

elle-même devenue garante de bonne moralité. Et nul aujourd'hui, parmi les traditionalistes les plus opposés à l'occidentalisation ou les hindous les plus extrémistes, n'aurait l'idée de condamner cette boisson venue d'ailleurs, ou de prôner la consommation des alcools locaux contre celle du thé.

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Identity Politics and Social Exclusion in India's Northeast

A Critique of Nation-Building and Redistributive Justice

Nava Kishor Das

This article examines how various brands of identity politics since the colonial days have served to create the basis of exclusion of groups, resulting in various forms of rifts, often envisaged in binary terms: majority–minority; “sons of the soil” – immigrants; local–outsiders; tribal–non-tribal; hills–plains; intertribal–intra-tribal. Given the strategic and sensitive border areas, low level of development, immense cultural diversity, and participatory democratic processes, social exclusion has resulted in perceptions of marginalisation, deprivation, and identity losses, all adding to the strong basis of brands of separatist movements in the garb of regionalism, sub-nationalism, and ethnic politics, most often verging on extremism and secession. It is argued that local people's anxiety for preservation of culture and language, often appearing as “narcissist self-awareness,” and their demand of autonomy, cannot be seen unilaterally as dysfunctional for a healthy civil society. Their aspirations should be seen rather as prerequisites for distributive justice, to which no nation state can neglect.

Colonial Impact and Genesis of Early Ethnic Consciousness

Northeast India is a politically vital and strategically vulnerable region of India. Surrounded by

five countries, it is connected with the rest of India through a narrow, thirty-kilometer corridor. North-east India, then called Assam, is divided into Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, and Tripura. Diversities in terms of Mongoloid ethnic origins, linguistic variation, and religious pluralism characterise the region. This ethnic-linguistic-ecological historical heritage characterizes the pervasiveness of the ethnic populations and Tibeto-Burman languages in Northeast. Northeast mountain ranges and river valleys indeed divide up Southeast Asia from South Asia. This predominant tribal region, replete with protracted records of isolation, difficult terrain, and lack of intense interethnic contacts, had witnessed the formation of three types of society and polity such as “tribe,” “chiefdom,” and “state” (Das 1989). The clans and age-set systems within them had often functioned hierarchically – involving unequal statuses (Das 1993). Full-fledged state-formation took place in the 4th century A.D. Hinduism remained confined to some pockets, including the royal families, among the Kachari, Ahom, Jaintia, Koch, Tripuri, and Meitei. Penetration of Sarania Dharma of Shankar Dev was felt in some plains tribal societies, who became followers of Sarania even while simultaneously pursuing tribal religions often replete with “animal sacrifices” (Das 2003).

The British colonisation process of Assam started in 1826 and ended in 1898. The colonial regime, at the beginning, resorted to the policy of nonintervention in most of then larger Assam. Two administrators, J. H. Hutton and N. E. Parry, advocated for separation of hill areas from general administrative scheme. In 1873 “The Inner Line” was introduced in hill areas, beyond which no person could pass without a license. Local tribespeople resisted colonial interference in their midst, and thus they often attacked the British. Their resistances were depicted as “raids” and “uprisings” (Das 1989; 1993: 28). There is a long chronology of such resistance. In 1860 and 1862, the entire Jaintia tribe and the Garo (1852–57, 1872) rose against the imposition of taxes. The Lushai-Kuki, Manipuri, and many plains-Assam tribes raided British posts in 1860–90, 1891, and 1892–94 respectively. There are records of Aka/Khamti resistances (1835–1839), Naga resistances (1835–1852), and even an agrarian movement in 1893–94. The Sonaram (1902), Kuki (1917), and Jadonang-Gaidinliu movements (Singh 1982; Das 1989) symbolised early ethnic struggles. Consequently, upon the visit of the Statutory Commission in the 1920s, further apprehension of marginalisation had grown among the tribespeople and minority communi-

ties. The colonial rulers allowed missionary activities. The association with the Christian missionaries and the gradual spread of education amongst the tribes and other communities infused a sense of self-esteem. This factor is crucial for understanding the birth of ethnonationalism eventually among the Naga, Mizo, and the Manipuri. In some hills and the Brahmaputra valley, there was a simultaneous revulsion for Assamese linguistic-cultural domination. This perception alienated a few tribes and thus grew discontentment among the Bodo, the Karbi, the Ahom, and many others. Under the relatively peaceful period of the 1930s, which may be called “the silent phase of identity consciousness,” the tribespeople had demanded a “participative representation” in the principal Legislative Assembly. The Khasi, Ahom, Naga, Mizo, Bodo-Kachari, Miri, and Deuri were the first to demand an “ethnic representation.” The Lalung established a durbar in 1967, and the Koch people had similarly been conscious about their minority status. In a memorandum submitted to the Assam Government the Assam-Koch-Rajbanshi-Khatriya Sammilani demanded proper representation in all bodies, quota in employment, scholarships to students, and the publication of their history and culture. The All Assam Garo Union was established in 1983. The Hajong in Assam urged the government to recognise them as a scheduled tribe.

In the long history of this region the feelings of in-group-out-group, perceived marginalisation, and “minority-consciousness” have variously surfaced as key factors causing ethnic unrest. Depending on varied influences of marginality and ethnicity, some movements remained more explicit and specific than others in articulating and defining their objectives. Strategies of operation correspondingly varied. Ethnic conflicts in the Northeast originally grew essentially through primordial affiliations. The distinctive ethnicity factor amongst communities led to steady expansion of aggressive binary categories of in-group and out-group (Das 1989, 1994, 2004, 2007).

Linguistic and Religious Revivalist Movements

Language has always been in the center stage of ethnic turmoil in the Northeast. Making Assamese as the compulsory language from class VIII onwards led to massive agitation in the Barak valley, reminiscent of the agitation launched earlier over the issue of the medium of instruction. In 1972, the Bodo-led Plains Tribes Council of Assam (PTCA) complained that the plains tribes have been “up-

rooted in a systematic and planned way from their own soil,” and that the “step motherly” treatment of the administration, dominated by the Assamese-speaking people, has reduced them as “second class citizens” of the state. The Bodo Sahitya Sabha (BSS), established in 1952, and PTCA, however, ultimately succeeded in making the Bodo language the medium of instruction (up to the secondary level). In doing so the Bodo leaders opted for the Roman alphabet – though they were ultimately convinced to accept the Devanagari script. The Mishing Agom Kebang (Mishing Sahitya Sabha) formed in 1972 and several other Mishing organisations had also worked consistently and succeeded, in 1987, to introduce the Mishing language as a subject of study in primary schools. The rejection of the Assamese script by the Miri, the Bodo, and others dismayed the Assamese, who thought that without their tribal counterparts they may become a minority, overwhelmed by the Bengali-speaking population (Miri 1993: 71). Following the recognition of native languages at primary level in Bodo-Kachari and the Karbi areas, the Mishing perception marginalisation sharpened. This led to the formation of the Mishing Literary Association in 1972. In order to maintain a distinct minority linguistic identity vis-à-vis the Assamese majority, the Mishing were in favour of the Roman script. The Assam Sahitya Sabha insisted that the Assamese script should be retained for “Mishing language.” The Mishing were ultimately convinced to use the Roman script, and their textbooks as well as some newspapers and journals came to be printed in that alphabet. The Bishnupriya Manipuri language issue, particularly in Assam, has also acquired the shape of an ethnic movement.

The Ahom, Meitei, Zeliangrong, Seng Khasi, and Zomi communities had all felt threatened by the near extinction of their original language and religion (Das and Gupta 1982; Das 1989). In the Manipur Valley, the Meitei revivalist leaders (before the formal inclusion of Manipur-Meitei in the Eighth Schedule to the Constitution) had demanded that the Manipuri language should be named “Meeteilon.” The Zeliangrong movement grew as a religious-cultural movement, originally against the spread of Christianity, but it assumed an anti-colonial political overtone. It actually came out to be the only tribal movement of the North-east which maintained links with the national freedom struggle (Das 1989). The Zeliangrong People’s Conference (ZPC) demanded the recognition of the ethnic nomenclature “Zeliangrong,” an acronym (Ze-Liang-Rong), which is spread in contiguous areas of Manipur, Nagaland, and Assam.

In our report, submitted to the government through the director-general of the Anthropological Survey of India, we had suggested recognition of common nomenclature as ethnographic facts supported the claims. It was recommended that an inter-state autonomous regional council for the Zeliangrong areas would be best suited to protect the cultural and economic interests of these tribes. In 1905, when the spread of Christianity was widely felt in Meghalaya, the Seng Khasi organisation took upon itself the responsibility of defending the Khasi religion. The members of the association called themselves the “Khasi-Khasi” so as to distinguish themselves from those “Khasi” who had adopted the Christianity. Having initiated the process of revivalism and reformation of the Khasi religion, the Seng Khasi encouraged the people to abide by the matrilineal system of descent, to respect the kith and kin on the maternal and paternal side, to believe in God, and to serve God through service to humankind. The Seng Khasi flag came to depict a crowing cock in white and red setting. The red signifies courage and white represents the world. The Seng Khasi started organising archery compositions and traditional dance performances such as “Ka Shad Suk Mynsiem” and “the Nongkrem Dance.”

Ethnic Conflict and Militancy

On the eve of independence of India, several ethnic groups had variously made effective use of the factors of ethnicity and regionalism as basis of ethnic rage, and democratic struggle for self-rule, greater autonomy, and militant actions. Other factors such as frontier location, development process, rise of Christianity and democratic process, partition of country, influx of “infiltrators,” and minority syndrome variously led to claims of separatism among the communities. The more assertive tribes who consistently rebelled against their incorporation within the new Indian nation-state, such as the Naga and Mizo, ultimately succeeded in attaining status of “statehood” and greater autonomy. Thereby they also succeeded in changing their minority status to that of a majority status in respective hilly states. Even after the formation of Nagaland, however, the Naga movement had not died, as A. Z. Phizo, who had originally given the call for a “long Naga struggle” in 1953, continued to occupy a center stage later also (Das 1982, 1994, 2004, 2007). The Naga movement, in which both “ethnicity” and “extreme nationalism” were used as operational strategies, is regarded as the mother of all movements in northeast India. The origin of

ethnicity among the Naga may be traced first in the formation of a Naga Club in 1918, which consisted of the Naga headmen and members of English-educated Naga middle class (Das 1982). The Naga formed the Naga Hills District Tribal Council in 1945, which was renamed as Naga National Council (NNC) in 1946 (Das 1993: 33). NNC had gradually articulated the sense of “Naga nationalism” (Das 1982, 2001). It also emphasised the theme of Naga oneness as “a moral category” (Imechen 1993), NSCN (IM) led the Naga movement in its modern phase. In order to globalize the Naga cause, NSCN (IM) took a delegation to the UN Conference of “Indigenous Peoples,” held in July 1994. Muivah established links with the Asia Indigenous People’s Pact and the Belgium-based Flemish Support for Indigenous People. The Nagaland Assembly also passed a resolution in 1994, extending support to the demand of the greater Nagaland – Nagalim. Outside the hills, the Ahom (who formed the Ahom League, in the wake of the 1935 Act) and the Bodo (by forming PTCA) had consistently raised the questions of “tribal self-rule” right since the colonial era. The All Assam Ahom Association (formed originally in 1893) was perhaps the earliest ethnic association of its kind (Das 2001). From the 1980s onwards, virtually the entire Northeast was plagued by various ethnic movements. Most of the movements were nonviolent in earlier stages, but gradually assumed a severe militant nature. In the seven states of Northeast India reportedly more than 30 “insurgent” groups operated, carrying on protracted armed struggle. Among them the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN [IM], NSCN [K]) and the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) remained prominent ones. Even though some scholars have tried to apply typology of class formation to describe the ethnic conflict in the region, it may be argued that there are innumerable ethnic-regional factors buttressed by typical tribal features, which seem to influence the escalation of unrest.

The long list of political organizations provided in the appendix points to the severity of the ethnic dissent prevalent in the region. Amongst the outfits mentioned in the appendix, some are non-operational, some are actually active, and some are no more active, as they used to be. It is amazing to note that at one point, more than 120 militant groups operated in India’s Northeast. Their demands ranged from autonomy to outright secession. In recent years, the Indian state has had considerable success in achieving stability in the region, using tactics from negotiations to military operations in order to root out militants. Militant

outfits also used various tactics. They even joined hands as early as 1989 forming the Indo-Burmese Revolutionary Front (IBRF), which consisted of NSCN, ULFA, KNF (from India), and Chin National Front (Myanmar). The influence of IBRF diminished gradually. Until recently, the NSCN (IM), NSCN (K), Bodo Security Force (BSF), National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB), United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), and Kamtapur Liberation Organisation (KLO) remained the most forceful and assertive groups. In the meantime quite a few Muslim extremist outfits, too, became active in the region (Das 1994). In the Manipur Hills, the most powerful defiant groups, besides the NSCN, are UNLF (Meghen), PLA, KNO, KNF, KNA, KDF, and KFC. The Kuki-Naga conflict rocked the state of Manipur in the mid-nineties. When the Naga claim of “proprietaryship” over the vast hilly region of Manipur was endangered by demands for a “Kuki Homeland,” the NSCN quickly asserted its dominion. The Kuki Impi and the Zomi Council had worked tirelessly to bring about a permanent settlement. In Mizoram areas, the Reang came to form Bru National Liberation Front whose leaders held talks with the Mizo chief minister. The population of displaced Reang rose to 40,000 in camps in Tripura. The Mizo were specially perturbed when the Bru National Union, formed in 1994 to protect the rights and privileges of the Reang minorities, called for an Autonomous District Council under the Sixth Schedule of constitution. What gives strength to the demand of the Reang (Bru) is their position as the second largest ethnic group in Mizoram. Both in pre-Independence and post-Independence eras, Tripura witnessed regular inflow of emigrants, and land alienation of tribals was rampant. The tribespeople thus became a minority in their own homeland. Tripura National Volunteers, therefore, did not target the state, but it opposed a community. In this respect, Bhaumik, says, “The TNV’s anti-Bengali violence created a general climate of ethnic hatred, which were sharpened by large-scale alienation of the tribal lands and actual marginalisation in jobs, professions and politics” (1996: 77). Prior to TNV, the Seng-khak (Clenched Fist) surfaced as a tribal insurgent group in 1967. It maintained close links with the Mizo National Front (MNF). Tribal leaders of Tripura, right from 1974, voiced demands of reservation, restoration of tribal land, especially the restoration of native Kok-Borok as one of the official languages, and lastly an autonomous district council. The language and script issue, which engulfed Tripura for a long time, has hardly been addressed in right earnest.

Illegal Émigré, “Anti-Infiltrator-Movement,” and Terrorism

There is a long history of incursion of outsiders, emigration, and resettlement in Assam. One can see this broadly in four spheres; tea plantation related manual labour, Bengali Muslim emigration (mostly occupying agriculture), Hindu Bengali migration (mostly occupying service sector), and Marwari migration in trading sector. Bangladesh war resulted in over 1,000,000 “refugees” taking shelter, who never returned. Modern Bangladeshi “infiltration,” however, is said to be a more severe phenomenon. It was alleged that Bangladesh Char area dialects spoken by the migrant Muslims were declared as Assamese dialect to the census enumerators. Politicians, too, encouraged the Bangladeshi Muslims and other minorities into Assam, giving them voting rights. This was a narrow exercise in electoral politics (Dixit 1998, 2003). This last wave of an illegal exodus from Bangladesh is a more dangerous phenomenon, as some among these infiltrators got involved in terrorist activities in parts of urban India. It is said that the fear within the native Assamese community of being overwhelmed by the unabated influx of illegal Bangladeshi migrants from across the porous border triggered off the long-drawn “Anti-Foreigner Mass Uprising (1979–1985),” spearheaded by the All Assam Students’ Union (AASU). It ended by arriving at an agreement, the Assam Accord, 15 August 1985. The Accord was fixed 25 March 1971 as the cut-off date for detection and expulsion of the illegal foreign migrants. The Assam movement was led by AASU. All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP), which was the umbrella organisation of several outfits, including Asom Sahitya Sabha, emerged as the political forum, the AASU. In 1985, AAGSP swept the elections on the wave of anti-foreigner sentiments. The ULFA’s inception dates back to the frenzied years of the Assam Movement when a section of the militant youth lost faith in peaceful programmes of AASU and the AAGSP. According to Baruah (1992) ULFA combined Naxalism with a strong dose of “subnationalism.” In 1990, the ULFA had forged links with various insurgent outfits inside and outside the country, including the PLA, NSCN, and even JKLF in Kashmir. In 1986, ULFA first established contacts with the then unified National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) and the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) of Myanmar for training and arms. Subsequently, links were established with Pakistan’s Inter Services Intelligence (ISI). The ULFA, according to Gohain, “advocated a line of ‘de-nationalization’

or ‘divesting oneself of ethnic identities except that of Assamese identity.’ It characterized India as a ‘colonial state’ and the northeast as the ‘colony’, though no serious economic analysis substantiating this assertion had come to light” (2007).

Identity Politics of “Small Ethnicities” and “Minority Syndrome” in Assam

After its partitions, Assam was left with 23 tribes, comprising of 14 hill tribes of Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills; and 9 plains tribes inhabiting the plains of the Brahmaputra Valley. Seeing development in the hills, some tribes became conscious to develop their subregions. Some tribes who had earlier launched movements rushed to renew their claims. Thus the Ahom renewed the demand for redefining their scheduled tribe status. In order to push forward the demand for a separate Ahom state, the “Tai-Ahom Land Committee” was formed by merging old organisations. In 1995, the Ahom placed a 17-point charter of demands. Showing his concern for the Ahom, the then Ahom Chief Minister of Assam, Hiteswar Saikia, highlighted the unique cultural heritage of the Ahom people. The Karbi have been conscious about their minority status vis-à-vis the Assamese majority. Notwithstanding the gradual incorporation of the Karbi into the Assamese society, culturally and linguistically, the factual incorporation was never conceded. What is more, the kinship-based tribal political system, territorial affiliation (Mikir hills), survival of Karbi folksongs and fables of their distinct origin, tribal mortuary rituals, and tribal costumes which survive in a vibrant manner helped the Karbi to put forward their autonomy claim (Das 1989: 188–190). Though the Karbi National Council demanded, in 1986, only an autonomous district, the last two decades have seen the growth of the Karbi Students Association and the Autonomous State Demand Committee (ASDC) spearheading a movement for creation of a separate Karbi state. Seeing evergrowing demands of the minority tribes, the administration had granted the Sixth Schedule Status to some plains tribes, such as the Mising, Rabha, and Tiwa.

The Bodo movement is the longest social movement in the plains of Assam. The first two phases of the Bodo movement were concerned with social reforms (1947–1967) and consolidation of the Bodo identity vis-à-vis the Assamese community (1967–1987). An earlier phase of the Brahma movement (1907 onwards) was a short-lived “Sanskritisation movement” led by the Mech-Bodo. The early cultural awakenings had led to birth of the Bodo

Sahitya Sabha in 1952, which demanded Bodo language as the medium of instruction at secondary level. In its modern phase (1967 onwards) a new section of Bodo elite emerged which demanded a greater share in political power. A call was given for carving a separate region called Udayachal. After a second phase of mass protests, there was a Bodo Accord signed in February 1993 that had led to the creation of a Bodoland Autonomous Council (BAC). The BAC was a nonstarter, as the territorial boundary issue remained unresolved. The movement for maximum autonomy by the Bodo, succeeded ultimately in securing a new politico-administrative structure within the existing state of Assam following a memorandum of understanding with the Government of India on 10 February 2003. The Bodo majority areas have now come under the new Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC), an elective body. The BTC Accord is seen as a fulfilment of the subnational aspirations of the Bodo of Assam. Under the BTC understanding, the Government of India provides financial assistance of Rs 100 crores per annum for 5 years for projects to develop the socioeconomic infrastructure.

The North East Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Forum, comprising fifteen diverse tribal organisations, resolved at its meeting in October 1994 that “The entire region has been swamped by alien people migrating from neighbouring countries and also from other parts of India” (*The Telegraph* 1994). Similarly, the Tribal Students Federation (TSF) was constituted by several tribal students’ organisations such as Karbi Students Union, All Tiwa Students Union, Takam Miashing Porin Kebang, All Assam Deuri Students Union, Maan-Tai Students Union, Sonwal Kachaari Students Union, Dimasa Students Federation, and All Assam Tribal Students Union. The main objective of the TSF was to provide coherent direction to the various tribal movements of the region for “the right of self-determination.” An important aspect of TSF was its renunciation of militant, armed actions. TSF failed to achieve its goals.

In view of extensive demand of Chakma and Hajong for Indian citizenship, the Arunachal Pradesh Legislative Assembly passed an unanimous resolution to deport émigrés settled in the state. To protect the cultures of indigenous tribes, the Legislative Assembly passed the Bill called “The Arunachal Pradesh Protection of Customary Laws and Social Practices Bill, 1994” for protection of the native tribal institutions. The All Arunachal Pradesh Students Union (AAPSU) also opposed such demands of citizenship. The Nepalese of Assamese origin demanded “special protected status” under

the constitution. They aimed to thwart attempts at branding them as “foreigners” / illegal infiltrators. The fact remains that the Nepalese did face the Khasi anger manifested in the “ethnic cleansing” of a sort in the late 1980s, and which had triggered the larger Nepalese demand of the Gorkhaland (Das 1989; *The Statesman* 2002a). In September 1994, the North East Students’ Organization (NESO) alleged that the Illegal Migrants (Determination of Tribunal) Act 1993 was full of loopholes which had made detection and expulsion of illegal migrants in the Northeast difficult. There have been strong reactions to the threat of infiltration of outsiders in varied manners. Thus, the National Socialist Council of Nagalim (Isak-Muivah) made it mandatory for non-Naga living “all over Nagalim” to obtain identity cards for themselves and their families.

In Assam, the Adivasi today can broadly be divided into two communities, the tea garden workers and those who came out of the tea gardens at the end of their contracts and settled in and around the tea gardens after procuring some land. Through gradual expansion these Adivasi form nearly 20 per cent of the state population, but their representation in the Legislative Assembly is said to be markedly lesser (*India Together* 2008). Hiren Gohain has discussed the Adivasi Militancy in Assam. The All Assam Adivasi Students’ Association along with Assam Tea Tribal Students’ Association (strong in Sibsagar, Dibrugarh, and Laximpur districts of upper Assam) have been agitating for years demanding recognition of tea tribals and Adivasi as scheduled tribes. The Adivasi have been neglected by the state. Only special measures, like the campaign against poverty, can win their hearts. The State Congress leaders failed to muster political will to fulfil that demand. The latest response from the Registrar General is that some relatively homogeneous groups among this population may be considered for inclusion onto this list if the state government agrees (Gohain 2007).

Reconciliation for Self-Rule and Autonomy

Cease Fire and Peace Accords

Noteworthy, peace initiatives were undertaken during the 1960s and 1970s involving several militant outfits of the region. However, it was during 1994 that several underground organisations came “overground” and surrendered before the government authorities, particularly in Assam, Meghalaya, and Mizoram. These organisations were the Dimasa National Security Force (DNSF), Achik Libera-

tion Matgrik Army (ALMA), and Hmar People's Convention (HPC). The Dimasa Kachari generally live in North Cachar Hills, Cachar, Karbi-Anglong, Nowgong (all in Assam), and Dhansiri region of Nagaland. Prior to the 1961 Census, they were identified as a "Subtribe" of the Kachari. In the 1971 census and afterwards, they projected themselves as a distinct tribe. The Dimasa Jalairani Hosoma was established in 1972 to promote their distinct cultural identity. The Dimasa National Organisation (DNO) was born in 1979. In March 1979, the Dimasa demanded the proper preservation of ancient Dimasa monuments and relics. In 1980, Nikhil Hidimba Barman Samity, Cachar, demanded the reorganisation of the Dimasa-speaking areas of Northeast India. Even though the Dimasa National Security Force (DNSF) had close ties with the NSCN, its leaders realised the futility of their actions, and thus they had surrendered before the Assam State Government authorities in 1994. A breakthrough achieved during 1994 was the signing of the Hmar Peace Pact. An accord was signed at Aizal on 27 July 1994 between the Hmar People's Convention (HPC) and the Mizoram Government, bringing an end to seven-year-old Hmar insurgency. The accord envisaged the setting up of a Hill Development Council in Hmar inhabited north Mizoram. In Meghalaya also the Achik Liberation Matgrik Army (ALMA), trained by the NSCN and inspired by the ULFA, surrendered before the Meghalaya Chief Minister at Tura, on 25 October 1994. The Garo Baptist Convention (GBP) played a major role in bringing the militants to the negotiating table. In Assam, Hiteswar Saikia (Congress)-led government declared "grant of total autonomy to several major ethnic tribes." Besides the Bodo Accord (1993), his government signed accords with the Karbi and Dimasa tribals. Self-ruling bodies were provided to Rabha, Mishng, and Lalung (Tiwa). In Assam, many organisations have ceasefire agreements with the government: UPDS since 1 January 2004, the UPDS since 23 May 2002, and the NDFB since 25 May 2005. Similarly, in the state of Meghalaya, the Achik National Volunteers Council has had a ceasefire agreement with the government since 23 July 2004. ULFA in Assam in 2005, too, has appointed a People's Consultative Group to prepare the groundwork for an eventual dialogue with the government.

The Naga peace initiative has a long tradition. Diverse perceptions surrounded the earlier 19-Point Agreement of 1960 and the Shillong Accord of 1975. In recent times the Naga Hoho convened a series of meetings with church leaders and NGOs from all Naga areas culminating in a call for "jour-

ney of conscience" to seek reconciliation and to rebuild the Naga society. A declaration was adopted in 2001 to pursue the cause of peace. Since 1998–99 peace parleys particularly with the NSCN (IM) has been generally successful. The NSCN (IM) has been demanding a homeland for all Naga living in the Northeast, which will be called "Nagalim." These peace initiatives have led to what is termed bilateral ceasefire whereby belligerence and hostility are halted. Even during ceasefire the cause for worry has been the fratricidal schisms between the different factions of the Naga National Council, the Isak-Muivah group, and Khaplang faction of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland. There has been success in peace talks with the Khaplang faction too. It is also pleasing that "substantive issues" have been discussed. At the same time, in a statement titled "Journey for Peace" the NSCN (IM) has recognized the "legitimate aspirations of all neighbouring people including the Meiteis, the Assamese and others" and appealed to them to "let us end tension between us" (Navalakha 2003: 683–685). NSCN (IM) has appreciated the Government of India's understanding of the "unique history of the Naga people." The Kamtapur movement, initiated by the Kamtapur People's Party (KPP), involves the Koch and Rajbanshi communities, who call themselves Kamtapuri. The Kamtapuri ethnicity and language question gave birth to this movement, which started as a peaceful movement but turned violent after the movement came in contact of the some Assam-based militant outfits, such as ULFA, in 1999–2000. Apart from the demand for a separate state to be carved out of five north Bengal districts, the Eleven-Point-Charter of the KPP includes the recognition of the Kamtapuri language, the introduction of Kamtapuri programmes in TV, and the "re-settlement" of the people who arrived after 1971. The KPP supporters, mostly of Rajbanshi origin, consider themselves indigenous to the region, and they feel they have the right to self-determination. Today, indeed, the situation, mainly in Manipur, Assam, and Tripura, remain disturbing. The Manipuri militants have shown no inclination for peace talks. All Tripura Tiger Force and the National Liberation Front of Tripura, which operate from camps in Bangladesh, will be weakened by the Naga peace accord, if reached (*The Statesman* 2002b). The NLFT has links with the NSCN and the ATTF has links with the ULFA. Though the NLFT talks of secession, the state is not their enemy. Their targets are the settlers who have migrated from former East Pakistan after partition, and subsequent settlers who have re-

duced the indigenous tribes of Tripura into minority (Chakraborty 2002).

A Recapitulation

In Northeast India cultural differences and incongruity sharpened the ethnic boundaries and generated cleavages along ethnic lines, leading to interethnic discord. Ethnic unrest in the Northeast is as old as the country's independence. The Indian independence along with the partition, influx of émigrés, suspected fear of linguistic-cultural subjugation, economic negligence, and failure to value approaching political institutions variously infused in the minds of the ethnic communities a "sense of narcissistic self-awareness." The spectre of social exclusion, minority syndrome, and ethnic rivalry remained the driving force behind protests demanding autonomy in the shape of homeland, state, or autonomous district council within the constitutional framework. Some of the movements followed the violent paths. While the former opted for constitutional path, the later sought an extra-constitutional, secessionist ideational path. Ever-increasing evidence, however, now indicates that most of the militant outfits in the Northeast have now transformed themselves into terrorist entities, empty of their original objectives and ideology. For example, since the 1990s ULFA in Assam has repudiated its earlier anti-Bangladeshi position. Vested interest and quarrel over interests led militant groups to clash among themselves. It will be incorrect to attach terrorist label to NSCN, but the media reports suggest that most fatalities in Nagaland are the result of the infighting between the two factions of the NSCN rather than from government forces. Despite several successful peace initiatives, the security force operations are in place by utilizing the army, state police forces, and the paramilitary forces to contain militancy.

Poor governance has been a major problem in the region. Wasbir Hussain (1998) says the region is caught in a vicious cycle of lack of economic development, and the militancy and the resultant violence further retard economic growth. Under these circumstances it is natural to find the people of the region harbouring a sense of alienation from the Indian mainstream and feeling neglected. We have noted above how the state of Assam is under siege with the aspirations of different communities and groups showing no signs of decline, despite attempts at devolution of power to the grassroots level. B. P. Routray of the Institute for Conflict Management (2003) has rightly observed that "this

is primarily a governance issue. Poor governance is the main trigger factor for ethnic groups clamouring for autonomy. Such demands from newer groups are here to stay." Special provisions for self-governance and autonomy are provided for people of the Northeast within the Constitution of India, particularly through such acts as the Sixth Schedule, NEC, and Department of North Eastern Region (DONER). The DONER and the North Eastern Council under the central control need to tackle more effectively the problems of unemployment, underemployment, and economic backwardness of the region. Let the people's representatives monitor the activities of these institutions. The DONER has an annual budget of Rs. 550 crores. The NEC has another Rs. 500 crores earmarked for the region. These are, apart from the enormous amount of funding available to the states through different central schemes, onetime packages announced by successive prime ministers, "Peace Packages" provided to states like Nagaland and Mizoram, grants by international development agencies, like the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) which in 2003 approved a master project of Rs. 2,000 crores for the Northeast. These institutional arrangements and provisions need to be appropriately regulated to assuage ethnic misgivings. In more recent years, the peace initiatives, such as the bilateral ceasefire, and the peace talks held between militant leaders and government representatives, symbolise the determination of the nation-state to resort to a broad-spectrum consensus on vital issues by adhering to flexibility and extendibility. These are basic foundations aimed at the national consolidation, which should be strengthened. Peace, development, and proper linkages are bound together and are intrinsic to harmony in the region. Gradually the region has increasingly witnessed not only naturalisation of electoral politics but also slow adaptation of national political parties.

Resurgence of ethnic identity and persistence of ethnicised politics does not indicate repudiation of the political state. Their concern for variously perceived threats to their distinct ethnic identities, their anxiety for preservation of culture and language, and their demand of autonomy can not be seen as dysfunctional for a healthy civil society. Their aspirations should be rather seen as prerequisites for distributive justice, which no nation-state can neglect. The Indian path of institutional adjustments aimed at wining over and changing the opinion of hostile ethnic groups and extending special safeguards to hill states have helped solve ethnic problems to a great extent. These need to be continued.

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Appendix

Arunachal Pradesh

United Liberation Volunteers of Arunachal Pradesh (ULVA)
 United People's Volunteers of Arunachal Pradesh (UPVA)
 United Liberation Movement of Arunachal Pradesh (ULMA)
 National Liberation Front of Arunachal: Koj Tara Dragon Force (ADF)

Assam

United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA)
 Bodo Security Force (BDSF)
 National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB)
 Dimasa National Security Force (DNSF)
 Bodo Liberation Tiger Force (BLTF)
 Dima Halim Daogah (DHD)
 Karbi National Volunteers (KNV)
 Rabha National Security Force (RNSF)
 Koch-Rajbongshi Liberation Organisation (KRLO)
 Hmar People's Convention- Democracy (HPC-D)
 Karbi People's Front (KPF)
 Barak Valley Youth Liberation Front (BVYLF)
 Birsra Commando Force
 Adivasi United Liberation Front of Assam
 All Assam Garo Union
 Cobra Force
 United Liberation Front of Barak Valley
 Muslim United Liberation Front of Assam (MULFA)
 Muslim Liberation Tigers of Assam (MULTA)
 United Social Reform Army Of Assam (USRAA)
 United People's Democratic Solidarity (UPDS)

Manipur

National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN-IM)
 People's Liberation Army (PLA)
 Revolutionary People's Front (RPF)
 United National Liberation Front (UNLF)
 People's Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak (PREPAK)
 Kuki National Organisation (KNO)
 Kuki National Front (KNF)
 Kuki National Army (KNA)
 Kuki Revolutionary Army (KRA)
 Kuki Defense Force (KDF)
 Kuki Front Council (KFC)
 Manipur People's Liberation Front (MPLF)
 People's Republican Army (PRA)
 Kangleipak Communist Party (KCP)
 Kanglei Yawol Kanna Lup (KYKL)
 Manipur Liberation Tiger Army (MLTA)

Iripak Kanba Lup (IKL)
 Kangleipak Kanba Kanglup (KKK)
 North East Minority Front (NEMF)

Mizoram

Hmar People's Convention (HPC)
 Hmar People's Convention-Democracy (HPC-D)
 Hmar Revolutionary Front (HRF)
 Zomi Revolutionary Army (ZRA)
 Zomi Revolutionary Volunteers (ZRV)
 Indigenous People's Revolutionary Alliance (IRPA)
 Kom Rem People's Convention (KRPC)
 Chin Kuki Revolutionary Front (CKRF)
 Bru National Liberation Front
 Bru National Front (BNFM) of Mizoram
 Bru Welfare Association of Mizoram (BWAM)

Meghalaya

Hynniewtre Volunteer Council (HVC)
 Hynniewtre Achik Liberation Council (HALC)
 Hynniewtre National Liberation Council (HNLC)
 Achik Liberation Matgrik Army (ALMA)
 A'chik National Volunteers Council (ANVC)
 People's Liberation Front of Meghalaya (PLF-M)
 Hajong United Liberation Army (HULA)

Nagaland

National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Isak-Muivah) (NSCN [IM])
 National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Khaplang) (NSCN [K])
 Naga National Council-NNC (Adino)
 Naga Federal Government (NFG)
 Naga National Council (Khodao) (NNC [K])

Tripura

National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT)
 All Tripura Tigers Force (ATTF)
 Bru National Liberation Front (BNLF)
 National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT): Biswamohan Debbarma
 Nayanbashi Jamatia
 All Tripura Tiger Force (ATTF): Ranjit Debbarma
 Tripura Tribal Volunteer Force (TTVF)
 Tripura Liberation Force (TLF)
 All Tripura Volunteer Force (ATVF)
 Tripura National Army (TNA)
 Borok National Council of Tripura (BNCT)

West Bengal

Kamtapuri Liberation Organisation (KLO)

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The Constellation of Orion and the Cosmic Hunt in Equatorial Africa

Vincent Vieira

Introduction

In the folklore of many traditional cultures of the Americas and North-Central Eurasia there is an association of specific constellations with a hunting scene, and stories related to such a hunt – the cosmic hunt mythological motif (Berezkin 2005 and references therein). One of the most common of such associations is that with the constellation of Orion, and it has been reported to be most extensively distributed over North America and Northern Eurasia (Berezkin 2005). In a common version of the Orion-based cosmic hunt, the three in-line stars of the belt are animals (e.g., cervines) being hunted. The hunter is one of the stars below Orion's belt (e.g., Rigel), and the bright, red Betelgeuse is the arrow – the bloody arrow that has hit the animal (Berezkin 2005). The other common Eurasian-American cosmic hunt motif involves the Big Dipper (Berezkin 2005). In a common version of the Big Dipper-based cosmic hunt, the handle represents the three hunters, and the cup represents the animal being hunted (Berezkin 2005).

It has been suggested that the mythological motif of the cosmic hunt may be specific to the