CHAPTER III

Disintegration of Assam and creation of New States

In the year 1947 after India gained Independence from British, the country entered another phase and this had been highlighted in the speech delivered by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, where he said, “At the stroke of the midnight hour, while the world sleeps, India will awake to life and freedom”\(^1\). This was rightly so, as the whole country including Assam played an active role in the country’s freedom against the British. Political awareness had spread right across the country. Assam too played an important role in the freedom movement and both the plains as well as the hill people contributed to its success.

Even before Independence the Indian Statutory Commission, 1930, made recommendations ‘for reviewing and, if possible, resettling the provincial boundaries’, and that race, religion, economic interest, geographical contiguity should be factors, which govern redistribution\(^2\).

---

\(^1\) This is a quote from Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru’s speech to the Indian Constituent Assembly New Delhi, August 14, 1947.

Moreover, regarding redistribution of states, the Linguistic Provinces Commission of the Constituent Assembly also known as Dar Commission from July to December 1948, felt that emphasis should be on administrative convenience with stress on history, geography, economy and cultural mores apart from, of course, homogeneity of language³.

The Ministry of Home by a Resolution appointed the States Reorganisation Commission (SRC) on 29th December 1953 to examine the reorganization of States of the Indian Union. The Government of Assam gave a memorandum to SRC to maintain status quo. The Commission after much deliberation and considering fact that it was a border state recommended that the new State of Assam will include all the existing areas and include even Tripura⁴. In regard to the demand for a separate Hill State on a memorandum submitted by Williamson Sangma the Commission was opposed to the opinion as the hill districts were not according to them capable of mobilization, despite grants from the Centre. Also, apart from the Nagas, Garo, Khasi and Jaintia Hills, none other tribes were in favour of separation from Assam⁵. Therefore, in independent India the state of Assam remained as it was, in the erstwhile,

---

⁵ Ibid., pp. 4 – 5.
province of Assam, except for minus the district of Sylhet, which then became a part of Pakistan. SRC were of the view that the Inner Line Regulations was introduced ostensibly in order to prevent economic exploitation of the hill people and thereby discourage undue interference, though actually this was not so. The British had hoped that beyond the Inner Line tribes should be independent and manage their own affairs. By 1875, it extended upto Darrang and Lakhimpur frontier, more on economic consideration rather than political. Later it came to an effective ‘mechanism to protect and preserve tribal identity and culture’.

Gradually, the emergence of the middle class in the hills, which was mainly due to the spread of western education, Christianity and a changed economy, also led to the growth of independent development. That is why when a section of chauvinistic Assamese sought to hasten the process of extension of

---

8 Foreign Proceedings, Political – A, 1872, May, Nos. 16 – 34. Aitchison to the Secretary Government of Bengal, 30 January.
9 Ibid., 117 – 118.
10 B. Datta Roy, ed., *The Emergence and role of Middle Class North-East India*, 1983, Intro. V.
Assamese influence in the neighbouring hills\textsuperscript{11}, they became alarmed of losing their culture, language and even their main prop namely land\textsuperscript{12}.

The Central Government has always been sensitive to the interest of the hill people and so after independence a Hill sub-committee was formed in the year 1948 under the Chairmanship of G.N. Bardoloi\textsuperscript{13}. The aspiration of the hill people and their right to manage their own affairs according to their social customs and usages were all highlighted by this Committee and this was honoured by the Government of India through the Six Schedule of the Indian Constitution, by which a large amount of the autonomy was granted to the hill people in the form of the District Councils\textsuperscript{14}. These District Councils were entrusted with legislative powers and therefore, could make laws for administration on some subjects relating to their area.

There in the interior of the hills of Assam, particularly in Naga and Lushai hills the process of assimilation was minimal\textsuperscript{15}, as they were very sensitive and

\textsuperscript{13} S.L. Baruah, A Comprehensive History of Assam, 1985, p. 649.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., p. 649.
feared exploitation, though in other parts of India the tribals had assimilated to
great extent with the life and culture of plains people\textsuperscript{16}.

The Nagas were the first among the tribes to demand separation. Virile and
freedom-loving, the Nagas demanded a sovereign Nagaland. To carry on this
political forum, the Naga National Council or NNC as it is more commonly
known, was started in the year 1946. The Nagas felt that Naga Hills should be
returned to them as its original free status after the British, who once conquered
a part of Naga Hills and left after India gained independence\textsuperscript{17}. The NNC was
divided, while one group wanted to continue with India, the more extremists
elements called for complete independence. The extremists under the leadership
of A.Z. Phizo even declared independence on 14\textsuperscript{th} August, 1947. Despite
criticism, Nehru’s government decided to grant Nagas full-fledged statehood
but did not concede to the demand for independence from India as it would be
a reversal of the process of unity and integration of the country\textsuperscript{18}.

In 1963 Nagaland became India’s sixteenth state. Its territories included the
Naga Hills District comprising mainly of non-Naga areas of Nagaon District
and slowly acquiring Lotha and Ao areas along with plains areas of Sibsagar

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., p. 10.
\textsuperscript{17} M.A. Alemchiba, \textit{A Brief Historical Account of Nagaland, Kohima}, 1970, p. 179.
21.
BANGLADESH

Nongpoh & Baghmara are the district headquarters of Ri-Bhoi and South Garo Hills respectively. These have been created in June 1992. The boundaries of the same have not been shown here.
District upto the revenue survey boundary. At present, it also includes a homogenous group of areas occupied by various Naga tribes. Dimapur mouza, which belonged to Assam was transferred to Naga Hills in the year 1913 for providing rail head and control of the road from Dimapur to Kohima. These territories became the part of the State of Nagaland including the Tuensang Area, which again was a part of Assam and then transferred to the new state in 1963.

Meghalaya, was the next to become an independent state on 21st January 1972. It comprised of the erstwhile United Khasi and Jaintia Hills District and Garo Hills District of Assam. The Khasi and Jaintia Hills are situated on the west of the Naga Hills. They belong to the same tribal community and their society is matriarchal. Earlier, the Jaintias were ruled by a Raja, while the Khasis used to have a sort of confederation of small oligarchical republics of which all members had a role in the control of the confederates. Garo Hills lies on the west of Khasi Hills. This area as the name suggests is inhabited by Garos. The British had annexed Jayantia Hills in 1835, Khasi Hills in 1833 and Garo Hills in 1869, which then became an independent district with Tura as its headquarters. Meghalaya became a full fledged state bounded by Kamrup and

---

20 Ibid., p. 301.
Nagaon district on the North, Cachar and Bangladesh on South and finally, on the east by North Cachar Hills and Nagaon.

Seventeen years later Government of India granted statehood to Mizoram on the year 20th February 1987. The cause of the Mizos were taken up by Mizo National Union, who were isolated and neglected. They felt that they were never a part of India. Also, Assamisation brought about by the official language issue dissatisfied the Mizos.

Mizoram lies between Burma on the east and Bangladesh on the west, covering an estimated area of 21,087 sq. kms\(^{23}\). The inhabitants of state are mainly Lushais and Kukis. Though, they do have differences, they are ‘described as allied tribes belonging to the same group’\(^{24}\). According to Mr. R.B. McCabe, ICS, the then Political Officer of North Lushai Hills, the word ‘Lushai’ means ‘Headcutter’. The British had placed the whole of Lushai Hills under the Chief Commissioner of Assam on 1st April 1898. The internal administration of the villages were left to various Chiefs\(^{25}\). After independence Lushai Hills came to be known as Mizo Hills district in 1954 by an Act of Parliament and then it was given the status of an Union Territory in 1972 and finally it gained statehood.

As notified under Notification No. 2106 AP dated March 9th, 1933 it describes


\(^{24}\) B.C. Chakravorty, *British Relations with the Hill Tribes since 1858*, 1964, p. 47.

\(^{25}\) B.C. Chakravorty, *British Relations with the Hill Tribes since 1858*, 1964, p. 47.
the Inner Line of Lushai Hills, which was also the district boundary of Lushai Hills and it coincides with the description of southern boundary of Cachar district. The Assam – Mizoram boundary runs along the old Cachar – Lushai Hills inter-district boundary\(^{26}\).

Finally Arunachal Pradesh too gained statehood. The boundary between Assam and Arunachal Pradesh runs from tri-junction of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and Bhutan at Bhairabkundo on the west bank of Dhansiri river to the tri-junction of Assam, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh on the Teok river. It has a length of nearly 704.8 kms. The district of Darrang, Sonitpur, Lakhimpur, Dhemaji, Tinsukia and Sibsagar of Assam adjoin Arunachal Pradesh\(^{27}\). The state today comprises the administrative units which were once known as North-East Frontier Agency (NEFA) formulated in 1954 after India gained independence. The units were as follows – Kameng Frontier Division, Subansiri Frontier Division, Tirap Frontier, Siang Frontier Division and Lohit Frontier Division. Till the year 1957, Tuensang Frontier Division was also a part of it but then was re-transferred to Naga Hills District. The inhabitants of Arunachal Pradesh are primarily, the tribes of the frontier hills namely Abors, Bhutiyas, Daflas, Khamtis, Miris, Mishmis and Singphos\(^{28}\).

\(^{27}\) Ibid., pp. 211, 212.
\(^{28}\) Ibid., p. 205.
Creation of these new states in the North-East was evident because the tribes had no affinity as such with the plains people and only for administrative purpose it was attached to Assam. The tribal people were always freedom loving people, who valued their own identity. This has been clearly highlighted by the Mizos, when they said, ‘The need for tribal people is survival as a tribal and development is our secondary issue’\textsuperscript{29}. The British, who were shrewd administrators understood this sentiment thus, by the Government of India Act 1919 left the administration of tribal areas totally under the Governor. Infact, in the Simon Commission report it is clearly stated they want ‘security of land tenure and freedom in the pursuit of their ancestral customs’.

After independence, the growth of Assamese chauvinism hastened the fragmentation of Assam. This process of ‘Assamisation’, which was extended vigorously in the neighbouring hills\textsuperscript{30}, alienated the tribes and thus, tension increased. Another grievance of the tribes was the Official Language Act (XXIII, 1960), which declared Assamese as the official language in the Assam Valley and in Cachar, Bengali was the official language. In the hills the task of selecting the language was left to the District Councils, while the then Prime Minister, Pandit Nehru also made it clear that Assamese would not be imposed on non-Assamese. But yet this was not acceptable to the tribals. They felt that

\textsuperscript{29} The Sentinel, 3\textsuperscript{rd} September, 1994.
\textsuperscript{30} M. Sharma, ‘Assamese Middle Class and Integration; The Role of Asom Sahitya Sabha’, NEIHA, 1988, 430f.
if they remain with Assam, their destiny lay in the hands of the Assamese. As the estrangement between two people grew even the introduction of the Tribal Affairs Advisory Council, which was for improvement in the relationship with the tribals and, thereby, forego the idea of formation of an independent state was of not much use. So, the new states emerged and Assam today is not what it used to be before. Creation of these states have led to many issues and the primary one definitely being the boundary issue.

31 N. Rustomji, Imperilled Frontiers, 1983, p. 82.