Chapter IV

North East India: Social, Political, Economic and Security Perspectives
Chapter IV

North East India: Social, Political, Economic and Security Perspectives

Map 4.1

North East India

An Introduction of North East India

North East India is essentially the creation of the British. Before 1947, the whole of North-East India, excluding Manipur and Tripura was Assam. However, immediately after independence fissiparous forces lead to the dismemberment of greater Assam resulting in the formation of seven North-Eastern sisters, namely Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura have been dealt with. Geographically, this region is almost isolated from the rest of India. North-East is strategically important and is girdled by Tibet, Bhutan, China, Myanmar (formerly Burma) and Bangladesh. It is linked to the rest of the country by a narrow corridor in West Bengal.  

The North East region of India occupies strategic geopolitical situation due to its international boundaries with Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, Myanmar and Nepal. The region earlier comprised the states of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura, popularly known as the ‘Seven Sisters.’ Recently, the State of Sikkim also come under the umbrella of this region owing to its proximity to the area and somewhat similar type of developmental and other problems.

The term “North east Frontier” connotes with reference to present day, British India something entirely different from what it did with regard to the Mughal Empire of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. While it is now applicable to the hilly region lying to the north and east of Sadiya, which commands the route to China, it meant in the Mughal age the Mongoloid states of Koch Bihar, Kamrup and Assam, which bordered serially on the province of Bengal in the north-east.

---

The region covered by the principalities is in much strange shape—great length by very little breath, and like it again, it may be said to be watered by one life-giving river (the Brahmaputra). The greater part of the country is shut in between high and inaccessible hills, which girdle it in three sides—north, south and east, while on the fourth, is a river, the Karatoya. The only point of contact with the outside world is on the west, and particularly south-west, and it is here that the Mughal Sarkar of Ghoraghat touched the fringe of Koch domain which was naturally the first to come within the pole of Imperial foreign policy.  

North East India is full of hills, streams and rivers. The hills are covered with dense forests because of the heavy rainfall. In some places, the ridges rise one after another. The valleys are deep, narrow and steepsided and the streams are deepening and cutting the valleys. As a consequence, communications between one hill and another is practically impossible. The rugged physiographic condition of this region render the tribes to live in splendid isolation. The isolated conditions of the different tribes induces them to demand political independence. The Mizos and the Nagas demanded independence because they were not touched profoundly by administration. The Khasi and the Garos did not demand independence because they were in close contact with the people of the plains and understood the benefits, cultural, political and economic, resulting from such contacts.

North East India is strategically important. It has natural frontiers on three sides and a political boundary on the fourth. It has common frontiers with four political communities, China in the North, Bhutan in the West, Bangladesh in the East and Myanmar (formerly Burma) in the South. No other part of India occupies such a strategic position as the North East.

Long before the advent of the British, the indigenous people in the hills of north-east India had organized themselves under the political systems of their own which had been the natural outcome of their social evolution. Two distinctly different types of system of governance had

---

4 Ibid. p 1.
been evolved in the hills, i.e., democratic system in the clan-based village societies controlled by the village councils and village headmen, had autocratic system of chieftainship controlled by the clan or village chiefs. The extent of power and authority of these traditional political institutions in relation to their people used to vary from tribe to tribe. While in certain communities these traditional institutions were well-organized and well-structured and even, in few cases, they led the formation of miniature states. In some communities these institutions were loosely organized without any central authority.⁶

History of Arunachal Pradesh goes back to hundreds of years into mists of tradition and myth. Local tradition regards the country around Sadiya as the ancient Vidarbha. Ancient Puranas have
many references to the region. Recorded history of Arunachal Pradesh can be traced only when Ahom kings began to rule Assam in the 16th century. The British took possession of Assam in 1838. British government had brought Arunachal Pradesh also under their administrative control. After independence, it was a part of North East Frontier Agency, and later, made a union territory. On 20th February, 1987 Arunachal Pradesh is skirted by Bhutan in west, Tibet and China in north and north-east, Burma in east and Assam in south. It consists of the sub-mountains and mountainous ranges sloping to the plains of Assam. It is the largest state area-wise in north-east region.\footnote{7 Tado Karlo (1996) “Arunachal: Plight of the Natives,” \textit{Encyclopaedia of India and Her States,}” Volume 9, ed. Verinder Grove and Ranjana Arora, Published by Deep and Deep Publications, F- 159, Rajouri Gander, New Delhi-110027, pp 95, 107-109.}

The total area of Arunachal Pradesh is 83,743 sq km.\footnote{8 Oxford School Atlas 32nd Edition (2010), Oxford University Press, p 25.}

Arunachal Pradesh is the land of 22 distinct tribes speaking as many languages. This culturally rich State of India is surrounded by Bhutan to the west, China (Tibet) to the north, (formerly Burma) Myanmar to the east, Nagaland and Assam to the south. Till 1962, neither the natives thought they were part of any country nor the Indians viewed them as Indians (many Indians still think so). It was after the Chinese aggression that the Government of India woke up to the reality that there also existed a part of India called North East Frontier Agency (present Arunachal Pradesh).

The geography, history, sociology, morality and philosophy taught to the natives are those of the mainland India, not of Arunachal Pradesh. As a result they are being culturally displaced. Not only that, the students of the mainland are not taught anything about Arunachal Pradesh and its people. That is why there exists a big communication gap between the natives and the mainstream people. Even the official media like Doordashan hardly gives coverage to Arunachal Pradesh and its people. For that matter, faces from tribal States of North East are rare sights on the TV screen.
The motto of the colonizers of the past God, Glory and Gold, finds its follower ever today. What one sees in Arunachal Pradesh is cultural imperialism. Also, the presence of huge number of Indian Army, along the 1030 km long border with China, puts the natives to submission. In fact, most of the fertile valleys in this highly mountainous State have been occupied by the Army.\(^9\)

The concept of land ownership in the region under study may, broadly be considered under three heads, namely the individual, the clan and the village common land. As ownership of land differs from tribe to tribe, the same system varies between the tribes practicing shifting cultivation only and the other tribes having continuous and permanent cultivation. The land under individual ownership comprises cultivated land such as irrigated rice fields, fields for dry crops, kitchen gardens, plots for crops like maize, vegetables, fruit trees, bamboo groves, pine other useful trees and homestead site. The land such as meadows close to village, commonly used as pasture as well as burial ground and the tracts of forests come under clan ownership.\(^{10}\)

**The Practice of Religion in Arunachal Pradesh**

The Khamtis are a Buddhist tribe living mainly in the Lohit district of Arunachal Pradesh.

The Khamtis are pure Buddhists. They are process the Theravada (Khamti, to- ni) in fact, brought their Buddhism from Myanmar (formerly Burma).

The Khamti priests (Khamti, chow- mun) are men of great importance, and their influence is greater even than that of the chiefs. No undertaking is commenced without first consulting them, and by pretended divinations they select and announce an auspicious day. They are also the school- masters, every free- born Khamti youth being compelled to attend school in the temples, where he learns to read and write his own language.

---

\(^9\) Ibid. pp 95, 107-109  
It is the responsibility of the villagers to provide food to the bhikkhu and samaneras, who may also receive gifts of the barest necessities, and accept invitations to meals.  

Agriculture is the mainstay of the people, who by and large, follow a slash and burn method of shifting cultivation called jhum practiced on rain-bed slopes of forest hills and dales. Rice is the principal crop and other important crops are maize, millet, wheat, pulses, potato, sugarcane and oilseeds. Ecological conditions in Arunachal Pradesh are congenial for the growth of horticulture. Besides, pineapple, orange, lemon, lichi, papaya, banana, guava temperate fruits such as apple, plum, peas, cherries, walnut, almond etc., are grown in above 1,400 horticulture gardens.  

Endowed with abundant forest, mineral and hydel power resources, Arunachal Pradesh was a high industrial potential. Limestone also occurs at Hunli in Dibang Valley distinct and Menga in Upper Subansiri District. These apart, occurrences of graphite, quartzite, kyanite, mica, iron and copper ores are also reported. Remarkable progress has been achieved in the field of cottage industries, of which weaving, basketry and carpetmaking merit particular mention. Small scale industries numbering 1,957 in 1990-91 comprise saw, rice and oil mills, fruit preservation, soap and candle manufacturing units, steel fabrication, wood works and so on.  

An Idu village is usually a collection of homestead, each consisting of a single family of parents and children as the smallest unit. The Idus practice polygamy and each wife has a separate apartment within the same homestead. Sometimes two or more lineally related kinsmen, their wives and children occupy a single homestead, and are jointly subject to the same authority. A domestic group may also include other persons related to the family, such as widows, orphans and infirm persons. The attitude towards the father, the fathers’ brothers, and the grandfather is

---

one of respect, and usually the father is considered to be the authoritative head, who has an effective say in all matters that concern the family. The mother’s brother, is treated with a degree of intimacy and affection which would not be shown to the father or lies brothers.  

Kinship, social and economic ties hold together the members of the homestead. In ordinary activities such as fishing, collection of food, clearing of the jungle and cultivation, they act as a single unit. Properties such as land, livestock, and foodstuff, house and forest trees are held jointly, by the family. But, personal effects such as ornaments, clothing, cash and household and occupational equipment may belong to the individual separately.

The political transformation has an obvious impact on the socio-economic life of the people of Arunachal Pradesh. A policy of alienation inspired the British regime to keep the hill areas scheduled and away from the mainstream of the culture and social life of the country. This had adversely affected the process of national integration. But the people of Arunachal are now on the move. They are now expanding- materially, culturally and spiritually. The hills do not circumscribe their mental horizon any more. Arunachal is undergoing a silent transformation.

At the time of Independence, Arunachal possessed no development whatsoever. There was hardly any network of communications and welfare institutions. The British administration had confined itself to the concept of loose administrative control by touring the major trade routes upto the international frontier. In the hinterland, large tracts of territory remained unexplored, unmapped and uncensused. In these areas many villages have been never located or visited and there was even doubt regarding the course of major river system through the territory.

---

15 Ibid.
17 Ibid, p 113.
The Bill in its amended form known as the “Arunachal Freedom of Religious Faith Bill, 1978” was passed by the Territorial Assembly and the President gave his assent, thereby giving it the status of an Act. This indeed was a singular triumph for the people of Arunachal Pradesh. \(^\text{18}\)

---

\textit{Assam}

\(^{18}\) Ibid, p 121.
Map 4.3

Source: “Assam (Asom) District Map, Maps of Assam (Asom),”
The word Assam is derived from Sanskrit asom meaning peerless, judged by her exquisite natural beauty, cultural richness and human wealth. Assam has a rich legacy of culture and civilization behind her. Being the homeland of different races of men: Austric, Mongolian, Dravidian and Aryan that can to dwell in her hills and valleys at different times, since remote antiquity, she has developed a composite culture of variegated colour. 19 The total area of Assam is 78,438 sq km.20

The issue of the Asamiya nationality vis-a-vis the Bengalis in Assam has remained controversial, ever since the arrival of the Bengali baboos in the wake of the annexation and consolidation of the British control in Assam in 1826. However, this does not mean that Assam had no connection at all with Bengal. Geographically, Assam’s connection with the rest of Indian sub-continent has ever been through Bengal. Being a neighbor, Assam and Bengal have had social, cultural, economic, diplomatic and political connections since beginning of human civilization in that region of the sub-continent. Many of the present day Asamiya caste-Hindu families came originally from Bengal during the later Ahom days.21

Sociologically speaking, the Bengalis became a reference group of the Asamiyas who were looking for upward social mobility within the emerging social hierarchy in British Assam. Many of the Bengali sweetmeats, eating habits, dress pattern, manners, rituals and behavior found acceptance among them. Some of them even talk proudly in Bengali, read Bengali papers and literature.22

During the century for which Assam has been under British rule and enjoyed the blessings of a settled Government, its material prosperity increased rapidly. Its trade has grown, and its exports of mustard seed, potatoes (introduced in the Khasi hills by David Scott), silk and other local produce have increased greatly, both in quantity and value. A large part of the lime used in

22 Ibid, p 50.
Bengal in supplied from the quarries on the southern face of the Khasi hills. Coal has been discovered and work in various parts especially in the neighbourhood of Makum in the Lakhumpur district; and mineral has been found at Digboi in the same district, where wells have been sunk for its extraction. But, by far the most important factor in the growing prosperity and commercial importance of the province has been the remarkable expansion of the tea industry.  

The national struggle for freedom is a long story to recount here. In 1921, the whole country including Assam responded to the call of Mahatma Gandhi and played a glorious part in the fight for our freedom. Assam’s contribution was in no way less. Bapuji visited Assam and called it lovely Assam and also highly praised its people for their heroism and adherence to the ideal of self reliance. India became free on 15th August, 1947. But, independence brought a large number of problems in its wake. The country was partitioned and this brought Assam to the fore. Assam became the real frontier of strategic importance.

Assam occupies a very important position in the map of India, surrounded as it is by different foreign countries namely Bhutan and Bangladesh, and people by various races and tribes speaking different languages and dialects and having distinct cultures of their own.

Assam is not only rich in her cultural heritage but also rich, possibly the richest state, in India in so far as natural resources are concerned. The flora and fauna, forest and mineral wealth, the colourful way of life. They are full of all species of herbs, plants and tree known to botanical experts.

The wild life of Assam has drawn the attention of the lovers of animals, not only of our country but of all parts of the globe. In the famous sanctuaries like the Kaziranga sanctuary one can find

---

25 Ibid, pp 340- 341
26 Ibid, p 341.
one-horned rhino, wild buffalo, elephant, bear and different kinds of deer. The State offers ample scopes for establishment of various important industries like cement factories, paper mills, sugar mills, jute mill etc. Although very rich in raw materials, Assam is still lagging behind other sister states of the union, industrially. ²⁷

Ever since the British occupation, there had been a considerable flow of non-Assamese Indians into Assam from other parts of India, particularly provinces in the neighbourhood of Assam. With the arrival of the British, the old Assamese system of government was replaced and its functions disappeared from public life. In order to run the new administration, clerks, officers and other servants familiar with the system of Company administration were brought from outside the province. Moreover, a certain number of other people also came within this flow to fill the various demands of economic growth. The Assamese people like most other traditional societies were agriculturists and looked down upon wage labour i.e., working for others. ²⁸

The slow penetration into Assam of the immigrants from Bengal. Obviously, the virgin and fertile soil of Assam had attracted a large number of immigrants. They came to Assam with their families and began to increase the permanent population of Assam. Thus, the immigration assumed alarming proportions. ²⁹

The second aspect of the immigrant population in Assam was the tension between the Assamese and Bengalis. The Assamese-Bengali question has been of special importance to the people of Assam. ³⁰

The British Government made frequent change of the boundary of Assam according to its convenience. Just after its occupation Assam was brought under the administrative jurisdiction of Bengal. Later on although it was made a separate Governor’s Province in 1921, two districts of

---

²⁷ Ibid, pp 340-341
²⁹ Ibid, p 229.
³⁰ Ibid, p 231.
Bengal, namely Sylhet and Cachar, were tagged on to Assam. These two districts had for centuries been integral parts of Bengal. Their history had been the history of Bengal, their language is Bengali, their ways and their outlook was almost the same as those of Bengal. Assam proper, on the other hand, comprised the Brahmaputra Valley and was a self-contained and independent kingdom. The dominant people in this variegated group were the Assamese speaking people. They were not all of the same racial stock, but due to close association and a common life and language they developed a culture of their own, markedly different, as they saw it, from the temperament and character of their Bengali neighbour. Their history was a history of isolation from Bengal and Mughal India, which they zealously guarded by the force of arms. As a result, there emerged a problem of cultural and political integration between these two streams. In a society having socio-cultural differences, the creation of a unified political authority is not enough to forge a single and durable political entity. People cannot be held together unless they are made to cherish certain common political values and attitudes. It is obvious that the role of historical antecedents, both political and cultural, is of crucial importance for the purpose of harmonious blending of the heterogeneous elements. Such a harmony is crucial for the purpose of political integration and political development. In Assam, however, such mobilization and tradition had not yet been possible.  

The majority of the Bengalis in Assam were, however, immigrants from East Bengal. In short, time the Bengali-speaking people emerged as the second largest group in the Assam Valley.  

---

**Manipur**  
Map 4.4
It is commonly known that an adventurer named Pakhangba ascended the throne of the seven main principalities and founded a dynasty which ruled Manipur till 1949. The King named Loi Yamba in 1074 A.D. consolidated the kingdom to a great extent. In the later years, Kabaws (who
lived at Indo-Burma border) tried to annex the south eastern part of Manipur Valley which was foiled by the King Khumomba. By 1470 Kabaw valley was annexed to Manipur. By 1542 Manipur dominions were further extended. There was a battle with the Chinese which the Manipuris singly defeated them.\(^{33}\)

In the next 200 years, Manipur saw a steady prosperous time. In 1762, the Manipur king concluded a treaty with the British to ward off the growing menace of the Burmese. It is well-known that Burmese successes in Manipur, Assam and other places led to war between the Burmese and the British lasting seven years. The treaty of Yandaboo in 1826 ended the war but failed to solve the problem of Manipuris. The British Government kept Manipur as a native state after much deliberations. After integration with the Indian Union in 1949, the problem of Manipur did not end as it was made a Part ‘C’ state. Central leadership was against its merger in Assam was considered by the Reorganization Commission. Hence, it became a Union Territory under the State Reorganization Act 1956. At the growing dissent of the people, Manipur was made of full-fledged state of the Union in 1972. Manipur is bounded by upper Myanmar (formerly Burma) on east, the Chin Hills of Myanmar on south-east, Nagaland on north, Assam on west and Mizoram on south and south-west.\(^{34}\)

The total area of Manipur is 22,327 sq km.\(^{35}\)

Manipur by virtue of its geographical position was in between the two called the Aryan culture and Mongolian. Although in physical features and certain traditional practices people appear to be more akin to the Mongolian camp, the basic principles mentioned in the old scriptures of the Manipuris are much nearer to the Vedic religion than to the Mongolian currents of thought and religion. That is to say Manipuri cultures forms part and parcel of the wide Vedic civilization.\(^{36}\)


\(^{34}\) Ibid. p 339.

\(^{35}\) Ibid. p 25.

Manipur has about 350 km long international border with Myanmar (formerly Burma) in the east and southeast. It is surrounded by Nagaland, Mizoram and Assam in the north, south and west respectively. Manipur came under the British rule as a princely State in 1891. It merged with Indian union on 15th October, 1949. 37

Since most parts of the border with Myanmar are ‘open’, inhabitants in the interior areas clandestinely and frequently traverse the borderline at different points. In fact, most of the dwellers on both side of the border belong to the same tribe. Mostly Kukis and Nagas have been found settling at these places with different nationalities. The tribal’s at the border in India are allowed free passage to the other side of the other side of the border to meet their relatives. 38

The Meitei insurgents hold the entire 1,800 square kilometer lush valley where most of Manipur’s Vaishnavite Hindu population is concentrated and the state administration to ransom. Policemen and men of the paramilitary forces like the Border Security Forces and the Central Reserve Police Force have been the main target of the militants and their morale is at lowest ebb. 39

A small, but determined, band of Manipuri Meitei radicals masquerading under the banner of the secessionist “Peoples’ Liberation Army” (PLA), led by Lhasa- trained Nameirakpam Bisheswar, has been striking terror in the hearts of the peace- loving citizens with impunity. 40

The young generation which is passing out from schools and colleges everyday does not find suitable employment avenues in the swelling. Graduates are already employed in the state police as ordinary constables. With the expansion of educational facilities the unemployment problem is likely to aggravate further in the coming years. It is these angry unemployed youngmen who

38 Ibid. p 42.
are taking to undesirable methods for satisfying their aspirations and form the nucleus of the rebel hardcore.\(^\text{41}\)

The growing pressure on land, the increasing competition for white-collared jobs, the growing aspirations of the Meiteis, and the acquisition of power apparatus to change the ethnic division of labour have united the “sons of the soil” to launch a virulent campaign to drive out the “Mayangs” or non-Manipuris from Manipur. Simultaneously, the Meitei undergrounds have sought to establish rapport with the Naga and Mizo insurgents by trying to project their movement as a part of a-pan-Mongoloid drive for self assertion as well as trying to whip up a popular agitation for atavistic revival of tribalism. Significantly, a senior Minister of the former Shaiza cabinet, had sometime back presided over a public meeting where the Hindu scripture like Geeta and Mahabharata were consigned to flames.\(^\text{42}\)

The hill areas of the state are endowed with rich natural resources- swift-flowing rivers and fertile soils, rich vegetal cover, precious minerals and over and above a hard working, healthy, strong and stout people, providing rich human resource base for economic development. But, major part of the Manipur hills remains economically depressed and underdeveloped for poor infrastructural facilities and unplanned utilization of natural resources. The gradual depletion of the natural resources has brought miseries to the hill people and their ecosystem. Therefore, there is an urgent need for proper attention to scientific management of natural resources, so that an ecological balance can be maintained for the development of the hill tracts of the state.\(^\text{43}\)

Soil erosion is a serious menace in the hills areas of the state, which is the result of intense jhuming and indiscriminate cutting and burning of forests. Without proper soil conservation measures, such as contour bonding, terracing and protective afforestation, it will be difficult to maintain the ecological balance in this part of the country.\(^\text{44}\)

\(^{41}\) Ibid, p 83.
\(^{42}\) Ibid, p 84.
\(^{44}\) Ibid, p 110.
Forests provide firewood, charcoal, roundwood and timber. Besides, fuel, they supply structural timber for public use, matchwood, bamboos, canes, turpentine and resin, gums, oils, fibres, honey, wax, thatching grasses and medicinal herbs. Many of them are used in various industries and some are exported. Dalchini used in spices, and Agar cane, with proper marketing facilities, earn a lot of foreign exchange besides their extensive use in the domestic market.  

The forest-clad hills have a rich variety of wildlife. Himalayan black bear and the common Indian sloth bear are found in the northern hills. The wild pig is common throughout the region. Several species of porcupine, moles, rats, and mice are found in large numbers, particularly in the Tamenglong district.

The main profession of the population is agriculture. Weaving, fishing and other cottage industries are the main supplement. Employment in the Government and semi-Government establishments and institutions. The main profession of a substantial section of the population in and around Imphal is weaving.

The villages on the bank of Loktak have the mixed profession of agriculture and fishing. The cottage industries, viz., carpentry, blacksmithy, goldsmithy, tailoring, embroidery, bamboo and cane work also support a small section of the population. Thousands of women both in the urban and rural areas supplement the income of their families by active participation, may, by playing leading role in the small business sectors of the main markets.

The available lands for agriculture can be put to more intensive use by introducing additional facilities for irrigation. The natural fertility of the land is an accepted fact. The agriculture so far has depended on the monsoon and the natural fertility of the land.

48 Ibid, p 104.
Progress political movements was closely associated with the growth of political and national consciousness among the people of Manipur. In this regard, the formation of the ‘Nikhil Hindu Manipur Mahasabha’, on the 30th May, 1934 may be regarded as a stepping stone for the growth of political consciousness in the country. Basically, this organization was a social and religious organization and its only objectives was for the upliftment and strengthening of the social and religious life of the people.  

Manipur enjoyed independence right up to the first two decades of the nineteenth century, except during the brief period of Burmese occupation between 1819 and 1826. In 1826 Raja Gambhir Singh liberated Manipur from the Burmese, but in the process he took help of the British, and Manipur had to pay the prince of it, it now had to work under British suzerainty.

After the memorable uprising of 1891, it came under British paramountcy, and functioned as such as a princely state. Within this political paramounter, the administrative, executive, policy-making and judicial functions were performed by a new institution known as the Durbar from 1907 to 1947. For the first two years the Maharaja functioned as the President of the Durbar but in 1916 the Raja vacated the post of the president in favour of an English I.C.S., though he continued to be responsible for the administration of the state assisted by the Durbar. While in some respects the dynamics of political and governmental processes in Manipur resemble those in those states in the country, there are also marked contrasts arising from historical, geopolitical and socio-economic-cultural compulsions of Manipur, which have been undergoing slow transformations but the constraints still casting their shadows all along. 

52 pp 366, 370. 
53 Ibid, p 370.
Meghalaya

Map 4.5
Meghalaya was created as an autonomous state within the state of Assam on 2nd April, 1970. The full fledged state of Meghalaya came into existence on 21st January, 1972. It is bound on the north and east by Assam and on the south and west by Bangladesh. Meghalaya literally meaning
the abode of clouds is essentially hilly state. It is now divided into seven administrative districts namely (i) Jaintia hills, (ii) East Garo hills, (iii) West Garo hills, (iv) East Khasi hills, (v) West Khasi hills, (vi) Ri Bhoi district, and (vii) South Garo hills district. These tribal communities are the descendants of very ancient people having distinctive traits and ethnic origin. The Khasi hills and Jaintia Hills which form the central and eastern parts of Meghalaya is an imposing plateau with rolling grassland, hills and river valleys. The southern face of this plateau is marked by deep gorges and abrupt slopes, at the foot of which, a narrow strip of plain land runs along the international border with Bangladesh.  

The total area of Meghalaya is 22,429 sq km.  

Meghalaya survives uniformly as the island of matrilineal societies distinct from the patriarchal societies which surround it. Yet, Meghalaya with its distinct matrilineal family and social organization has found enough room to adjust itself to all the situations which have affected the state. Most of the Bodic or Sino-Tibetan speaking people at one time exhibited strongly the matrilineal traits, who at the laps of the long ages, switched over to a patrilineal society. This is proved by the Garo Society which still retains its matrilineal customs of succession and inheritance.  

Advent of British rule, in the case of Meghalaya, disturbed the old system of leading tribal communities of the state, mainly Garos, Khasi and Jaintias. Sixth schedule of the Constitution deal with three areas through certain provisions in the post-independence governance. Famous 73rd Amendment to the Constitution further shook the functioning of these scheduled areas.  

---

Mother kinship is dominant and inheritance is matrilineal. The tribe is a conglomerate of clans, each tracing lineage from the ancestral mother, and the founder of the clan. The mother is the custodian of family rites and property; she is succeeded by her youngest sister who becomes the keeper of the property and the organizer of the family rites in which she can improve the pattern of this residence but cannot part it off. Thus a form of ultimogeniture survives. Her elder sister also secure shares of inheritance in the form of landed or family property, jewelleries and ornaments, vessels and other articles of household furniture and goods, but the largest share (including the mother’s residential house) is hers.  

The elder sisters generally move with their respective husbands, but the youngest daughter’s husband stays in her residence, the custom being matrilocal whether temporary or permanent. In the event there is a single daughter, she will get the entire property. If there be no daughter, the ancestral residence goes to the elder sister’s lineage, but if the woman has become clanless, a girl is adopted and becomes integrated into the family kinship pattern, inheritance thereby being reverted in her person to the same group. There are however exceptions as modern trends indicate. The self- acquired property of the couple, discernible from the ancestral one, may be entitled to a son or shared among the sons if there be no daughter in the house.  

Mizoram

Map 4.6

59 Ibid, p 80.
Mizoram is a mountainous region which became the 23rd state of Indian Union in February 1987. It was one of the districts of Assam till 1972 when it became a union territory. After being annexed by the British in 1891, for first few years, Lushai Hills in the north remained under
Assam while the southern half remained under Bengal. Both these parts were amalgamated in 1898 into one district called Lushai Hill district under Chief Commissioner of Assam. With the implementation of the North-Eastern Reorganisation Act in 1972, Mizoram became a union territory and as a sequel to the signing of the historic memorandum of settlement between Government of India and Mizo National Front in 1986, it was granted statehood on 20th February, 1987. 60

Sandwiched between Myanmar (formerly Burma) in east and south and Bangladesh in west, Mizoram occupies an area of great strategic importance in northern-eastern corner of India. Hills in Mizoram run from north to south with a tendency to be higher in east to the territory and tapering in north and south. Average height of hills is about 900 metre, the highest peak being Blue Mountain (Phawngpui) rising to 2,210 metre. Mizoram has great natural beauty and an endless variety of landscape and it is rich in fauna and flora. 61

Of the early history of Mizos, as of other hill tribes of India’s north-east, very little is known. An interesting feature of the pre-British period Mizo hills, like that of Naga hills, was its pre-State society. The Lushais, in spite of being surrounded by the powerful and organized states, were completely unaware of any state form. 62

The Mizo Union also raised unarmed volunteer force for launching a movement for creation of a separate Mizoram State, and when the Mizo Union announced its programme for non-violent direct action, the danger of direct confrontation between the two parties became real. 63

In October 1965 a deputation of the Mizo Union called on the then Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri, in New Delhi to press the demand for early constitution of Mizoram State. 64

---

61 Ibid, p 398.
63 Ibid. p 174.
64 Ibid. p 174.
In February, 1987 Mizoram was born as the State of Indian Union. It was one of the districts of Assam till 1972, when it became a Union Territory. Surrounded by Myanmar (formerly Burma) in the east and south and Bangladesh in the west, Mizoram occupies an area of great strategic importance in the north-eastern corner of India with Aizawl as its capital.  

The hills in Mizoram run from north to south with a tendency to be higher in the east and tapering in the north and south. The State has the most variegated hilly terrain with its steep hills being separated by rivers which create deep gorges between the hill ranges.

The word ‘Mizo’ is a generic term and used to mean hillmen or highlanders. They came under the influence of the British Missionaries in the 19th century. Consequently, most of the Mizos now profess Christianity. One of the gains of Missionary activities was the spread of education.

The Mizos’ code of ethics or Dharma centred round Tlawngaihna, an untranslatable term meaning that everyone should be hospitable, kind, unselfish and helpful to others. It is the core of their philosophy of life. In war or peace, in dealing with individuals or in the midst of a crowd, it was their spirit of Tlawngaihna which guided their thoughts and actions.

The most colourful and distinctive dance of the Mizos is called Cheraw. As long bamboo staves are used for this dance, many people call it the bamboo dance.

The State of Mizoram having common borders with two foreign countries, viz., Myanmar and Bangladesh, occupies an area of great strategic importance on the political map of India.

---

66 Ibid. p 221.
67 Ibid. p 221.
68 Ibid. p 221.
69 Ibid. p 221.
The total area of Mizoram is 21,081 sq km. \(^{71}\)

\[\text{Nagaland} \quad \text{Map 4.7}\]

\(^{71}\) Ibid, p 25.
The Nagas too have their share of legends and folklore regarding their origin and evolution through the ages. Nagas are basically tribal people and very tribe had its own effective system of self-governance from time immemorial. In the 12th and 13th centuries, gradual contact with the
Ahoms of present day Assam was established, but this did not have any significant impact on the traditional Naga way of life. However, in the 19th century under British administration. After Independence, this territory was made a centrally administered area in 1957, administered by the Governor of Assam. It was known as the Naga Hills Tuensang Area. This however, failed to quell popular aspirations and unrest began. Hence, in 1961, this was renamed as Nagaland and after given the status of a state in the Indian Union was formally inaugurated in 1963. Situated in the extreme north-east of the country, the state is bounded by Arunachal Pradesh in the north, Assam in the west Manipur in the south and by Myanmar (formerly Burma) in the east. 

Nagaland is one of the smallest states of India (now Sikkim is the smallest). It was carved out in the Indian map as sixteenth state of the Union on 1st December, 1963 and inaugurated by the then President of India, Dr S. Radhakrishnan. The State of Nagaland has been formed with the erstwhile Naga Hills Districts of Assam (established in 1881) and the Tuensang Division of NEFA. 

The administrative unit, previously known as Naga Hills and Tuensang Area (NHTA) came into being on 1st December 1957, following the acceptance by the Government of India of a resolution passed in the first Naga People’s Convention 1957. In another convention at Mokokchung in October 1959 it was advised to rename the areas as ‘Nagaland.’ The Government of India accepted the recommendation and renamed the area on 18th February 1961. It was a mere preliminary step to the Constitution of Nagaland as a full-fledged State. On the same day an Executive Council consisting of five members with a Chairman called the Chief Executive Councillor and an interim body of 42 members were constituted. 

Traffic and trade between village having been minimal as a result of the practice of head-hunting, each village grew in isolation and the authority of the chief was unquestioned. The chief

---

74 Ibid. p 78.
was a judge, administrator and commander rolled into one and indeed it was imperative that he be a warrior-chief more than anything else. Families of various clans lived in a village and it was the clans not the tribe which was the rallying point among the Nagas. Tribal solidarity came late, much later, and even today advanced and supposedly progressive Naga tribes bicker over *my* and *your* village.  

The solidarity and the honour of the early Naga village was vested in the chief who dispensed justice in conformity with recognized and accepted codes and customs. With the coming of the British, the village chiefs, once supreme rulers suffered an erosion of their authority though the British administration set about subtly in doing this. Being interested only in maintaining *law and order* and preventing *head-hunting* the British left the village well alone to their chiefs and interfered little or not at all in the day-to-day administration. So it is that the erstwhile village administration still survives and the government administration gives way before the customs of the tribes.

The traditional political system developed in the context of communities is families, extensions of families (clans) and tribes. They belong to the same kinship group sharing a common culture, common descent and a common territory.

Important functions of the council may be mentioned; the councilors decide disputes arising between individuals and they dispense the law of inheritance, adoption, marriage, divorce, theft and murder. Functions of the council included the maintenance of the village water supply and foot-paths, construction of new paths, bridges across streams and rivers which are swollen during the rainy season and are otherwise very difficult to cross.

It is an agrarian State and about 80 per cent of its population depends upon agriculture. Nagaland is essential an agrarian state of the country. In some of the tribes of Nagas, working in jobs other

---

78 Ibid, pp 119-120.
than farming, hunting, forestry and gathering is considered as a taboo. Although sedentary agriculture is practiced but it is insignificant and confined to terraces around Kohima and in the arrow river terraces alluvial fans. Shifting cultivation is the dominant agricultural system.  

The total area of Nagaland is 16,579 sq km.  

---


80 Ibid, p 25.
Sikkim is bounded on the north and north-east by Tibet on the east by Bhutan, on the west by Nepal and on the south by the Darjeeling district of West Bengal.  

Ethnicity affects the life of the individuals and groups in many ways. Indeed, ethnicity has become a ‘resource’ affiliations to which ultimately involves the realization of ‘privileges’ for a section of the society. Role played by the constitutional provisions strengthens the ethnic identity. Ethnic groups have ever time become strong ‘interest’ group and ethnicity a ‘resource.’ This dimension has created conflict situations. 82

The Bhutia, Lepcha and the Limbus were automatically recognized as the Sikkimese by the regulations. But, it was not easily attainable even for the earliest Nepalese settlers in general, who were later recognized and granted Sikkimese status after initial resistance from a section of (anti- Nepalese) ruling elites, though the plainsmen had always been excluded. 83

The Sikkim ruling Durbar had maintain a register of all such legal settlers who were the Sikkim i.e. Sikkimese. 84

Very little is known about the early history of Sikkim. It is commonly believed that in the 17th century Phuntsog Namgyal became the first leader of the Namgyal dynasty which ruled till Sikkim joined Indian Union in 1975. A mountain state in the eastern Himalayas, Sikkim is bound on west by Nepal, on north by Tibet, on east by Bhutan and on south by west Bengal. Sikkim is strategically important for India as it lies astride the shortest route from India to Tibet. The state is entirely mountainous covered with dense forests where sal, simal, bamboo and other trees thrive, some finest forests lie in the northern most areas in Lachen and Lachung. Mountain rise to 7,000 m and above, Kanchenjunga being world’s third highest peak. Sikkim had several hundred varieties of orchids and is frequently referred to as ‘botanist’s paradise.’ 85

83 Ibid, p 33.
84 Ibid, p 33
Integration with the Indian Union has been unique mainly because Sikkim had for long earlier remained a protectorate. The experience has shown no trace of socio-cultural alienation, political resistance and concomitant problems of adaptability and assimilation, despite the fact that Sikkim had its own socio-cultural and political-economic systems a traditional paradigm of development and powerful neighbour in China which is yet to recognize it as part of India. Historically, also it represented a very different political culture from the mainstream India’s.  

The present population of the State is primarily composed of Lepchas, Bhutias, Nepalese and the plains people who represent different ethnic groups settled in the State at different times. The plains people are largely the business communities (Marwaris of Rajasthan and Baniyas of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh), Brahmans, Kshatriyas and others who come from the Indo-Gangetic plains that cover Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Punjab, Kerala, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh.

The people of Sikkim mostly live in small houses in village. The houses by and large are similar to primitive dwellings. However, the Bhutia and Lepcha houses are different than the Nepalese houses. The Lepcha and Bhutia dwellings are constructed on taller stone foundations and they are often supported by poles made up of tree-trunks.

Before its incorporation into India, Sikkim had remained, administratively, for many years, in relative isolation. The socio-political structure centred on a hierarchy of lamas and monasteries and the temporal ruler called Chogyal. The kingdom with its system of feudal, autocratic bureaucracy was formed by the immigrant Bhutias in cooperation with the local Lepcha chiefs. Prior to the Bhutia immigration there was no central political power in Sikkim but only local

---

Lepcha Chiefs were there in order to administer their respective villages. The installation of first King Phuntso Nangyal in 1642 was recognized by the Dalai Lama in Tibet.  

The total area of Sikkim is 7,096 sq km.  

**Tripura**

---


90 Ibid, p 25.
History of Tripura dates back to the Mahabharata, the Puranas and pillar inscriptions of emperor Ashoka. There are no historical records available of Tripura except Rajmala which is the
chronicle of the kings of the ruling family of Tripura. According to it, rulers were known by the surname ‘Fa’ meaning ‘father.’ There is a reference of rulers of Bengal helping Tripura Kings in the 14th century. Kings of Tripura had to face frequent Mughal invasions with varying successes. They defeated Mohammedan sultans of Bengal in several battles. Nineteenth century marked the beginning of the modern era in Tripura when king Maharaja Birchandra Manikya Bahadur modelled his administrative set-up on the British India pattern and brought in various reforms his successors ruled over Tripura till 1947 when it was annexed to Indian Union. In 1972, this territory attained the status of a full-fledged state along with Manipur and Meghalaya. Tripura is strategically situated between the rivers valleys of Burma and Bangladesh. Encircled almost on three sides by Bangladesh, it is linked with Assam only in the north-east.91

In ancient period, prior to the establishment of the Muslim rule in Bengal, Tripura had no distinct political status. It had virtually no significance at the time. The archaeological evidences found in the region prove the fact that a huge portion of this region, particularly south-western part of the present state of Tripura, was political attached to the Kingdoms of Eastern Bengal known as Samatata Vanga and Harikela.92

Since its incorporation into the periphery of the British Indian empire in the late eighteenth century, the tribal princely Tripura was subject to a series of major social changes- demographic and socio-economic- which laid the critical basis of the rise of the political movements and parties in the state in the twentieth century, and remain the roots of much of the later-day tensions in Tripura’s state politics. Those changes form an indispensable part of the modern social history of Tripura’s communism is unintelligible without them.93

Among its people the overwhelming majority were the tribals, the rest being immigrants both tribals and non-tribals. The tribals and immigrants confronted each other, thereby creating a

demographic imbalance in the society. The tribals, divided amongst themselves into a number of separate communities, each carrying its banner of separate socio-cultural heritage, naturally nurtured the spirit of developing themselves as distinct ethnic groups. The dormant sub-nationalist sentiment had to confront the uneven competition with one of the most advanced and prosperous ethnic group the Bengalee. The Maharajas of Tripura, despite being tribals, saw in the growing Bengali art and culture a safe saddle for power, even if it had rung the death-knell for the tribals’ aspiration for developing their latent ethnic consciousness. In the wave of Hinduization patronised by the rulers, the tribals were own indigenous socio-cultural pursuits. Their language ‘Kok Borak’ which had the necessary qualities to be fully developed in the years to come was compelled to be humiliated before the rich Bengali language.  

For an understanding of the rise of political consciousness among the tribals of Tripura, to go into the history of the state formation process in Tripura since the early part of the 15th century. At that time the main tribes living in Tripura were the Tripura, Kuki, Riang and Jamatiya who belonged to the Indo-Mongoloid stock. They migrated to Tripura through Assam, Sylhet and Cachar in successive waves. 

The disturbance of the demographic equilibrium caused by the large-scale inflow of Bengali-speaking immigrants from East Pakistan, now Bangladesh, the growing pressure on land, acute food shortage, the lengthening shadow of unemployment, and the backwardness of the hill areas of the State have generated serious socio-economic tensions and ethnic conflict in this north-eastern State. The tribal aborigins have been swamped by the Bengali migrants who have taken over increasing charge of the administration, State’s trade and commerce and its cultural life.

---

The native Tripura tribals with their primitive economy and archaic ways of eking out a livelihood have had a subordinate place throughout. But, the visible signs of relative prosperity of the non-tribals in the very area where they have been living in abject penury all these years resulted in serious heart burn, bitterness, jealousies, prejudice and conflict. Tripura is situated on the north-east corner of India.  

In addition, the submersion of the tribal people in the growing mass of non-tribals has led to acculturation in a manner and on a scale which has but few parallels in the country.

The process of acculturation continues to cut deeper into the social matrix as points of contact between the tribals and non-tribal section of the population keep on enlarging. However, one may subjectively react to its results, one thing is certain, namely, that the equilibrating mechanism within the structure of tribal societies in Tripura is now largely non-operative and it does not have much chance to redeem itself. The cauldron of tribal unrest in Tripura has begun to simmer. If timely measures are not taken to make amends, it will not be long before it starts boiling.

The total area of Tripura is 10,491 sq km.

**Relevance of North East for India’s Security**

Northeast India has been witnessing two distinctive discourses: reiterative and declarative. The two seem to be characteristic of not only the Indian state and its machineries, but also its counterparts: the protesting voices in the region.

---

97 Ibid. pp 148, 167  
99 Ibid. pp 148, 167  
100 Ibid, p 25.  
The influence and the endurance of insurgency in the Northeast are due to the fact that armed groups are embedded in the workings of northeastern civilian politics. Acting like the combination of a racketeer and a policy lobby, an insurgent group can cut political deals and influence elections, and become enmeshed in a network of extortion and corruption that makes it difficult for politicians to bureaucrats to act independently of the rebels. 102

Delhi’s response to the uprisings in the Northeast has been a two-pronged strategy of tough counter-insurgency combined with development aid aimed at ending popular grievance. The argument over which of these two strategies is more important is misguided. Neither confronts the local political role of violence in the Northeast: both security and development programmes are inefficacious in the face of a system of violent politics, corruption, and immunity for the powerful. When outside security forces stay in the region for too long they create resentment among civilians, but violence breaks out when the local security forces are in control because they do not have the ability and/ or incentives to resist the ties between insurgents and politics. Underdevelopment persists because aid ends up being used for private gain, and lawlessness destroys the investment climate and limits entrepreneurialism. 103

 Civilians in the Northeast, as well as insurgents and local politicians, have little faith that the formal political process can be purged of violence. The means to do so are reform of and support for local police and judicial institutions. Violence, electoral manipulation, corruption, black market transactions, extortion, and inter-communal violence are only rarely effectively prosecuted in the Northeast. Illegal acts by security forces and agents of the centre are not always dealt with quickly and decisively. Only in an environment where civilians feel safe and would-be rebels or collaborators are deterred by a belief that there may be real penalties for their actions, does the equilibrium described above dissolve. 104

The political uncertainty in Northeast India has been a major factor in shaping India’s Myanmar policy is quite apparent. Indeed, arguably it is India’s security anxieties, getting Myanmar to act against Northeast Indian insurgent groups that takes shelter in Myanmar, rather than a desire to give the Look East policy a continental orientation that explains Indian policy towards Myanmar, especially the U-turn in its attitude toward the military regime. Security expert Bibhu Prasad Routray wrote an article looking at the potential effects of the road-building project between Northeast India and Thailand through Myanmar on northeastern insurgencies.  

Geography has also affected the pattern of development in the North East and the Partition caused havoc both in the geography and the economy of the North East. To begin with, the entire land mass of the North East is now connected to the rest of India by a tenuous 22 kilometre link along the Siliguri Corridor; more than 99 per cent of the borders of the North East abut other countries: China, Bhutan, Myanmar and Bangladesh. Some of these countries have not been too friendly and, across a porous international border, have been only too willing to assist militant activity in India. Others, while not anti-India in their approach, have not been in a position to prevent anti-Indian activity from their soil.

Insurgency flourishes when the people have a feeling of separate identity on the basis of ethnicity, culture or history. This is compounded by a sense of neglect, exploitation and discrimination, and immensely aggravated by bad governance, corruption and economic backwardness. All these factors exist in the North East. The key to the situation, clearly, is to provide good, corruption-free governance, and economic development.

It is rightly said that when people in Delhi think of the Northeast, they think of the distance, and that translates itself into a mental gap. When the people of the Northeast think of Delhi, they

---

think in terms of different levels of development, and this translates into an emotional gap. Hope that these gaps can be bridged, and that, with changes in attitudes, the Northeast will take the high road to peace and prosperity.\textsuperscript{108}

Autonomy and ethnicity have diverse faces and masks. A paradigm shift in perception and policy-making occurs when they are viewed as part of the problem and not the solution. Autonomy as practiced by us is accommodative but it is firmly controlled by the Centre and the States, politically and bureaucratically. Autonomy to an ethnic group on the Indian side cannot afford to ignore the condition of the same ethnic group across the border. One has to necessarily strive towards achieving a far greater inter-government coordination.\textsuperscript{109}

The psychological integration of the NE with the rest of the country is of critical importance. One also has to upgrade the policy and institutional structures to render effective such integration.\textsuperscript{110}

A critical futuristic threat perception vis-à-vis India’s North Eastern region has long preoccupied many analysts and the Indian security establishment. The projected exercise would involve Pakistan launching an attack on Jammu and Kashmir. At the other end, China would engage Indian military in the latter’s Northeast with movement from Tibet, through Bhutan and via Alipurduar in the Jalpaiguri district and consequently cut-off what is referred to as the eastern chicken’s neck or the Shiliguri corridor. An Indian strategists’ nightmare come true.\textsuperscript{111}

The crucial Chinese objectives would be to capture a large amount of territory in northern Sikkim to secure a strategic hold. In tactical terms, this would translate into denying a launching pad to the Indian forces for an assault on Tibet. The other element of this thrust, it is projected,

\textsuperscript{108} Ibid. pp 6, 21
\textsuperscript{110} Ibid. p 35
would be centred on capturing areas in Bhutan, the ones traditionally claimed by the Chinese, thus posing a direct threat to the Shiliguri Corridor, a key item on the agenda.\textsuperscript{112}

The Shiliguri Corridor is an area of 12,203 square kilometers connecting mainland India with the outlying border States of the Northeast. As geographical configuration puts the North Eastern States of the country (India) at a disadvantage for a lack of strategic depth, considered necessary to provide a buffer, the tenuous lines of communication (that run through this corridor) connect mainland India to the Northeast. The corridor’s dimension extends lengthwise approximately 200 kms with a width varying between 20 and 60 kilometres.\textsuperscript{113}

No coherent and effective policies can be drawn up for the restoration of an abiding peace in, and for the enduring development of, the States of India’s Northeast unless they factor in these various unorthodox elements of the political, administrative and socio-economic conditions prevailing in this region. An obvious corollary is that the models and patterns of development that have been applied, or that have succeeded in, other parts of the country, cannot mechanically be extended to this region.\textsuperscript{114}

The prospects for peace in India’s Northeast remain mixed.\textsuperscript{115}

Growing and increasing indiscriminate external support to all terrorist groupings, irrespective of ideology or objective, particularly by Pakistan’s ISI, and the gradual cementing of linkages between terrorist groups across international borders create further barriers to peace. The problem is aggravated by the act that most such terrorist groupings operate out of safe havens in

\textsuperscript{112} Ibid, p 108.
\textsuperscript{113} Ibid. pp 107-108
neighbouring countries such as Bangladesh, Bhutan and Myanmar, and the weak regimes in these countries find it impossible to check such activities on their soil.  