizoram (Madhab, J, 1999). Thus, the whole north-eastern India is a place with people of diverse races, cultures, languages and various dialects with different traditions. Besides the heterogeneity of geographical and socio-cultural factors, the more striking view of the North-Eastern scenario is the co-existence of the extreme forms of both tradition and modernity.

Hence, in the context of NER, in general and Assam in particular, ethnic groups may be defined as such minorities socio-cultural groups having common origin and background, searching for their identity and to establish their primordial loyalties like ancestry, religion, language race, culture, custom and tradition. As search for identity of different ethnic groups led conflicts in the region and took the path of violence by creating a social tension, the nature and character of such issues may be discussed under the heads of Religion, Language, Ethnicity etc.

The North eastern Region of India (NER) comprises, at present, seven full fledged States like Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura poetically called 'seven sisters'. Before independence, the region consisted of one province of Assam, two native states like Manipur and Tripura and one centrally ruled area known as North Eastern Frontier Agency (N.E.F.A.).

The share of population of NER to the total population of India as low as 1.70 per cent in 1901. Since then it has been steadily increasing and reached at nearly 3.75 per cent in the census year of 2001 from 2.84 p.c. in the year 1951. The decadal growth rate of NER is always higher than the all-India level during the period 1951-2001. However, the growth rate of NER

is decreased from 41.34 p.c. in 1961 to 22.02 p.c. in the year 2001 while at the same time for India the respective rates are 21.64 and 21.35. during the period rate of growth of population for India is 184 p.c. while for NER it is 275 p.c. (**table -14.1**). The share of migrants from Bangladesh was between slightly more than 70 per cent to slightly more than 87 per cent in pre-independence era. In the post independence era it reached to 94 per cent in 1951. However, the share was around 89 per cent in the census year of 1991 and it again shows an increasing trend after 1991. The phenomenal migration is instrumental in creating not only social tension but also jeopardizing the security of the region.

The total geographical area of NER was 2,55,037 sq. km. At the time of independence. But within a span of 40 years in the post independence period, the region has been splinted several times and yet the region is not free from the threat of further split with the most dominant tribes like Bodos, Karbis etc. The state of Nagaland with an area of 16,579 sq.km. was formed in the year 1963. On 2nd April, 1970, the hill state known as Meghalaya with an area of 22,429 sq. km. was inaugurated by the then Prime Minister of India. The states of Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh were made as Union Territory in the year 1972. In 1986, Mizoram with an area of 21,087 sq. km. became the full fledged state and Arunachal Pradesh with an area of 83,746 sq. km. became an autonomous state in the year 1987. Thus, at present, out of the total geographical area of NER, the state of Assam occupies only 30.75 per cent while Arunachal Pradesh occupies 32.83 per cent. The other states like Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura occupy 8.75 per cent, 8.79, 8.27, 6.50 and 4.11 per cent respectively.

Religious Issues

The geographical situation of Assam has given the state its special position and importance situated in the north-east (NER) corner of India and surrounded by four foreign countries like China, Burma, Bhutan and Bangladesh. Assam stands

like a sentinel of the country in a most sensitive region. It is a meeting ground of the people with different cultures. At the time of country's independence in 1947, Assam attracted attention of the entire nation for foreign national issue. However, this issue is not a trend developed on the eve of independence, it is as old as British occupation of Assam. The products of the New English Education in Bengal by the end of the 19th century over flown into Assam for livelihood. During this time, the dominance of middle class Bengalees in employment by virtue of their cultural superiority started in Assam. During the years of Muslim league ministry under Sir Mahammed Sadullah and before there was a heavy flow of people from East Bengal. It is possible that the Muslim League ministry encouraged the land-hungry peasants from East Bengal to settle in the fertile plains of Assam out of purely communal considerations but in the name of agricultural development of the State. Before independence, there had always been a latent fear in the Assamese mind of being swamped by the Bengali-speaking people and such suspicious were strengthened when Assam was included in the group "C" category by the Cabinet Mission.

Taking language as an issue, the then leaders of Assam headed by Mr. Gopinath Bordoloi committed a serious blunder in Assam's history as a result of which there was every possibility of Muslim dominance in Assam. The separation of Bengali-speaking district of Sylhet from Assam in 1947 through a referendum known as "Sylhet referendum" greatly helped to calm Assamese fears of being outnumbered by Bengali speaking population but the path for future ethnic conflicts were cleared from that day onwards in Assam.

In 1951 census, the rise in the population of Assamese-speaking people was substantial as the migrated Muslim population adopted Assamese as their language leaving their mother tongue Bengali. Meanwhile, the refugees from East Pakistan poured into the State in their thousands leading to an abnormally high rate of population growth in the State. During that time, the Bengali-speaking population in Barak

Valley districts was in majority. To see the political situation of Assam, they started “Purbanchal” movement, which was suppressed when the plan for ‘purbanchal’ was rejected by the State Re-organisation Committee of 1954.

Before independence Sir Sadullah bore the responsibility for settling the Muslim infiltrators in Assam and after independence task was given to Mr. Fakruddin Ali Ahmed and Moinul Haque Choudhury. The then Newspapers alleged that Moinul Hoque Choudhury was encouraging muslim communalism in Barak Valley districts as a Pro-pakistani and supporter of “Azad Cachar Party”, for which he was detained by the then Deputy Commissioner of Cachar under ‘Preventive Detention Act’ for providing shelter to the muslim infiltrators from Pakistan¹. During that time the linguistic nationalism of the Bangalees in Barak Valley was at its peak against the Official Language Bill passed in the Assam Legislative Assembly. Besides, the leaders of the Indian National Congress encouraged Muslim infiltrators into Assam for their vote bank, which was clearly manifested in one of the election meetings in which a leading congressman of Assam expressed “so long as Alis and Coolies are with the congress, we have nothing to fear”. Later on, the AGP Government of Assam continued to appease the muslims by making them as their vote bank too. On the other hand, to reduce the Hindu Bengalees into minority in Assam, the government of Assam is still trying to impose upon them the process of assamization. The Bengalees as a race has been subjugated on the language issue in different ways even after independence for which communal riots erupted in different parts of the state at different points of time. However, during the period 1951-1991, the percentage of Hindu population in NER decreased from 65.61 p.c. in 1951 to 60.92 p.c. in 1991 while at the same time the percentage of Muslim population increased from 20.88 p.c. to 21.56 p.c. The percentage of Christian population has also been increased from 6.34 p.c. to 12.25 p.c. (table 14.3).

It is to be observed, in this context, that every successive government in Assam since independence adopted an attitude

that can set one community against another, one race against other etc. i.e. an attitude that can sharpen the divide among people in respect to either religion, race, or language. And by doing so, they might wrest political power but the sharp cleavage, once created, has struck its root deep and even after more than five and half decades of independence the level of backwardness in economy, communication, industrial investment etc. is writ large in the face of the region in general and the state of Assam in particular. Unless homogeneity is achieved in heterogeneity, progress lies distant. The political leaders, cutting across party lines, are, it seems, bent on letting loose and inferno for the people of the state and building a Tajmahal for them out of the public exchequer. Again party in power at the center at present can not be escaped from the accusations as NER is deliberately ignored by the central government so far as the problem of security is concerned though it sanctioned thousand crores of money during the last seven years in connection with insurgency problems in the region. But the problems can not be solved unless the governments try to appropriate the money in a proper way.

Language Issues

Assam is a composite state (truncated four times already) is inhabited by various indigenous ethnic groups and mainly two linguistic groups (Assamese and Bengalees) having Indo-Aryan culture. The number of Bengalee Muslims (neo-Assamese) are far more compared to that of Assamese Muslims. The entire political power was vested since independence into the hands of the Hindu elite of the Brahmaputra Valley who mustered necessary support from Muslims and other ethnic groups not conscious politically during those hey days. This established the Rhodesian regime in Assam. Prior to the partition of the country, the province of Assam was divided mainly into two regions – Surma Valley and Brahmaputra Valley. In Surma Valley, according to 1931 census report, the Bengali speaking people were 28,48,454 and Assamese speaking people were 2,692. In Brahmaputra valley including N.E.F.A. and Hill

Table 13.1: Percentage Distribution of Bangalee and Assamea Population in Assam: Before and After Independence

	Before Independence				After Independence	
	1911	1921	1931	1951	1961	1971
Assamese :	35.31	33.43	32.32	56.29	57.14	60.89
Bengalees :	26.90	27.60	27.56	19.64	17.60	19.71
Assam (popn):	38.49	46.7	55.61	80.29	108.37	146.25 (population in lakhs)

N.B.: No tabulation on language basis due to war economy in the year 1941.

districts, the Assamese speaking people were 19,77,515 the Bengali speaking population were 10,86,258. Thus 73 years ago, Bengali speaking people in Assam numbered 39,60,712 and Assamese speaking people were 19,77,515. This figure in census report was a great headache to the Assamese leaders headed by Mr. Gopinath Bordoloi and others of Indian National Congress. For the domination of Assamese in the politics of Assam they wanted to separate Sylhet from Assam. They persuaded the Central leadership of Indian National congress as a result of which "Sylhet Referendum" took place. Only three and half Police Stations of Karimganj Sub-division remained in India along with the then Cachar district.

The following table shows the percentage of Assamese and Bengalee -speaking population as recorded in different census.

It transpires from above that the number of Assamese -speaking people in the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam has risen twofold in 20 years - from 19,78,823 in 1931 to 59,65,159 in 1951 (total population being 90,43,707) while Bengali speaking people decreased to 8,14,979 in 1951 from 10,86,258 in 1931. This miracle cannot be explained biologically as human being do not multiply at this rate "All this decline" (i.e. sharp fall of percentage of other languages) according o Mr. R.B. Baghiwala, ..., *the superintendent of Census Operation in Assam,*" has gone to swell the percentage of people speaking Assamese in 1951. Thus, there is a striking increase in the percentage of the people who speak Assamese in 1951 (56.7 p.c.) over those of 1931, which was only 31.4 p.c. while during the same period the percentage of Bengalee speaking people decreased from 26.8 p.c. in 1931 to 16.5 p.c. in 1951. With the solitary exception of Assamese every single language or language group in Assam shows a decline in the percentage of people speaking the same. The figures do not fail to reflect the aggressive linguistic nationalism prevails in Assam.

It can be realized the intensity with which this 'aggressive linguistic nationalism' worked when one will compare between the real and the manipulated population figures from 1951

census onwards. In Brahmaputra Valley, the percentage of Assamese-speaking people increased from 42 p.c in 1931 to 73.1 p.c. in 1951 and it is only 73.3 p.c. in 1961 while at the same time in the same valley, the percentage of Bengale-speaking people decreased to 13.0 p.c. in 1951 from 23.0 p.c. in 1931. It is further decreased to 9.8 p.c. in 1961.

Just after independence, disappointment and resentment overtook the Bengali speaking people of Cachar and considering the linguistic, racial and cultural affinities they wanted to integrate Cachar district with Tripura under the New Scheme of "Purbanchal". When the "State Re-organisation Committee" was set up they supplied the facts and figures in support of it. However, the commission rejected the proposal for which the Bengali-speaking people expressed their resentment. Assam is a multilingual state but on 24th October, 1960, the government of Assam declared Assamese as the sole official language of the state. The people of Cachar district launched a movement of non-violent Satyagraha on 19th May, 1961. As a result of brutal police excess, 1 girl and 10 boys were killed. Cachar Zila Sangram Parishad and Bhasa Andolan Samiti launched a non-violent movement demanding Bengali as the second official language of the State. Three language formula called as "Shastri Formula" was evolved by Sri Lal Bahadur Shastri by which "Assam Official Language Act" was amended so far as to make Bengali as the official language in Barak Valley. In 1972, on 12th June, Academic Council of Gauhati University passed a resolution making Assamese as the sole medium of instruction in all the educational institutions of Assam. Tension mounted again in the Barak Valley of Assam. On 18th June, 1972, Cachar Zila Sangram Parishad lodged a protest against the decision of the Gauhati University. On 28th July, 1972, 'Cachar Bandh' was observed and in continuation of the movement, 'Satyagraha Movement' took place in Nov. 1972 and continued till January, 1973, in phased manner, organized jointly by 'Chatra Yuva Sangram Parishad' and 'Cachar Sangram Parishad' with great dissatisfaction of the leaders of Barak Valley due to step motherly attitude of Assam

Government towards the Bengalees of Barak Valley. The "Union Territory Demand Committee" (UTDC) was formed under the leadership of Paritosh Paul Choudhury. The UTDC organized different types of movements to get Barak Valley enrolled as one of the members of North Eastern Council (NEC) for preserving the language and other interests of the people of the valley. Barak Upatyaka Banga Sahitya O Sanskriti Sammelon (BUBSOSS) started different types of movements after its formation through its first conference held at Silchar in January, 1977 and protested against the strategy followed by the State Government towards Barak Valley. In the year 1980, another student organization named "All Cachar Students' Association" (ACSA) was formed and started movement demanding one central University in Barak Valley. Afterwards its name was changed first as "All Cachar and Karimganj Students' Association" (ACKSA) and then "All Cachar Karimganj and Hailakandi Students' Association" (ACKHSA). In the year 1985, a movement again started under the banner of "Cachar Siksha Sangrakshan Samiti" formed in 1973, to protest against the Article- 6 of historic Assam Accord and for the demand of Central University in the Valley. Fresh tension mounted in the valley when the SEBA circular (No.SEBA/AB/Syllabus/1/85-86-1 dated 28.02.1986) imposed Assamese language in the valley. On 21st July, 1986 there was a police firing on students at Karimganj, as a result of which 2 students were killed³. On 4th April, 2001, a memorandum submitted to the Deputy Commissioners of three districts of Barak Valley by the BUBSOSS demanding total implementation of Official Language Act for using Bengali in all official works, in the valley. The very attitude of State government towards the Valley in different forms has not stopped till date. Though the demand for Union Territory is suppressed, it may crop up again and may take violent turn if the harmonious relationship between the people of the valley and their counterparts in the government of Assam will not properly be maintained.

In 1979-80, the anti outsider movement was started by the "All Assam Students Union" (AASU), the largest student

organization in the state after the revocation of national emergency in 1977, demanding for deportation of foreigners from the State. In its Sibsagar session of 1979, AASU decided to start peaceful democratic and non-violent Gandhian Movement for fulfillment of their demand, which converted into anti foreign national movement. The targets were both Hindu and Muslim Bengalees and they demanded to abandon 1981 census of the State. This students' movement in the state also involved the non students and general people of the state under the banner of "All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP) which was created by AASU in its Dibrugarh meeting on August 27/28 of 1979. The different phases of movement led by AASU and AAGSP later on supported by all section of people living in Assam except the targets. They decided to boycott the parliamentary election of 1980 as the name of the foreign nationals still in the Voter's List. However, election was conducted at the point of bayonet, which led serious communal holocaust and massacre. In the election to the State Legislative Assembly of 1983, the congress party came back to power in an abnormal situation boycotted by the AASU. The AASU did not recognize the legitimacy of the election and the resultant government. As a result the movement continued and on 14th August, 1985, the 'Assam Accord' was signed and fresh election was declared. The Assam Gana Parishad (AGP) came to the power in the state in the election of 1985. All the front-ranking leaders of AASU became the leaders of AGP but the vital ethnic issue is still in a hanging position. The percentage of Bengali speaking people in Assam was 14.77 p.c. according to 1971 census while the percentage increased to 14.89 p.c. in the year 1991 in the whole of North eastern region. (table 13.2).

Before dwelling on the validity of charge(s) leveled against the 'foreigners' viz. the Bengalee Hindus in particular that they do not learn Assamese nor do they mingle with the so called mainstream of Assamese culture, it will be relevant to reproduce the extract from a letter appeared in 'AMRITA', a prestigious news magazine of the 'Amrit Bazar Group' of Calcutta, which devoted its August, 24, 1979 number completely to publish a

Table 13.2: Linguistic Composition of the Population in North East Region (in p.c.)

Language	1971	1991
Assamese	45.63	41.08
Bengali	14.77	14.89
Bodo/Boro	2.73	3.75
Manipuri	0.45	3.52
Khasi		2.79
Tripuri		2.05
Garo		1.76
Lushai / Mizo		1.64
Others		28.52

Source : Census of India, Statement No. 3, Paper 1 of 1997 Language,

Note : 1971 Census Data are for Assam alone which included Mizo hills also

bunch of Assamese stories. "This issue presenting Assamese stories is a milestone in the literary spectacle. He expects more Assamese drama, poems and essays and other important writings. The poems may be in original Your bold attempt will definitely strengthen ties between the linguistic groups and remove regionalism. There are only 10 millions of Assamese speaking people as against 100 millions of Bengalees in both Bengals. It is our responsibility also to bring their language and culture to the fore" (**B. Das, Cal-31, Amrita, dated September 14, 1979 translated**). There were many more letters, voicing the same demand and each congratulating the editor on his bold attempt. He was also requested to publish more on Assamese literature and culture.

But, the AGP government of Assam toed the line of the earlier government and continued to appease the muslims by making them as their vote bank too. On the other hand, to reduce the Hindu Bangalees into minority in Assam, the government of Assam is still trying to impose upon them the process of Assamization. The Bengalees as a race has been subjugated on the language issue in different ways even after independence for which communal riots erupted in different

parts of the state at different points of time.

Recently, again communal disturbance started in the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam against Hindi speaking persons, in general and Bihari Population in particular. Recently, for the protection of Hindi speaking people in Assam, the organization named as Non-Tribal Youth Union (NTYU) requested one of the MPs of Bihar to place 11-point Charter of demands before the house of the Parliament.

Another language movement in Barak Valley attracted the attention of the politicians, administrators and others in the state is the conflict between Metei and Bishnupuri groups. In 1962, the "Nikhil Bishnupriya Manipuri Bhasha Parishad" (NBMBP) was formed and placed its demands for the recognition of 'Bishnupriya' as 'Manipuri'. Then the movement was spearheaded by the "Bishnupriya Manipuri Andolan Parishad" through peaceful and democratic means. In 1975, the Information and Broadcasting Ministry declared that broadcasting facilities through All India Radio would be extended to Manipuri Language – both Metei and Bishnupriya. In this respect memorandum submitted on 5th August, 1983 to the then Chief Minister of Assam. On 2nd January, 1990, a memorandum submitted to the then Prime Minister of India jointly by 'Nikhil Bishnupriya Manipuri Mahasabha', 'Nikhil Bishnupriya Manipuri Sahitya Parishad' and 'Bishnupriya Manipuri Samaj Sanstha' headed by Monoranjan Sinha. However, the said language has been implemented as a medium of instruction at the primary stage of education in the Barak Valley vide Govt's notification No. EMI.169/74/pt-III/310 dated Dispur, the 14th November, 1983 and No. EDG.459/86/217 dated Dispur, the 21st July, 1989. One of the main demands is the correction of 1961, 1971 and 1981 figures of this linguistic minority and to record correctly this linguistic minority as Bishnupriya Manipuri. A memorandum submitted by NBMSA to the then President of India in this regard. Tension mounted in Barak Valley when the government of India gave the recognition to the language of Metei group as one of the languages in the 8th schedule of the constitution of

India. Since then and till now the Bishnupriya group have lost their faith on the governments – both central and state and their agitational programmes are going on.

Tribal Issues

In the post independence era, some remarkable ethnic conflicts took place which changed the current of Assam's political history. To safeguard the language, culture, customs etc., the different hill tribes through their organizations and leaders have separate themselves from the mainstream of Assam and got the status of statehood. At present, separate states like Nagaland, Mizoram, Meghalaya, and Arunachal Pradesh have been emerged as separate political entity in this region but the problem of ethnicity is yet to be sorted out.

The demand for a separate state of 'kamata' or 'Koch land' in North Bengal as well as some parts of Assam has taken a violent turn during the last few years, organized by 'Kamatapur Liberation Organization' (KLO), 'Koch Rajbanshi Liberation Organization' (KRLO), 'Koch Rajbanshi Liberation Tiger Force' (KRLTF) and 'Koch Rajbanshi Security Force' (KRSF). This movement has received help and assistance from extremist groups of Assam like the outlawed 'United Liberation Front of Assam' (ULFA), 'Bodo Ultra Groups' etc. the movement originated with a view to protecting their rights and interest in Social, Political, Cultural and Economic spheres. The chief aim of these organizations is to win the right of self – determination of Koch Rajbanshi people in North Bengal as well as the western parts of Assam. As a result of their movement, the areas of Assam worsely affected are Dhubri, Bongaigaon, Goalpara, Kokrajhar and its adjoining areas. According to security sources, the KLO, the KRLO, the KRITF, the KRSF have been receiving training with militant groups of Assam in the dense forests and hilly areas of Assam, Bhutan and Bengal tri-junction. The Koch Rajbanshi's fear is that they would loose their ethnic identity because of the steady influx of illegal Bangladesh nationals through the pores of indo-Bangladesh

International Border of Lower Assam and North Bengal. They swear to restore and regain their lost identity which were established in the 15th century Assam by carving out separate state. They also demanded their Kamatapuri language to be included in the 8th schedule of Indian Constitution and separate T.V. center for them. In this respect they have sent eleven point charter of demands to the Govt. of India and their movements are going on⁴.

The plain tribals of Assam can broadly be divided into two groups like –(i) the Bodo group and (ii) the Miri and the Michings. The Bodo and the Miri group belong to Mongolian origin and they are ethnologically different from the rest of the Assamese people. They are the earliest known inhabitants of Assam. From time immemorial they had been maintaining their sovereignty till their last king Tula Ram Senapati died in 1854 A.D. The language spoken by the Bodo group of the plain tribals belong to the Tibeto-Burman group and widely differs from the Assamese language. The Bodo groups of the plain tribals of Assam belong to different religious, some of them Hindus, some Christians and some profess tribal religion. Among the hill tribes of Assam the Dimasa and Garos belong to this Bodo stock. The All Bodo Students' Union (ABSU), A student organization of Bodos has been demanding that Assam must be divided fifty-fifty between the tribals and the non-tribals. The present area of Assam is 78,523 sq. km. and half of it becomes 39,261.5 sq. km. Tribals are getting 25,478.1 sq. km. as Union Territory along with 15,222 sq. km. for Karbi Anglong and N.C. Hills Autonomous State totaling 40,700.1 sq. km. together which is slightly more than 50 per cent and non-tribals will get 37,822.9 sq. km. in the rest of Assam. The areas of Union Territory include the whole of Kokrajhar and Lakhimpur districts on Majuli and Sadia Sub-division, northern parts of Dhubri, Goalpara, Barpeta, Nalbari, Kamrup, Darrang and Sonitpur districts. They claimed that they had been the master and ruler of Assam at one time and the present Assamese society is formed by the influx from Kanauj, Mithila, Magadha etc. of the central India in the 13th and 14th century

only whereas the Bodos and other tribals are the aboriginal people of Assam. They alleged that the Assam government whether the past or present ones are not the government of the people of Assam but it is merely the government of Assamese people. The government of Assam and the administrators are deadly anti-tribal. No progress tribal people can be achieved under this type of government. As such no expected progress of tribals in the dimension of education, economy, language, culture could be achieved even after more than five and half decades of independence of India. The Assamese people and government are having a deep conspiracy to swallow and to assimilate the people of Assam had their distinct linguistic and cultural heritage and hence Assam should be separated on the basis of language and culture. The tribal people want to enjoy the right to political self-determination and separate State would fulfill their desire⁵.

Large scale violence in the districts of Kokrajhar, Bongaigaon and Dhubri of Assam in the month of May, 1996 against Adivasis, mainly Santals, rendered more than 1,50,000 people homeless. Riots accompanied by plunder, arson and massacre which occurred then were the 3rd major set of riots against the non-bodo communities in the Bodo Autonomous Council Area of western Assam, which was set up as part of an agreement in 1993. As Bodo Liberation Front (BLF) and All Bodo Students' Union (ABSU) who are spearheading a movement for a separate Bodo-Land, targeted non-Bodo communities to spark violence. The Justice Safique Haque Commission was set up to probe the circumstances leading to the 1996 riots. But the commission's investigations have made little progress. Fresh riots in April, 1998 once again disturbed the fragile peace in Kokrajhar. Both Santals and Bodos have been affected in the current tension.

The year 1993 was a turning point in the political history of Assam when BTC was granted after signing the Accord. The doubts had been expressed that the geography of Assam is going to be further reduced and the fact was established when the Bodo insurgent group, BLT, Central Government and the State Government decided to implement the Accord on the

10th February, 2003. Though the state government was not willing to grant BTC to the Bodos but by the said Accord, the same will be realized as it was happened in case of Meghalaya. At that time no one can resist the Bodos from their demand of separate statehood and this very demand is due to the repressive attitude of the Assamese people towards the other ethnic groups. BLT, which formed in the year 1996, demanded separate statehood for the people living on the northern side of the river Brahmaputra and also to include the Bodos in the 6th schedule of the Indian Constitution for the Bodo people living in the Karbi-Anglong district of Assam. The step motherly attitude towards the non-Assamese people in case of employment policy and in developmental work and also aggressive policy of Assamisation by the State government of Assam gave birth of dissatisfaction to the Bodo people (**Samayik Prasanga, 10th February, 2003**).

To restore peace and normalcy, the central government invited BLT to the discussion table as a result of which BTC came into being. 12 members under the leadership of Hagrama Basumatari took oath in the presence of the Deputy Prime Minister and the Chief Minister of Assam. Another insurgency group under the banner of NDFB raised its ugly head as they are deprived of power in the newly created BTC.

The Hmars are the inhabitants of Mizoram and a part of Assam in the Barak Valley and North Cachar Hills. The Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes Order (amended) Act of 1976 includes not only the Lusais and other 37 tribes or sub tribes but also Lakher, Pawi and Hmar apart from the Chakma settlers from Tripura. The Mizos or Lusais in general opposed this classification as well as granting of autonomous status to the Lakhers, Pawi and Chakmas. To their great dissatisfaction and under the banner of Hmar Peoples Convention (HPC). Hmars have been carrying on agitations since 1954 for autonomy within or separately to safeguard their interests in Hmar dominated areas. In a memorandum to the Prime Minister of India on 21st January, 1987, HPC raised the demand for a separate Homeland or State called Hmar Ram.

They wanted the recognition of North Eastern States to satisfy their political aspirations. The demand made by the Hmar was unacceptable to the Mizos. They staged agitational programmes and were capable of cutting off the lines of communication to the people of Mizoram as they had their control over a part of the Silchar- Aiwjal Road. In 1989, the State Government of Mizoram decided for granting autonomy to the Singlung Hill Development Council (SHDC) for social, economic and cultural development of the people under its jurisdiction.

One accord was duly signed on 27th July, 1994 and this was followed by an agreement on 8th August, concerning the settlement of SHDC's jurisdiction. A three member Commission verified the SHDC area but the State Government delayed its implementation. The president of HPC, Mr. Hmingchunghenung, complained that a year had passed since the boundary was demarcated but the government of Mizoram had shown total disregard to the findings of the commission, set up to ascertain whether the Hmars are in a majority in the HPC demand area or not. As a result the president of HPC warned that it will take extreme step in this regard. Despite surrender of a number of cadres of the HPC to the government of Mizoram in 1994, some of the dissidents who remained underground had been able to reactive the organization and a nexus between NSCN and HPC has been established. The militants had enabled the Hmars to set up camps in dense forests along Assam- Mizoram border and with their active support extended operations to the Barak Valley and North Cachar Hill region of Assam.

The Mikir Hills and the North Cachar Hills are the only two autonomous Hill Districts remaining in Assam after independence as the Naga Hill District got a full fledged Statehood Status in 1962 and Khasi and Jaintia Hill and Garo hill districts formed the state of Meghalaya. Later on, the Mizoram district got the status of Union Territory and finally become a state under Indian Union. The Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hill of Assam bounded by the plain district of Nowgong and Sibsagar on the North, Meghalaya on the West,

Nagaland and Manipur on the East and the³ district of Cachar on the South. During the days of British Rule, North Cachar Hill was a Sub-division under the plain district of Cachar and the Mikir Hill was a part of Nowgong, Jowai and Sibsagar district. These two districts were administered as "Excluded and Partially Excluded Area". On the eve of independence the constituent assembly of India appointed a sub committee of these areas known as Bordoloi Sub-Committee to enquire into the will and aspiration of the tribal people of this area under the new government. The tribal people of this area represented for separate autonomy to safeguard their language, culture, customs and ways of life. Bordoloi sub-committee report was that Autonomous District Council for all the hill districts of Assam will be created under the provision of 6th schedule of the constitution. In 1975, the Mikir Hill, came into being out of the portions of Sibsagar and Nowgong districts of Assam and a new civil district with North Cachar Hill sub-division was formed in 1970, the North Cachar Hill sub-division was raised into the status of a district. The Mikir and Dimassa Kachari are the main tribes living in the Mikir Hills District. While North Cachar Hill District is inhabitant of Dimassa Kachari, Hmar, Kuki, Mikir and other tribes. They have their own languages, cultures and traditions but one thing they have in common is their backwardness, educationally, economically and politically. At the time of State Re-organisation of 1969, the Mikir Hills and the North Cachar Hill District Councils were given option to join the proposed Meghalaya Sub-State but the people of those hills did not see the solution of their problems in joining Meghalaya. On the other hand, they received certain significant assurances from the highest authority of the government of Assam and the APCC (Assam Pradesh Congress Committee). They wanted to develop in all spheres by preserving their own separate entities as tribes.

The main discontent was mounted in this hill district when Assamese was imposed as medium in the University and Secondary level of education. They desire to have their own state enhanced when the erstwhile sister districts enjoyed much

larger shares of natural resources and these two districts are lagging behind. The customs, traditions and manners of these two districts differ greatly from the contiguous tribal areas. Considering all these the Mikir hill and the North Cachar Hills Leaders' conference submitted a memorandum for a separate State to the Prime Minister of India in June, 1973. The Central Committee of Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hill State Demand Committee again submitted memorandum to the Prime Minister of India on 18th January, 1982 for creation of a separate full fledged State. They expressed their desire due to the economic, political and cultural backwardness of their people along with the issue of medium of instruction. Their agitation took violent turn when the Autonomous State Demand Committee (ASDC) and the Karbi Students' Association (KSA) jointly submitted a memorandum to the Prime Minister of India on 18th May, 1987. They proposed English as the official language of the proposed Autonomous State and a separate legislature to be located in Diphu, besides other proposals. Till now, the issue is pending before the Central and State governments. Due to their strikes, demonstrations and Road Blocked, normal life has been paralysed and delay in governments decision into the matter is taking the dangerous turn in these areas.

The most important burning issue of the present day Assam is the extension of Naga Ceasefire to other states of North Eastern Region. The Central government's representative and negotiator, Mr. Padmanabhaiah, has opened a new Pandora box of problems in a highly region, known for insurgency, agitation and bloodletting. On 14th June, 2001, one agreement was signed between Mr. Padmanabhaiah and the general secretary of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN), Mr. Muivah at Bangkok while the earlier Accords were operating within the Nagaland territory, the fresh ceasefire has been extended to the geographical territories of Assam, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh where there are Naga inhabitants. It not only affects 9 districts of Manipur for which recently Manipur is burning with fire but also applied

to Tirap and Changlang districts of Arunachal Pradesh and Sibsagar, Jorhat, Golaghat, Karbi Anglong, North Cachar districts and some portion of Barak Valley districts of Assam which contain a sizable Naga population. In these areas that is so called greater Nagaland, the NSCN is recruiting fresh cadres establishing larger militant networks and Camps and collecting taxes when the ceasefire is in operation since August, 1997. As a reaction to it various political parties and leaders of Assam and Manipur lodged protest against the centre's decision. The Chief Minister of Assam was not consulted by the central government but only informed about the decision of the ceasefire. The Assam government is not in a mood to give an inch of Assam's land to NSCN leaders for their aspiration of greater Nagaland. Whether the Naga ceasefire will bring peace in the region or not but one thing is certain that the region will face some consequences as happened during the days of partition on the eve of independence. It will change not only the geography of North Eastern Region of India but also the history of the region. On its wake it may bring bloodshed and several new terrorist organizations as it is a great lesson to all other militant groups of the region that the violent activities is the only means to achieve the political aspirations. It would like an epidemic or cancer for the entire North Eastern Region for which heavy price may be paid.

In NER the expenditure to control insurgency has been increasing day by day. But ironically along with the expenditure to control insurgency, insurgency has been increasing by leaps and bounds. Recently, in an NEC published paper a detailed account of expenditure is presented. This paper of expenditure is outside the budget of Defence Ministry and seven State Governments. After so much expenditure, bomb in Chief Minister's Convoy, Kidnapping of Bureaucrats, bombs in buses are regular features.

If anything serious happens, the Chief Ministers of this region make the lame excuse that there are no sufficient Central forces in the region. But, in the last six years, in NER, the central government spent an additional amount of 1,000

crore for deployment of police forces. After spending such huge amount of money, the condition of the region is no better.

In the last seven years, the states of NER have sanctioned crores of rupees in their budget. Side by side an amount of 767 crores of rupees they have spent for police security out of the enhanced amount of Rs. 1,000 crores sanctioned by the Central government. Among these seven states, Assam having an expenditure amounting Rs. 487.8 crore, Tripura having 118 crore and Nagaland having 96 crores are at the top of the list (**table 13.3**). For the modernization of police force another 278 crores of rupees has been spend. In this sphere also these three states top the list. The amounts spent are 103 crore, 46 crores and 39 crores respectively (**table 15.3**).

According to an official communiqué of the Home Ministry in the last 12 years only in the state of Assam, 1378 have been killed and 178 security personnel too have been murdered. In this 12 years the Security Personnel could kill 552 Bodo (NDFB) insurgents. In the last six years the total numbers may be arranged in the following way. 763, 73 and 486. From the year 2001, in Assam, Army men killed. 841 insurgents. In the last year, 159 ULFA activists, 125 NDFB activists too were killed. In the last 33 months of the two outfits 1,596 and 606 insurgents of these groups have been murdered by the Army men.

This governmental information made it clear that despite of huge expenditure normalcy cannot be brought in the region. Here both the central State governments are a great failure. According to the Deputy General of Assam Rifles, Lt. Gen. H.S. Konwar, I.S.I is solely responsible for the whole situation.

Conclusion and Suggestion

A review of the above ethnic issues in NER proved that the ethnic conflicts in the region, in general, and in Assam in particular, were due to the religious, linguistic, crisis of ethnic identity of different groups of people living in the region and the repressive attitude of the people in the mainstream of the

Table 13.3: Expenditure in Modernisation of Police Force in North East Region (Rs. in Lakh)

Year	1997-98	1998-99	1999-00	2000-01	2001-02	2002-03	Total
Arunachal Pradesh	--	56	386	538	76	541	1597
Assam	1710	664	2272	2245	1821	1561	10,273
Manipur	626	98	554	651	362	1149	3440
Meghalaya	--	122	474	635	325	488	2044
Mizoram	--	67	346	436	365	814	2028
Nagaland	616	108	452	651	593	1588	3908
Tripura	611	133	606	1381	832	1036	4599

region. Through different ethnic movements, the state of Assam is bifurcated into different states and the process of separation is still going on jeopardizing the unity and integrity of the region and threatening the security of the country. Hence, the solution to the problem lies in the realm of a humane approach. An effort should be made to win hearts of the people of different ethnic groups of the region so that they can understand the destructive nature of the foreign hands by which they will not be benefited at all. The tribal and non-tribal gap should be closed in the region at any cost through different governmental programmes by which they should not be segregated from the Indian Society. The society of the region cannot be tension free by granting mere autonomy and self government to the ethnic minorities and hence, the centralized political administrative structure should be removed in order to minimize the external influences to the ethnic conflicts of the region. It is high time to negotiate with the neighbouring foreign countries to ensure that state boundaries do not stand in the way of social, economic and cultural interactions among different ethnic groups of people. As the twin objective of ethnic issues are for autonomy within India and independence from India, the above suggestions can serve the very purpose of reducing social tension in the region.

The ethnic movements in the region initially reflect the ethno-cultural aspirations of the people and finally deviate from the real path by turning the movements into violence of the insurgence for material gains and to search the quick money through smuggling, drug trading etc. Hence, the government should suppress these organizations with heavy hands by saving the entire society of the region from further decadence. A review of the sub-nationalist movements in Assam have resulted in the formation of different states and ongoing movements of the Bodos, Bangalees, tribes of North Cachar Hills and Karbi-Anglong, Koach Rajbanshis etc are very much in the air and day will come when they will secede away from the Assamese mainstream. It is noteworthy to mention that the recently held ceasefire agreement with the NSCN Chief

by the representative of the Central Government will pose a serious threat to the Government of Assam. Hence, it may be revealed that due to the lack of foresightedness of both the central and the state governments, the unity and integrity of the state may be jeopardized. In the pre-independence era, the tribals demanded for simply autonomy but the leaders of Assam were adamant in their attitude as a result of which they get themselves separated from the mainstream.

In the conclusion, it may be said that the ethnic conflicts in Assam are due to excess repressive attitude of the government of Assam from time to time. Had the leaders of Assam been liberal to all the ethnic groups and sympathetic to safeguard their languages, customs and cultures, ethnic movements in different parts of Assam would not have taken place.

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