Modern democracies are a new political form of society that incorporates both the liberal and democratic tradition in its wake. There is seemingly no relationship between the two distinct traditions. The liberal tradition emphasises rule of law, defence of human rights and respect for individual liberty, while the democratic tradition emphasises equality, identity between the governing and the governed and popular sovereignty. According to Mouffe, the latter, given present tendencies of states being subservient to trans-national finance and its demands, seems obsolete (Mouffe 2000: 2-3). The liberal notion of democratic societies creating moral and minimal consensus around basic institutions, in ambitious nation-building projects such as the Indian one, is often confronted with the problem of dealing with plurality of incompatible yet reasonable doctrines, especially the problem of citizenship vis-à-vis inclusion-exclusion of peoples marginalised in the vision of a nation. Democracy, especially in its flawed best, does not require a theory of truth and notions like un-conditionality and universal validity, but a series of practices and pragmatic moves aimed at persuading the governed to broaden the range of commitment to others to build a more inclusive community. In other words, the experience of democratic practice in regions like Nagaon and Karbi Anglong, does not only depend on one's insistence on a universal truth but a manifold of small, mundane practices that are aimed at encouraging democratisation of society at every level. In other words, when faced with a situation of plural structures of law, ownership and practice, modern democracies can take either route to consolidate itself. In complex cases where
ethnic identities are fused into colonial practices and histories, there are more than one way in which post-colonial identity formations take place. Given its geographical, political and historical distance from the centres of national power in the Indian sub-continent, Assam reflects the predicament of places that constitute the edge of imperial empires and thereafter get drawn into the borders of modern nation-states. On the one hand, democratisation leads to the expansion of republican ideals, and on the other (perhaps typical of the South Asian experience) it also leads to the manifestation of inequalities based on regional, class, ethnic and other cleavages. This manifestation often challenges the rules of established law and creates new cleavages in its wake. This, in a sense, is the paradox of the democratic transition from empire to sovereign nation-state among post colonial societies.

Democratisation therefore risks becoming part of rhetoric if one does take into account the fact that it cannot only be seen as the establishment of sets of governing institutions. It has to be, more fundamentally, the creation, extension and practice of social citizenship throughout a particular national territory (Grugel 1999: 11). Following Rousseau, Diamond and Plattner argue that the largeness of nations are the principle source of misfortunes and that democracy is but a system of institutionalised conflicts and competition that requires reliable means for managing conflicts peacefully and constitutionally (Diamond and Plattner 1994: ix-xxx). Such systems, when associated with large multi-ethnic, multi-national nation-states like India, are often faced with the need to introduce conflict reducing mechanisms that protect minority rights and power sharing. It is important to understand the existing structure of governance in Nagaon and Karbi Anglong, which have a multiplicity of legal structures and illegal practices, with a
predilection for the state to resort to military means and extend its control via a dominant development-oriented discourse.

As often alluded to in the course of the study, the use of force by the state is challenged by other actors. What is of utmost concern here is the aspect of domination that structures relations on a daily basis (Bourdieu 2000: 172-173). Since territory is one of the necessary conditions of the nation-state, it follows that in the geopolitical frontiers, processes of homogenisation and structuring ethnic, cultural and regional groupings are far more complex (Chaturvedi 2005: 5). In Northeast India, constitutional engineering has not produced the ideal, homogenous nation-state precisely because it remains an ethnically diverse borderland which belies the 

...ratic, racial and cultural homogeneity that is sought by many post-colonial modern nation-states (Wilson and Donnan 1998: 9-10). Recent assertions of a Hindu-nationalist discourse and politics in India further reinforce the policy penchant that lead to this form of homogenisation (Chandhoke 2004: 513).

Militarisation is a comprehensive process of reorganising the political space in any society. In the Northeast, it involves coercion, cooption and corruption of political processes. It encourages the politics exclusion retribution in place of reconciliation. The current armed struggle, involving ethnic militia and the India army/paramilitary, in the autonomous district of Karbi Anglong (in Assam) has been in the news since 2000 for brutal events of violence that involved inter-ethnic clashes, factional warfare and military engagement with the state. What is often forgotten is the fact that this politically explosive situation was preceded by a democratic movement for an autonomous state. While the movement (for an autonomous state) is still active, the state’s reluctance to
engage with the movement on equal terms result in the evolution of radical armed volunteer groups in the late 1980s and 1990s. Although none of the current political factions of the initial organisation demanding separate statehood would admit it, armed groups occupy an important position in the manner in which an ethnic community come around to articulating a political position. At the same time, the armed movement in the Luit (Brahmaputra) valley, far from having been subdued, has become more visible in its capacity to exact retribution and commit random acts of violence in the region.

The need to secure alternative ways of thinking through the political and economic deadlock in the Northeast can only be a welcome possibility for the future. Underlining the importance of the region as a bridge between South Asia, China and Southeast Asia, Baruah (2005) seeks to explore the ways and means to make India’s ‘Look East Policy’ more meaningful for the people of the Northeast. The possibilities of unbridled economic success stories, leading to a change in the insurgency/counter-insurgency view of the region, is a likelihood that can transform ethnic and class relations in the region. There are indications that such an effort is underway. However, the extent to which it addresses local experiences and histories is questionable proposition. Underdevelopment is an oft-repeated reason for the persistence of violence in the region. According to Fernandes, the economy of the region is almost totally dependent on the primary sector, even though there is no dearth of educated persons available for the secondary and tertiary sectors of the economy (Fernandes 2004). This predicament forms the underpinnings of sociologically suspect answers to the causes and effects of violence in the Northeast. Scholars and security analysts often advocate a softer approach in dealing with insurgency by concentrating on respect of development and economic
progress of the region (Das Gupta 1998). This discourse is repeated by most of the funded non-governmental organisations that have begun to undertake small, albeit conspicuous welfare and developmental efforts in the region. Often, ethnic political groups that are placed in an adversarial position against the state, make use of the same discourse of deprivation and denial. There is some truth in the linkages drawn between impoverishment and violence. Alienation of land and resources is cited as one of the major causes of conflict. Developmental projects, for example, cause displacement of (mainly) indigenous people and without adequate rehabilitation, become sources of new conflicts. According to critics of unsustainable development, major power projects that have been proposed as part of the development package for the region will cause severe loss to livelihoods, especially among indigenous groups who live on community owned lands. Since the law only recognises individual ownership (of land), such communities are placed in a disadvantageous position when it comes to bargaining for their rights as displaced peoples. Added to this, the loss of land and resources of subsistence farmers is often seen as the precursor to conflict. When such processes coincide with the unprecedented powers offered to the authorities to quell dissent, the language of threats and bans- enforced with guns by ethnic militia- are regularly used in the repertoire of resistance.

Armed struggles in the region have undergone a transformation as a part of the dynamics of militarisation. The diplomacy modes undertaken by the National Socialist Council of Nagalim (NSCN); the ceasefires negotiated by the Dima Halam Daoga (DHD) and the United Peoples Democratic Solidarity (UPDS); or the tentative-yet-recalcitrant position of the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) have all undergone serious
facelifts and changes in engaging with the state. On the other hand, given the popular uprising against the Indian army and paramilitary, as well as the increasing public opinion urging the government to start political discussions with the armed opposition groups, the state too has changed its counter-insurgency strategies. It would be sociologically reckless to claim that the October 2004 bomb explosions marked the proverbial Rubicon for armed struggles in the region (as media reports would suggest), or for that matter that the car rally has heralded a new era of connectivity and democratic interaction between the ethnic communities of the region and their Southeast Asian kin. Far from it, it seems that all the issues raised in the past year - the repeal of the Armed Forces (Special) Powers Act; the future of the Indo-Naga peace parleys; the ceasefires in North Cachar Hills and Karbi Anglong - will be relegated to the back-burner in favour of politically expedient solutions of retaining a dangerous status-quo in the region. Armed forces personnel now engage in welfare work in places they once scoured for insurgents. Simultaneously, armed actions to liquidate members of certain armed opposition groups who take shelter in neighbouring countries have gained ground since the joint action of the Indian and Royal Bhutanese Army in December 2003. Similar actions are asked of Burma and Bangladesh, even as Indian officials negotiate the logistics of policing the borders with their neighbours. Such militarised conditions raise fundamental questions about the kind of freedoms its citizens are allowed to enjoy. The militarised frontiers are also essential in maintaining and mapping a national/sub-national/ethno-national territory. The examples of the Karbi reaction to autonomy regimes, or the uneasy relations fostered within Naga society following the creation of the state of Nagaland, are cases at hand. They allude towards a peculiar mode of conflict-resolution where
grievances and civil disorder are seen as the inevitable consequence of the region’s geographical and existential distance from India. It finds a prominent place in the discourse on funds and governance. In short, they subvert the whole notion of citizenship by the perpetuation of territorial violence, which encourage financial corruption while producing “marginal, expendable and vulnerable people” (Ludden 2003b: 1057-1078).

Hence, concepts of citizenship are far from being embedded within notions of justice and fairness in the Northeast. In the interplay of ethnic relations, one sees that the interplay of political strategies over manipulating land and identity lead to significant transgressions in rules of governance and administration. The state’s choice of language to produce political and economic relations, create boundaries and assign powers impact specific culture and identity within a state in multiple ways (Carens 2000: 8-14). As the previous chapters try to show, the use of a flawed, but explicitly stated, immigration policy produces a specific kind of political response from actors in the field. The wealth of data that shows the emerging conflicts over land and identity during the colonial period point towards the inability of the colonial state to evolve a political language of inclusion. To give it the benefit of doubt, perhaps that was never its mandate. The colonial state actually stood outside the realm of the moral and political community in Assam, inasmuch as it was neither a locus of shared cultural identity where members were able to participate and subjected to common institutions, nor an arbiter of the greater common good (Carens ibid). It was a classical empire with fluid borders and definite frontiers. However, in the post colonial period, one sees the shared genealogy of some of the practices of the state reproduce the logic of exclusion within communities in both Nagaon and Karbi Anglong. For example, in the case of Karbi Anglong, the
constitutional architecture of the autonomy regime limits the exercise of autonomy to subjects on the basis of identity, thereby creating a peculiar condition where the Karbi are politically dominant (in the council) but economically marginalised—perhaps as much as those they share the economic and ecological spaces with. Hence the logic of majority control impedes the growth of accountability where political and economic disparities between settlers and indigenous people, between indigenous elite and peasants and between different indigenous communities are seldom discussed in public but continue to determine the political activities at a daily level.

To this end, the experiences in Srimala points towards a different situation, where the representation of “otherness” is integrally related to the representation of the “self”. This, it bears reiterating, is a consequence of political choices that were made by (or induced from) the inhabitants of the village. With expanded interactions and intercultural influences over time, people interpret others and themselves in a bewildering diversity of idioms (Hallam and Street 2000: 1-10). In the articulation from below, where people are pushed into exclusionary spaces, inarticulate identities (like that of second and third generation immigrants) are quickly made the subject of state discourse. Hence, in Nagaon one sees a developmental thrust towards developing the ‘chars’, or the forest areas where cadastral surveys have only recently been carried out (as in Srimala). This leads to a positioning of the self that take on a metaphoric meaning in designating the outside in various communities. It is a metaphor used to relate to the state and established law, where often the ‘outsider’ becomes a synonym for identifying alien state machinery in tandem in tandem with business establishments, all of which stand against the interest of the indigenous peoples/peasants and those who feel sidelined by its policies. The legal/
constitutional discourse emanating from the state, projects dominant identity as the only legitimate identity in the course of ethnic contests over land, social stratification and identity, from where smaller identity formations are forced into negotiating for their rights from a lower position. The ‘outsider’ (in Nagaon), or the ‘settler’ (in Karbi Anglong) encode the apprehensions of indigenous persons and a politicised peasantry, on the unreserved extension of citizenship rights in the ethnic spaces (Hemprek, homeland, and even to Swadhin (Free) Asom) in the region.

In the course of the study, ethnographic data from Karbi Anglong showed how local ecological landscapes are transformed within the span of a decade. In Nagaon, it goes without saying that the ecological landscapes has changed. However, from all accounts, this change took place at least four decades ago and more critically in the early twentieth century. Hence, the use of historical and archival data was warranted for the study of Nagaon. In the villages of Karbi Anglong, this change cannot be unearthed from archives. It is a matter of everyday politics that is recalled by local actors who were involved in initiating processes of change in the era. In Hanlokrok, (and Kheroni subdivision) where the Karbis share the land with other ethnic communities, they are still the nominal owners of the land according the legal fiction that supports this claim. As mentioned in the course of the preceding chapters, this causes resentment on every front locally. Bijoy, a young Dimasa sharecropper (who also owns some land), and has since had to relocate to Nagaon after the ethnic conflict in 2005-6, says:

“I went to primary school with my Karbi friends. You have been there, haven’t you? I wish I could say that we were enemies then because of the way in which we were thrown out, but the truth is, we were not. Like (other) youth, we also waited for market day, bullied the
Bengalis...now they (Karbis) want us to say that the fight started because DHD has a camp nearby. It was there from before, and they were quiet...now, all I can think of is the trees and bamboo that they cut down, and the police guards who watch us as we cut our paddy and return to the camp...”

This captures the poignancy of human relations and the manner in which they are often subjected to different tests by governmental apathy, shortcomings of a political community that has a limited repertoire of strategies to mobilise support and to sheer economic marginalisation. Bijoy and other Dimasa residents of Hanlokrok barely escaped with their lives in November 2005, after their Karbi neighbours had warned them of UPDS (Karbi militia) cadre who were on their way to the village to exact revenge for the massacre of Karbi bus passengers on October 15, 2005 allegedly by members of a Dimasa ethnic militia. The limited, though important solidarity that was evident in the political narratives of the autonomous state demand movement and protests against army excesses, strains to be heard in Bijoy’s statement. What he feels betrayed about is the fact that his fruit growing trees, bamboo grove and house are no longer there. His ire and anger is greatest when he refers to the manner in which the trees in his private compound was cut at the roots, and how he can’t bear to see his (Karbi) friends in the eye when he and other Dimasas (of the village) are escorted in to cut their paddy. When asked if the paddy growing on his land has been stolen, he acknowledges that it is still there. Yet, he

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167 Bijoy (name changed), was displaced from his village in November 2005 and this interview was held in a relief camp near Hojai on January 16, 2006.
168 Ironically, both DHD (Dima Halam Daoga) and UPDS are supposed to be engaged in a ceasefire with the government of India. Obviously, this ceasefire does not extend to members of other ethnic communities.
reiterates, it will be a long time before he or other Dimasa villagers from Hanlokrok return and rebuild their homes\textsuperscript{169}.

In Karbi Anglong, the political community has not made a major effort to be inclusive, especially after the divisions and splits within the ASDC. Where there was a concerted effort to include different ethnic groups in a political project, the splits and divisions in the party meant that a radical, civic-identity based alternative was made weaker. It would be stretching things too far to say that this factor alone contributed to ethnic identity being the preferred mode of political mobilisation, especially when one has tried to point to other factors that feed into ethnic relations in the region. However, it is indicative of the kind of turn that politics can take in the absence of a radical alternative.

\textsuperscript{169} Some Dimasa families who had been displaced from Hanlokrok have bought plots of land in Hojai subdivision (in Nagaon district). Those who are not as well off contemplate selling their lands to others and buying land elsewhere.
schema, ecological systems undergo transformations that, in the cases chosen, exacerbate the conflicts between communities.

With a view to the decline in inter-ethnic violence between indigenous peasants and settlers in Nagaon after the bloody clashes of 1979 – 1984, it seems that the Nagaon peasants’ ideological and organizational alignment with the Assamese nationalist movement has had a positive impact on the level of violence between the erstwhile antagonists. In Karbi Anglong, on the other hand, the class principle failed to catch on. Instead, the anti-settler movement radicalized to the point where an underground ethnic insurgency is trying to evict the settlers by means of force from the indigenous homeland (Hemprek). The case study thus bears out that certain ideological and political alignments – namely those concerned with class – seem to have the potential to mitigate environmental conflicts by reconciling the contestants and re-defining the conflicts as non-communal. It is difficult to forge functioning class alliances between indigenous communities and peasant migrants or indeed between peasants and other classes placed within the same economic strata (Debray 1975: 126- 141). Therefore, the sub-nationalist movement’s programmatic and practical solutions to perceived migration-induced scarcities of land are of great theoretical significance as they seemed to have diffused settler-indigenous tensions.

In the light of these processes, it would seem logical to accept that certain premises upon which colonial empires were transformed into modern nation-states have become contentious. The British Empire was portioned mainly on the basis of religious communities (van Schendel ibid. 25-33). This has to reiterated against the fact that previous plans to divide the Empire along river basins, hill-valley schemes were deemed
meaningless as utilitarian bonds (of highlanders-lowlanders, or upstream- downstream users of resources) came second to identity bonds (of Hindu-Muslim, Bengali- Assamese) (Chapman 2000. 165-252). Fifty odd years since the events, in districts like Nagaon and Karbi Anglong, the effects of the transformation of empire are still being played out on a daily basis.

In November 2004, the prime minister of India inaugurated the Indo-ASEAN car rally in Guwahati. The event generated a sense of optimism about the future of the region. The prime minister announced that his government was committed to peace and more trade with Southeast Asia through the Northeast. It is presumed that with India’s “Look East Policy”, the Northeast will soon be transformed into a hub of economic activity with the promise of unbridled commercial success (with trade to Southeast Asia). These issues soundly rest on the expectation of a radical transformation of governance and democratic practice in the region. The “Look East” policy also indicates an official commitment to encouraging regional ties, in turn with attempts to transcend existing arrangements by granting ‘corporate autonomy’ in the form of collective rights over cultural and political rights to ethnic communities within a compact area (Ghai 2000: 9). Such arrangements would change the current discourse of settler and native by providing legal guarantees that are respected by constitutional law within a region (implicating more than one nation-state).

In terms of labour flows, a regionalist arrangement would benefit from greater transparency on population transfers from within and outside existing nation-states.

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171 Corporate autonomy arrangements are regional in the sense that it transcends territorial arrangements of existing nation-states and combines traditional federalism with corporate shares in communitarian vetoes and power. Cf. Ghai, 2000: 9.
Recent public boycott of so-called illegal Bangladeshis\footnote{See Sanjoy Hazarika, “North by North East: SMS on Bangladeshis”, in The Statesman, May 23, 2005. URL: <http://www.thestatesman.org/page_news.php?clid=14&theme=&usrsess=1&id=77736> (Accessed May 23, 2005).} and the attacks on Hindi-speaking migrants in 2003-4 in most parts of the Brahmaputra valley, underline the need to involve nation-states and regional units (like states in India, districts in Nepal and divisions in Bangladesh) in creating comprehensive statements of population transfers locally and making them available for scrutiny. Such inter-state measures could build the basis of a comprehensive policy on migration within regions (Hazarika 2000). Such measures could only be envisaged at the level of the state, where political compulsions and greater need for autonomous development of peripheral region (from political centres) becomes an explicit agenda of the state. The other tool for extension of local governance (not autonomy) - the Panchayati Raj Bill- has been extended to Nagaon but not to Karbi Anglong. As briefly mentioned in section 5, critics see this measure as a bureaucratic cover for limited, ill-conceived extension of electoral politics to the rural areas (Nesiah 2000: 67). At least in the case of Karbi Anglong, where legal plurality (Sixth Schedule, community law, state law) co-exist in an inchoate form, an imposition of centralised bureaucratic tools for devolving powers, would only create further problems.

Within exiting policy, it is clear that measures like the autonomous districts (under the Sixth Schedule) begin with a political disadvantage, inasmuch as there are no real, tangible tools of exercising autonomous agency for the indigenous people. In Karbi Anglong, there is a belief that democratic progress can only be achieved if it is linked to acceptance of traditional institutions of autonomy (Athparia 1998: 209-14). As one has tried through the discussion on traditional institutions and reconstitution of ideas of a
homeland (Hemprek), there exists plural legal, political and cultural contexts that are incompatible with doctrines that based on one functional element of autonomy-the autonomous district with Sixth Schedule status. On the part of the state, if there is a commitment to assess the effectiveness of the Sixth Schedule and the working of the existing autonomous district councils, then it would be prudent to incorporate a theory of 'corporate autonomy' for different indigenous groups within Karbi Anglong. In principle, this would enforce a discussion on power-sharing arrangements among native/indigenous groups and devolve greater powers to the council. Such an assessment has to also take into consideration the importance of carrying out cadastral surveys in the context of land-alienation and land-based conflicts in the autonomous district (Bhattacharyya 1995:37).

5.2. Alternative Policy Frames

The two districts have followed different administrative trajectories and yet there are similarities that cannot be ignored. The early history of migration into Nagaon reveals that the state, natives and settlers were implicated in the politics of migration. The debate surrounding migration into Nagaon were bitterly contested but were subjected to public scrutiny to which the state had to respond. Their reactions and strategies, far from being uniform, were responses to immediate concerns. The ill-fated line system, tribal belts and excluded areas, may in retrospect be considered to be projects that failed (Bordoloi ibid). However, they still reflect the local tensions that resulted in administrative changes. Significantly, conflicts between natives and settlers were contained during the colonial period. Even after the partitioning of the British Empire, the potentially dangerous borders between Bengal and Assam did not witness violence (Mansergh, Moon et al
1981). As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the colonial state actually stood outside the realm of the moral and political community in Assam. However, in the post colonial period, one sees some of the practices of the state reproduce the logic of exclusion within communities in both Nagaon and Karbi Anglong. The only manner in which a community can lay claim to being citizens, or being part of the state, is by excluding others while claiming their rights as citizens within a constitutional setting (as scheduled tribes, minorities, regional groups).

One sees these issues reappear in the local settings as well. The use of the constitutional language to engage in local politics has resulted in the reproduction of ethnic hierarchies and violence. There have been two distinct attempts to move away from this trend. The first has been the reiteration of an instrumental class solidarity (Srimala, Nagaon) that has checked the further social divisions by using local conditions as the starting point for collaboration between different communities. The second has been highlighting the contradictions of existing autonomy regimes in securing the right over land, resources and modes of development for different communities (Karbi Anglong). Under the latter conditions, universal civil rights are placed sharply in contrast to the inability of constitutional discourse to account for increasing polarisation between different ethnic groups who share a common resource base. Both trends occur within a highly militarised polity. It is true that changes are being discussed on a regional scale (Baruah 2005). However, such discussions need to be rooted within a local experience in order to prevent the replication of failures that are the result of central planning (Scott 1998:311-16). Making peripheral regions subject to a discourse that does not have adequate understanding of local conditions, other than one determined by strategic
military and conflict managerial concerns, will undoubtedly lead to further conflicts in central Assam.

5.2a. Some concrete possibilities

This thesis started with asking a few core questions on the manner in which land, class and ethnicity come into play in conflicts between ethnic groups in parts of the world that have undergone a fundamental transition from being imperial frontiers to units of a sovereign, federal (post-colonial) state. Surely, over time, the resource that is most seriously contested and fought over in both Nagaon and Karbi Anglong is territory. Recalling Gleditsch’s (1998) observations that territory is something that is constantly being shown as a factor in armed conflicts, environmental conflicts in Assam have shown how history, ambitious social engineering projects and contemporary events merge in everyday politics. Population figures, demographic change and the creation of “otherness”, create a discourse that is built on standardized responses to political questions of governance and citizenship. On the basis of the evidence collected in the course of this study, class and ethnicity do not appear as mutually antagonistic modes of political mobilization that stand out on their own. Instead, they appear as artefacts that are shaped by state policies and an uncritical reliance on a political vocabulary that does not pay enough attention to pathways of existence. Class and identity, in conformity with Calic’s (op. cit.) contention, become yet another strand in the conflict bundle. The meta-narrative of conflict and insurgency in Assam, threatens to make the daily instances of cooperation (between different ethnic groups); the nuances in the use of language; the outcomes of seemingly innocuous developmental dreams and sociological/ psychological
reasons behind the articulation of people-hood (in distinct opposition to celebration of citizenship), processes that will slip away from academic discussions.

In the light of the above discussion, certain concrete alternative policy frames may be suggested for the two districts:

(a) **De-militarisation** The foremost policy measures with a view to mitigate the conflicts in the two districts have to be rooted in principles of demilitarisation. As long as the issues of migration-induced conflicts and sub-national aspirations are dealt with militarily, the problems will intensify with successive ethnic groups feeling deprived of 'real' security and thereby taking to arms. Demilitarisation does not merely imply the withdrawal of the Indian army and paramilitary and periodic ceasefires with different armed opposition groups, it fundamentally implies political engagement with dissidence and protests. It also implies the willingness to subject past policies to the test of judicial inquiry and redress in order to create democratic institutions and processes for reconciliation.

(b) **Reassess autonomy arrangements:** Existing federal and autonomy arrangements need to be subjected to serious reassessment in the light of policy orientation towards a more regional order ("Look East" policy). Such an assessment would include eventual incorporation of 'corporate autonomy' arrangements for all indigenous groups within a wider territorial arrangement. The autonomy arrangements should also have a regional character, where groups migrating from other areas are allowed adequate social and political safeguards without alienating native economic and political resources. Exploring notions of multi-level citizenship within federal and regional arrangements could be a
possible entry point to engage with problems arising out of a citizen/denizen polarisation in the districts. In keeping with principles of good governance that state that smaller, federal units are better suited to manage natural resources (as opposed to large centralised states), it bears repetition that mere devolution of limited executive powers on an ad-hoc basis is not the essence of democratization and better governance (Føllesdal 2006). If anything, the lack of transparency and inability of autonomy regimes to redress deep-rooted grievances and sense of injustice (among the indigenous communities) need to further highlighted in the search for alternatives.

(c) **Nurturing cultural differences:** Rather than be constrained by a discourse of integration/assimilation and loss of identity, community-based cultural differences could be encouraged. In many places in Karbi Anglong, the need for addressing indigenous historiography as independent of dominant representations is often highlighted. Given the fact that the ‘tribal’ voice is conspicuously muted in a national and regional rendition of history, community based cultural differences could be the basis for enriching regional history with hitherto marginalised voices.

(d) **Encouraging alternative land-use patterns:** Monoculture and cash crops have been encouraged as an alternative to traditional food crops. The experiences of the plantation sector in upper Assam and experiments with cash crops in the 1980s have been regarded as the cornerstones of introducing agricultural changes that lead to profits for farmers and revenue for the government. This, however, has had a detrimental effect on local economies and livelihoods. The urge to change land-use patterns has resulted in several ill-fated experiments in Karbi Anglong, leaving local farmers without the adequate food and means of livelihood. The implicit idea that swidden cultivation is backward and
needs to give way to other modes of agriculture has to be tempered with the knowledge that it is rooted to the culture and economy of most indigenous (and native) groups in the region. Alternatives that seek to replace this repository of cultural wealth and knowledge with market and profit oriented values need to be approached with caution.

(e) *Encouraging a human rights political discourse:* There are at least two reasons why this discourse is absolutely essential. First, its absence has resulted in the systematic devaluation of human life and victims of violence have continued to suffer as a result. Second, its presence could help temper intransigent and often violent identity politics to one that supports plurality and respect for others. The rights discourse would also help put discussions of autonomy within a rights-based perspective. All too often, autonomy arrangements as they are constructed and implemented in political discourse, lack the capacity to demonstrate that justice has been done to those who seemingly benefit from autonomy from dominant territorial/political units.