Conclusion
In the whole tangle, the ethnic question came at the centre stage which perpetuated the tensions. Mizoram, like any other state, is a multi ethnic society, a fact the majority group in the state cannot easily bear with grace. Where the multi ethnic situation is accepted with grace, there are less chances of continued turmoils. In North Cachar Hills of Assam, the ethnic strifes are engineered by the denial of the multi ethnic situation in the district. Already, the Chakmas, the Maras and the Lais have their autonomous district councils in Mizoram, the new claimants are the Reangs. While the other three mentioned above are organizationally well entrenched in their areas held by them, the Reangs were, in the beginning, unorganized when the issue came to the fore for settlement. The Government of India was generous in their grant of statehood to the people who saw bloody turmoils in the sixties, carried almost to the end of the eighties.

In the wake of statehood granted to the people, there came the extensions of development schemes in different shapes. The development activities do not affect the capital of the state only, it need lands in the periphery. The Government is willing to create new areas of development. In the west, Mamit district acquired the attention of the Government and the lands were sought to be earmarked for the extension of the reserved forest and it was never
asked whether the acquired lands were the jhum lands of a tribe who farmed it for generations.

When the population was small in comparison to the availability of lands around, there was less conflict. But the modern concept of development is a pervasive one, detriment to the interests of the smaller ethnic groups who are not accustomed with the aggressive nature of the operators of development. Along with the extension of forest in the area originally inhabited by a small ethnic group, the urge to exploit the resources of the area occupied the minds of the operators.

The development of education became another urge which accommodated a good number of educated youth from the majority community. The smaller ethnic group began to get the taste of education through another language, the language of the majority. It did not become a bone of contention between the majority and a small minority group. Education does not divide but when the lands are grabbed in large measures, it hurts them as it touched their livelihood. Already, the Mizoram Government was wary of the struggle with the Hmar insurgents. When a settlement in that respect was arrived at, the Reang issue begins to worry them.

The Reangs were rather forced to climb down from the demand of an Autonomous District Council to the Special
Development Project which could not see the implementation stage as the parties disagreed on the details of the scheme. The development induced aggressiveness shown by the officials had not counted the needs of a smaller ethnic community. It could be always doubted the efficacy of an official settlement unless there is a political guarantee attached to it. The refugees could not be assured with the official arrangements without their representatives putting a brake on the official enthusiasm in the proposed implementation of the scheme. The targeted beneficiaries might remain in the waiting for the benefits. The intensity of their feelings are expressed when their return journey to Mizoram is postponed and they do not know what is the future for them. It also exhibits their strong feelings of deprivation, harbouring a sense of alienation from the lands where they lived once.

In an advanced society, the members could show the tokens of identity easily but the Reangs lived in the fringe areas of a state never cared to retain any kind of documents to prove their identities. A modern state demands proofs which the camp dwellers could hardly show to the satisfaction of the officials. If some of the camp dwellers could show any, the officials disputed their claims quickly. The impasse on the identification continues.
In any kind of bargains, the organizational unity begets strength and the Reangs struggle in Mizoram exhibits diverse groups of negotiators who do not show their unity very often. A satisfied group after arriving at a certain deal with the officials do not show much concern towards their brethren languishing in the camps. Everybody feels a quick solution of the problem and there should be the mediators to solve the impasse. As it happens in many places where relief materials are distributed, there is a discrepancy between what is shown in the records and the camp dwellers obtained. Such records are not very genuine and the scandals in distribution can only be expected. The officials of the Government are those ‘dole distributors’. The camp is, after all, a temporary shelter for the people in distress, it should not be made to look a permanent settlement for some people.

The repatriation of the Reangs should be worked on under the direct supervision of the Government of India. In such a situation, the packages are announced and a responsible agency is given the charge of distribution. In the context of the Reangs, there is a demand that the central agencies should be involved in the distribution of the packages. There is obvious absence of trust between the State Government and the Reang refugees. The Central Government must be pro-active and should not behave merely as a
referee. If the attitude of the officials in any state is analysed properly, they generally prefer a state of status quo and they do not easily find ways for the conflict resolution. There are some reasons behind their attitude. The stalemate in the repatriation means the continuation of the camps and the camps are supplied with rations and other ancillary items for which the officials are responsible. They handle the resources for the camp dwellers, of course under the declared policies of the Government. Many of the relief camps set up after the independence for the refugees became the sites of scandals on the distribution of relief materials. In the Tripura relief camps, such apprehensions cannot be ruled out if the relief camps take nearly the permanent shape. The stalemate helps some of the officials who want themselves to be benefited from the provision of supplies. One people's misery becomes the source of income for the other.

For the Government of Mizoram, there was a tacit eagerness to enlist the surrender of BNLF and BLFM (the Reangs ex-militant organizations). But these outfits failed to persuade the Mizoram Government to accept all the camp dwellers without any reservation. Their kinsmen in the camps do not enjoy the treatment, they got from the Government. The ex-militant outfit (BLFM) left their families in camps who continued to live on doles. It is alleged
that the militants returned to Mizoram to get decent monetary assistance announced by the Government.

The surrender of BNLF was preceded by a historic agreement in which they were assured by the Government to some sort of facilities including the Special Development Project in the Reang inhabited areas of Mizoram. During the course of negotiations with the Government of Mizoram, a rift developed between the members of BNLF and the NLFT.

It is to be mentioned that BNLF had nexus with other outfits like NLFT and NSCN (IM). But after sometimes, disagreement arose between them due to sudden change in BNLF leadership. The new leadership was not acceptable to NLFT mainly because the new leaders of BNLF tried to encroach upon their areas of influence. The old leadership in BNLF was in continuous contacts with NLFT people with whom they had personal rapport but it was suddenly cut off due to the change of leadership of BNLF. NLFT totally altered their policies and programmes towards BNLF as they felt that the latter was not cooperating with them in implementing the joint agreement on the operational manoeuvres. In the Bangladesh hideouts, the two outfits came into deadly conflicts which unnerved BNLF. The alien conditions were not conducive to their manoeuvres. They had rethinking on the manoeuvres. In India, the operation
invited the wrath of the Indian army and the paramilitary forces, the
Bangladesh remained an alien territory where only the benign
attitude of that Government could allow them to stay. They could
stay in the hideouts there with the assistance of other insurgent
groups. The rift between BNLF and NLFT left the former into an
embarrassing situation. In these circumstances, they decided to
surrender to the authorities in India.

While some of the leaders of Bru National Union (BNU), Bru
Welfare Association of Mizoram (BWAM), Mizoram Bru Refugee
Committee (MBRC), all accepted the proposition that their armed
outfit must surrender before any viable settlement of the issue of
repatriation could be made. The idea of surrender precedes the act of
repatriation.

When BNLF started the armed movement for achieving their
demand of autonomy, the general Reang community had high hopes
that this movement would bring something beneficial for them. But
the surrender dashed their hopes. With their hopes shattered and
BNLF put into inaction due to surrender, the refugees stranded in
the camps in inhospitable conditions are forced to resign to their
fate. Their dream of returning to their beloved villages is becoming
thinner day by day. The villages where they spent their childhood,
adolescence and youth which they had left in the late 90’s, become
distant in their minds now. The possibility of safe and unencumbered return is made difficult as the parties involved are insincere in finding a viable solution of the problem. Though the legal questions are raised, the problem is essentially a humanitarian one. Unforeseen political hurdles are created to make their dream of returning impossible to nurture.

They want to be resettled within a compact area, a desire came out of their extreme sense of insecurity. They demanded that the population dispersal must be avoided to make the settlement cohesive. The selected habitats must accommodate not less than 1000 families percentage within the Mamit district. They want to live together where they can mingle socially among themselves. But the Mizoram Government wants to scatter them to many centres beyond Mamit district and in each of the centres, a small number of families are planned to be settled. In the stalemate, the Reang leaders sought the intervention of the Central Government. They appealed to the Government of India to convince the Mizoram Government, the Y.M.A. (Young Mizo Association) and the people at large in the state for the resettlement of displaced Reangs in Mamit District only. When the disagreement between the Government of Mizoram and the displaced Reangs persisted, SDP was put into cold storage.
The more intractable hazard appeared when the Reangs demanded representation in SDP. After the hectic parleys, the political demands were scaled down to the minimum and the movement leaders agreed to the proposal for a special development project only. No district council like political contrivance was sought for the sake of returning to peace at an early date. The Government of Mizoram considered SDP, simply as a department of the administration manned by the officials. The Reang leaders raised an objection and demanded their own ethnic representation in SDP. They put forward the argument that the chairman and the secretary of SDP should come from their own community to make the body democratic and workable. The Reang leaders thought that any bureaucratic control over a body meant to serve a backward ethnic group would ultimately become unviable without any popular representation in it. After all, the proposal for SDP is viewed as the culmination of a long struggle.

They said that they are a primitive tribe and till today, jhum cultivation is their main occupation. In Tripura, the Reangs are enjoying the benefits emanating from their status as a primitive tribe and they have access to the centrally sponsored schemes. Therefore, they felt that the same facility must be made available in the state of Mizoram also.
The long stay in the camps since 1997 made them real destitutes and they argued for better compensation as no household items, they could carry with them while on flight. The immovable properties like gardens, fisheries, ponds, cultivable areas left behind are all lost and to get them back is a near impossibility.

Findings of the Study

The record of the Reang settlement in Mizoram is not documented properly. In the recent times, there is always an attempt to create a contrived historical account to suit the current political needs. This happens in all places. If the proofs are not properly kept and presented, then the claim of residence may get lost in default. A segment of the Reang people possibly arrived in these forlorn tracts under the present territory of Mizoram when these tracts were actually 'no mans' land. Because of the abundance of lands available, it was the settler who possessed the ownership. The British colonial exercises in the late nineteenth century took the territory under a civilized administration. Even the colonial administration and aftermath did not take away their possessions and they stayed in their homes enjoying the benefits from the woods and streams near to their hamlets. Actually, these were the providers of their sustenance. Possibly, they moved from one patch of land to the other for seeking better farm lands.
The situation after the creation of the new state of Mizoram attended with the programmes of new development schemes is a phenomenon which strikes at the root of their exclusively tribal and nomadic living. It is not simply the question of one advanced tribe eagerly looking out for modern developmental avenues comes into opposition from a tribe who had not acquired any such pretensions, there is another important question, how the interests of a smaller tribe could be accommodated within a composite polity. For a tribe, totally uninitiated in the modern ways of administration, considered lands as their temples and they did not know any other means which may provide them their economic sustenance. Traditionally, they enjoyed lands communally which automatically came to them. Villages in the tribal areas during the colonial times and long after the independence were not cadastrally surveyed. A village is perceived in the plains, as a settled habitation long occupied but in the hills, it is only a hamlet consisting of some houses inhabited by exogamous clans. The problem of a primitive tribe, unpapered and undocumented, had a struggle with the modern system of administration where the validity of a claim is settled only on the presentation of legal proofs.

Every community maintains their identity and fashion their own organization in order to project their own distinctiveness. The
other people identify them by observing such distinctiveness. A clear physical isolation helped them to avoid probable conflict with other communities. When such barrier is lifted and the people come closer to each other, conflicting issues appear on the surface. The Reangs have their own identity but they were not organized. Their gradual economic deprivation brought in a sense of alienation in their mind. The Reangs have their own traditional priesthood in their religious system which contradicts the practices in Christianity with its hierarchical structure.

The Reangs feel that their cultural aspects are interfered with even though many of them willingly embraced Christianity. The Mizo evangelists in their enthusiasm often undervalue the customs and traditions long followed by them. This happens through the acts of enthusiasm and as the Mizos have much deeper association with the Christianity, a certain mizo-isation in the sermons appeared. A certain section of the Reangs began to think that their socio-political autonomy would only protect their culture and traditions, they did not have resentment against the preachings of the gospels. Though the demand for autonomy remained an unfulfilled dream, they visualize certain advantages from the enforcement of the 6th schedule of the constitution nullifying any interferences in their traditional practices. The state government cannot interfere in the
sphere of forestry and wildlife. Moreover, they will be saved from land alienation. No large industry will come up in their areas affecting their own interests.

Ethnic assertion is generally the answer to the sense of being exploited. It is considered to be an 'effective factor' which force the opponents to go into defensive. It also activates a backward community with an urge to modernize themselves. The common complaint against the politically dominant group is the clear lack of appreciation of the disadvantages suffered by the smaller ethnic group. They want to integrate the society on their own terms, this happened in many other areas and Mizoram is no exception. The cultural and the political goals merge together and become a composite whole.

The Christian evangelical missions working among the uninitiated people proceed on a set pattern and a particular festive occasion is chosen to influence the people. The missionaries come with good gifts and these are distributed among the people. Some people are influenced by such generous presentations. Some respond to the call for conversion. As the whole state has become Christians already, a small population cannot remain unresponsive to the call to embrace. The arrival of the missionaries in a Reang village and their stay for some days there itself brings a change. For
the village people, it is an occasion to see the outside world through these evangelists. They usually respond to the call when it comes.

Their conversion to Christianity itself may not be a factor as such as it is purely a question of calling God as Christ. A conversion brings a change in the lifestyle of the community and beliefs. Here, a tribe cannot compromise easily and in the ethnic assertion, the customs and traditions become the redeeming features. Nowhere, the religion could unite the warring ethnic groups. The groups fight among themselves as their material interests differ, the spirituality hardly plays a role in the whole exercise. At this critical juncture, the Reangs felt cornered and marginalized and the ethnic consciousness made them aware of their condition in Mizoram, the conversion to the Christianity notwithstanding.

Observations on the Repatriation of the Reang Refugees to Mizoram:

1. The Reang refugee problem is made unusually politicalised and the parties are not serious about a speedy solution of the problem.

2. The camp dwellers, though scared of their uncertain future, could not show their unity and determination to repatriate en masse before the stalemate made the repatriation process impossible.
3. There is a ‘tough and hardline’ approach of both the officials and the Reang leaders who could not see any ‘middle line’ emerging in the negotiation derailing the solution process.

4. There was an unusual hurry in the approach to surrender of the combative forces among the Reangs without ascertaining the practicability of all refugees return to their ‘homelands’.

5. The Central Government must evolve a policy in regard to the plight of smaller ethnic groups facing similar situations throughout the country. In case of the Reang refugees, they remained passive onlookers in the initial stage and allowed the situation to go out of hands.

6. The non solution of any such ethnic exodus problem ultimately disturbs the peaceful conditions in the whole region. Some of the people who came as the refugees turned insurgents and joined rebel groups to terrorise people in the region.

7. The ethnicity question should attract attentions of all ‘concerned’ people and the state government should accept it as a reality. It is not merely the question of ‘dominant’ and ‘non dominant’ ethnic groups inhabiting a state, there should emerge a constitutional system where all ethnic groups can peacefully live together.

8. The derailment of talks between the Reang refugees and the Mizoram Government means the uncertainty in the whole region
entailing an unnecessary expenditure from the exchequer in the form of maintaining the camps for an indefinite period of time. The Chakma refugee problem, the Central Government solved with a foreign country (Bangladesh) but the Reang problem is an internal one, still hangs fire without any sign of hope emerging out on the horizon.

9. The Reang refugees showed lack of wisdom in denying repatriation according to plans of the Mizoram Government. The problems, they anticipated might be true but their wholesale return to the state would have strengthened their resolve to fight for their demands. The haphazard way they approached made the whole act a non starter.

10. There are differences of opinions between the two state governments, Tripura and Mizoram. The stalemate on the dispersal of the refugees to their original habitats continued as the two governments failed to come to any agreement on it.

11. The Mizoram Government fails to bring the chauvinistic non government organizations in the state under their control. These organizations dictate the terms on the Government and the latter cannot oppose them easily.

12. There is another possibility which is the result of the dithering. Tripura state has a large population of Reangs and there might be a process of melt way of the camp population into the
Reang communities already there. In that case, the state where the problem originated, would be very happy to be relieved of the troublesome problem they are facing for many decades.

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