The history of the Indian nation-state is a history of integration of diverse ethnic groups. Different methods were used to integrate the princely states of Manipur and Tripura and the adjoining hills areas of Assam which now combine the present day Northeastern region.

The term “Northeast” was first used by the British rulers to identify a geographical area. Alexander Mackenzie was perhaps the first to use the term “Northeast Frontier” to identify Assam, including the adjoining hill areas and the princely states of Manipur and Tripura in his book in 1884. When there was a plan to merge Assam with Eastern Bengal in the late 1890s and the beginning of 1900, there were proposals to name the new province as the “North Eastern Province.” Initially the term remained a geographical concept and throughout the colonial period the British rulers referred to Assam as the “Northeastern Frontier of Bengal”. Thus in the colonial period the area what now constitute the Northeast was considered to be a frontier of Bengal that needs to be protected and defended militarily.

Northeast India became a region merely through a geo-political accident. The separation of Burma from the Indian sub-continent in 1937 and the partition of 1947 virtually created what we now call the “Northeast”. Before partition there was no idea of a separate Northeastern region. Hence, the region does not fulfill the three traditional

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approaches to the definition of a region which are homogeneity, nodality or polarisation around some central place. In the words of Barrister Pakem, Northeast India is a region as the lack of sophisticated definition of a region for Northeast India does not make it a non-region. It is a region despite its varied physical features and its different economic, political and social systems.\textsuperscript{3} Thus, Northeast India is a region of diverse geographical features with a population characterised by diversity of ethnicity, language, culture, religion, social organisation and levels of economic development. According to J.B. Fuller, "The province of Assam at the far northeastern corner of India is a museum of nationalities."\textsuperscript{4}

At the time of Independence "Northeast" basically meant Assam and the princely states of Manipur and Tripura. In order to quell the various ethnic aspirations new states were carved out of Assam: Nagaland (1963), Meghalaya (1972), Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram (1987). The concept of Northeast was formalised politically and the term became popular with the formation of the North Eastern Council (NEC) in 1971. Since its inception the NEC functions as a regional planning body for the Northeastern region. Sikkim was included in the NEC in 2002 although the state did not meet the contiguity criteria.

Scholars often question the practical relevance of clubbing all the eight states together and calling it the "Northeast". Udayon Misra points out that the use of the term "Northeast" is itself problematic as the region represents a varied cultural mosaic and


has never considered itself to be one compact unit.\textsuperscript{5} Wasbir Hussain also observes that, "By bracketing the eight northeastern Indian states, with its diverse tribes, customs and cultures, into what is called the 'Northeast,' we tend to ignore the distinct identity and sub-national aspirations of these ethnic groups. More so, such clubbing together of the region, in an attempt to look at it as a single entity, has led to stereotyping of the problems that plague the area. The fact that each state has a different set of location-specific concerns and grievances often gets blurred in the scheme of things of policy framers and government leaders who are supposed to address these issues."\textsuperscript{6}

It is true that the Northeastern region shares certain common problems like ethnic unrests, insurgency, immigration, drug trafficking, communication gap, etc. However, there are severe intra-regional differences in social issues and ethno-political aspirations. Not only the hills and valleys are at different level of socio-economic development; the urban and rural areas of the valley exhibit social and economic disparities. The region is in fact, one of the most ethnically and linguistically diverse region in Asia and each state has its distinct cultures and traditions. B.G. Verghese commented that "The Northeast is another India, the most diverse part of a most diverse country, very different, relatively little known and certainly not too well understood, once a coy but now turbulent and in transition within the Indian transition."\textsuperscript{7} Most of the inhabitants consist of peoples who migrated from Southwest China or Southeast Asia via Burma at various points of history. A substantial portion of the population is also

\textsuperscript{6} Wasbir Hussain, "India's North-East: The Problem", paper presented as part of the "Interaction on the North East" Observer Research Foundation, New Delhi November 18, 2004.
composed of migrants during the British rule, one group consists of people recruited to serve the colonial administration in the region and the others are tea planters. Apart from these, there is huge inflow of late migrants, mainly from Bangladesh, which resulted in constant friction with the local population.

Political Integration

The study of political integration has been one of the major concerns of political scientists. The term is widely used among various fields of political science, such as international relations and international organisation, local and urban government, and operates in the international, national and sub-national level. There is a new wave in the study of political integration during the post-war years as the newly independent countries of Asia and Africa has to rigorously go through this process in their drive for nation-building.

The rationale of political integration is that there is a need to create a “territorial nationality which overshadows - or eliminates - subordinate parochial loyalties”\(^8\). These local allegiances, or the similar primordial attachments, impede development since the national leaders, aspiring to expand the functions of the political system, need the undivided loyalty of all the population. It is, therefore, one of the challenges to the political system to bring about “the process whereby people transfer their commitment and loyalty from smaller tribes, villages, or petty principalities to the larger central political system.”\(^9\)


According to Myron Weiner, political integration is the "integration of political units into a common territorial framework with a government which can exercise authority."\(^{10}\) Ernst Hass defines it as the "process whereby political actors in several distinct national settings are persuaded to shift their loyalties, expectations, and political activities toward a new centre, whose institutions possess or demand jurisdiction over the pre-existing national states."\(^{11}\) Karl Deutsch uses the term integration both as a process and a condition and term political integration as "the attainment of a sense of community, accompanied by formal or informal institutions or practices, sufficiently strong and widespread to assure peaceful change among members of a group."\(^{12}\) Such an integrated community, according to Deutsch, may or may not be a sovereign state. In simple words political integration is the integration into the government, the political parties and the pressure group life of a country.\(^{13}\) In the theoretical treatment of political development and political stability, the concept of political integration is usually employed in a sense that approximates Deutsch’s definition,\(^{14}\) where the focus of interest is on integration within states, or, in other words, on the question whether an amalgamated community is integrated or not.\(^{15}\)

With the gaining of independence by countries of Asia and Africa during the middle of the twentieth century, the task of nation-building has been left with these

\(^{10}\) Myron Weiner. *op. cit.*, p. 53-54.
countries. The first and foremost problem encountered by them was the issue of integrating the vast chunk of people who had been loosely administered with varying degrees by the colonial powers. In large and multi-national nation-states, the problem of integrating people inhabiting different regions with varied language, religion, culture and ethnic communities, the task is an arduous one. As Leonard Binder, while analysing the crisis of political development in new nation-states, pointed out: "the greatest task facing the new nation will be to build a nation out of a collection of tribes or of isolated communities."^{16}

Claude Ake broadly defines the problem of political integration as follows: "how to build a single coherent political society from a multiplicity of 'traditional societies'; how to increase cultural homogeneity and value consensus; and how to elicit, from the individual, deference and devotion to the claims of the state."^{17} The problem of integration faced by each nation-state differs from others in nature as well as in degree. It varies from country to country "because of the ambiguity as to what constitutes a nation which is to be integrated" and also because of the "differences between the countries in their history and ethnic composition."^{18} Therefore, the solution to the problem of integration cannot be uniform even among the developing countries. Some of the most common problem in integration involves the "problems of national identity, territorial control, the establishment of norms for the handling of public conflict, the relationship between the governors and the governed, and the problems of organising

individuals for the achievement of common purposes." Nonetheless, students of comparative politics develop some theoretical framework, where much of the theories developed out of concern for nation building in pluralistic societies.

Theoretical Considerations

There are diverse sources of political integration theory which needs to be pulled together for defining the boundaries and characteristics of political integration, and present some tentative hypotheses for future analysis. However, in order to analyse the process of political integration in the Northeastern Indian states, the conceptual apparatus of Sidney Verba, Claude Ake, Karl Deutsch, Ernst Hass, William Riker and Marxists will be taken into advantage.

The primary prerequisite of political integration is the existence of political culture. According to Sidney Verba, political culture "consists of the system of empirical beliefs, expressive symbols, and values which defines the situation in which political action takes place." Verba pointed out that not all beliefs about political culture are relevant to the concept of political culture; but the concept refers to only those beliefs which affect politics in a fundamental way. In almost all the theories of political integration cultural homogeneity, especially a homogeneous political culture is often regarded as a prerequisite for political integration, which in turn is a prerequisite for political stability, especially in democracies. It is also further argued that shared culture

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19 Myron Weiner, op. cit., p. 52.
21 Ibid., p. 526.
22 Arend Lijphart, op. cit., pp. 4-5.
may not be a prerequisite for unification but a requirement that has to be fulfilled before the process can be advanced.

Claude Ake stresses the requirement from the members of the political system to identify with and trust one another. He said that “without some basic mutual trust among members of a civic body there can be no stable expectations about the modes of acquisition and exercise of political power, no coherence and predictability in political life.” He further argues that if the different cultural entities within the political system are so profoundly dissimilar that they cannot communicate with one another, mutual trust and a sense of collective identity cannot develop. Therefore, one of the essential preliminary requisite for political integration is the broadening and intensifying of “social communication". The improvement of the communicative facilities of a new state depends, in turn, on social mobilisation—"the process in which major clusters of old social, economic, and psychological commitments are eroded or broken down and people become available for new patterns of socialisation and behaviour.” Social mobilisation involves a massive transformation of an old way of life and therefore generates tensions.

Claude Ake hypothesise that, “the political system driving for integration maximises its chances for achieving a high degree of integration and remain stable, in spite of short-run destabilising effects of the drive for integration, if it is an authoritarian, consensual, ‘identific’, and paternal.” Ake said that the pursuit of integration underscores the need for authoritarianism as the quest for integration aggravates political

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25 Claude Ake, *op. cit.*
instability by attempting to make people relate to national symbols rather than to tribal ones. Thus, in order to maintain a minimum of political stability it is crucial that the government be strong enough to deal with the centrifugal forces that the drive for integration will activate and the government must also be able to decide and act quickly.  

Ake further theorise that leaders of a new state must not concentrate power in their own hands but father social transformation and be innovative as they are committed to integration of their culturally pluralistic societies. They must destroy or modify certain habits of mind and undermine certain traditional symbols of collective identity; they must induce the people to accept new norms, new goals, new motivations; they must readjust patterns of social and economic relationship and to this effect they must supply the initiative for relising it. As socio-cultural gap between the elite and the masses is one of the most striking features of the newly independent state which poses the threat of mutual alienation between them, the political style and the way of life of the ruling elite must be calculated to dramatise its concern for and identity with the masses so as to lessen this threat. Political leaders need to eschew corruption, conspicuous consumption, and social snobbery and give their politics a distinctly “populistic” one. Ake believes that “the ultimate cure for the inherent instability of the new states lies mainly in the modification of the political behaviour of its elites.” He argues that the “government should be a coalition of the leaders of the major social, religious, professional, and ethnic groups...Consensus is sought not at the grass-roots level but at the leadership level by enlisting the support of leading personalities from all major social

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26 Ibid., p.5.
groups.” Political integration is said to occur “when the linkage consists of joint participation in regularised, ongoing decision-making.”

John Wood criticise Verba and Ake’s equation of political integration with the achievement of national identity or a value consensus. He said that these psychological phenomena are no doubt important to the “making whole” that integration connotes, but they are dependent aspects insofar as the fundamental political process is concerned. Wood further pointed out that Verba and Ake wrongly suggest integration as implying a homogenisation of political values, conformity of political purposes. Etzioni also views that homogeneity of political values among subunits does not guarantee political integration anymore than heterogeneity precludes it. Political integration cannot be assessed by measuring sameness. Rather, some measure of political interaction and exchange among the integrating units must be devised.

Deutsch’s communication theory stress on communication among persons, cities, ethnic groups, language communities, and countries. To him the success or failure of political integration depends in part upon the compatibility of autonomous responses as well as on the distribution and balance of range of social transaction, and of the streams of experiences to which they give rise. As political integration does not just happen anywhere a core area of “larger, stronger, more politically, administratively, economically, and educationally advanced” political units is usually present to lead the

process.\textsuperscript{31} In their study of the North Atlantic area, Deutsch and others found that “mutual compatibility of main values” was an essential condition for both amalgamated and pluralistic security communities.\textsuperscript{32} They conclude that political communities occur whenever groups not only exchange a high proportion of communications but also share a superordinate goal and a “we-feeling”.

Referring to Deutsch’s approach as too broad, Ernst Haas excludes transactional and institutional criteria from his initial formulation, though he considers them as potentially helpful factors.\textsuperscript{33} Haas specifies that integration is a process which takes place in a period of time “between the establishment of common economic rules and the possible emergence of a political entity”, and which must consist “of increasing politicisation, of shifting loyalties, of adaptation by the actors to a new process of mutual accommodation.”\textsuperscript{34} Thus, the goal of the political community is “a condition in which specific groups and individuals show more loyalty to their central political institutions than to any other political authority, in a specific period of time and in a definable geographical space.”\textsuperscript{35} Whereas the functional theory of David Mitrany stresses the role of non-political international organisations as promoters of integration whenever experts replace politicians as key actors, Haas refines Mitrany’s functionalism by arguing that there is a need for both political and non-political actors, since technical organisations can only expand in number and in scope so long as they have political support.\textsuperscript{36}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{32} \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 58, 66.
\item \textsuperscript{34} Ernst B. Haas & Philippe C. Schmitter, “Economics and Differential Patterns of Political Integration: Projections About Unity in Latin America”, in Amitai Etzioni (ed.). \textit{op. cit.}, p. 266.
\item \textsuperscript{35} Earns B. Haas (1958). \textit{op. cit.}, p. 5.
\item \textsuperscript{36} Ernst B. Haas. \textit{Beyond the Nation State}. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1964, Chapter 2.
\end{itemize}
According to Haas, political integration is a process where the goal is the eventual formation of a political community.

William Riker, on his work on federalism and coalition formation propound the "bargain" concept, a tool with which to analyse the exchange of rewards and loyalties between political actors of the core and the periphery. Political bargains may be public or secret, explicit or undefined, confirmed or anticipated. They may be amicably negotiated or arrived at under stress. In integrational terms, the bargains forge new links among hitherto separate units, and facilitate the building of new loyalties to a larger system. The term "counterbargain" implies competition among bargain-offers and alternative integrational formulas. The later may appear at the onset of the integrational process or at the later stage if, in the view of at least one bargainer, the initial bargain has been debased or broken. Marxist conceive successful political integration as a method of state-building has performed two critical state functions: provision of the political infrastructure for the expansion of productive forces in protocapitalist and capitalist societies; and an appropriate means for legitimating the power necessary to maintain the social relations integral to these societies.

The majority of integration theorists' deal with only the contemporary world. They argue at some length about the appropriate definition of their dependent variable, whether there is more or less integration, how one is to measure it, whether different dimensions of integration change at different speeds, and whether some measures are better predictors of the future of the phenomenon than others. Michael Haas has summarised the objectives of the various approaches as an:


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attempt to discern preconditions for the achievement of higher levels of integration, variables that account for the maintenance of existing levels of integration, and factors that promote increases from present to future levels of integration. Key variables in all three research avenues, when reversed, may tell us about factors accounting for backsliding in integration.39

According to Ernst Haas, integration theories are “becoming obsolete because they are not designed to address the most pressing and important problems on the global agenda of policy.”40 Rapid changes in technology and communications have thrown the process of integration itself into doubt. Growing international interdependence has created a turbulent world with crucial problems whose solutions are international rather than regional, global rather than European.41

Political Integration in Asian and Africa

Most of the nation-states in Asia and Africa had been under colonial subjugation. In the post-independence years these countries inherited a vast array of problems which needs to be tackled and among one of them which needs to be solved at the outset was the problem of political integration. These countries also inherited from the colonial rule certain features of administrative and legal system, forms of government and fixed territory, which help in their efforts to build their state and nation.

Several approaches to the problem of political integration were followed in Asia and Africa. One of them is avoiding the problem altogether by retaining the essential

39 Ernst B. Haas (1958), op. cit.
“steel frame” feature of colonialism - open or disguised. This process has been followed in the Belgian and Portuguese territories. A similar result has been achieved in federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland by means of the wide devolution of power from imperial government in the United Kingdom to the European settlers in Africa. Another approach is found in the role played by powerful political leaders, nationalist movements and political parties, and territorial political institutions, as an instruments and new modes of integration. Charismatic leadership exercised by Kwame Nkrumah, Jawaharlal Nehru, Mahatma Gandhi, Sardar Vallabhai Patel, etc. were factors in the successful transition from a British colony to a stable parliamentary democracy. Political movements such as the Indian National Congress, Northern Rhodesia National Congress, Sierra Lone People’s Party, etc. have been instrumental in enlarging the scale of political activity. Moreover, territorial assemblies and legislatures, centralised bureaucracies, and other territory-wide institutions have been structures that have fostered-indeed forced-progressive integration.

Common language, which is the one of the most important factors favouring political integration, is absent in most of the countries of Asia and Africa. Linguistic regionalism remains a formidable obstacle in the path toward integration in Asian countries. Although these countries lack a common language, efforts were made to introduce a national language in the interests of integration, and in order to counteract “linguistic regionalism”. There are instances of the introduction of English as a second language in some countries of Southeast Asia. Language as a key factor in the

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43 Ibid., p. 47.
44 Brian Harrison, op. cit., p. 143-144.
integration of Southeast Asian societies naturally features prominently in educational policies, which are themselves virtually concerned with integration-political, social and cultural.\textsuperscript{45}

The impact of British conquest and occupation has resulted in bringing the issue of minorities into the open, where it has "left a difficult legacy by accentuating the distinctions and differences between various groups". They also "left a valid tradition of effective political hegemony with control" from the centre of administration and "a sketchy but uniform system of statewide education and modern communications network which ultimately should prove to outweigh the difficulties they created and left".\textsuperscript{46}

**Political Integration in India**

Although India is one geographical entity, throughout its history the subcontinent has never achieved political homogeneity. Even in the heydays of the Gupta and Mughal empires the country did not come under one political umbrella. Having a sub-continental size, characterised by diversity of race, language, religion and lifestyle, bringing the whole geographical areas of India under one political umbrella was an almost impossible task. It has, however, "achieved over the millennia some feeling, however loose ill-defined, that all the diversities had their place in a single whole." But this "amorphous spiritual identity had found no expression in political unity: the characteristic political

\textsuperscript{45} Ibid. p. 144.
condition was a shifting array of states and principalities, conquest and alliances, lending
colour to the trite comment that India was only a geographical expression."^47

The British rule considerably brought about an enduring political consolidation
in India. The effect of the British rule, plus modern innovations in transport and
communications, in promoting a working sense of Indian unity was of vital importance.
The maintenance of law and order, administrative unity, the introduction of a common
body of social and political concepts and values, the appearance of English as a lingua
franca, fiscal and economic integration, all served to link together the disparate elements
which made up the Indian society as did the common national struggle against British
rule.48

The imminent withdrawal of the British from India after the end of the Second
World War led to the appearance of different plans for autonomy by most of the princely
states. The transfer of power was formulated in the Cabinet Mission Plan of May 16,
1946, which laid down suggestions and recommendations for the solution of India's
demand for self-government and independence. The most important constitutional issue
in this plan was to determine the position and future of the Indian native states. With the
transfer of power all rights surrendered by the states to the paramount power will return
to the states. The void that would arise from the lapse of political arrangements between
the states and the crown was to be filled in either with the states entering into federal
relationship with the succeeding government in British India or enter into a particular

1960, p. 12.
48 Ibid.
political arrangement with or without them.\textsuperscript{49} The states were given freedom whether to associate one or to stand alone.

On the eve of British withdrawal from India two opposite forces operated: pan-Indian nationalism seeking an integrated independent India, and the separatists seeking its independent existence. At first, the Indian National Congress leaders in Indian freedom struggle was not against giving the Right to Self-determination and even the Right to Secession to the aggrieved constituents and agreed to prepare a constitution "acceptable to all" and a "federal one with residuary power vested in the units."\textsuperscript{50} However, alarmed by the rising number of claims the Congress did not agree to any proposal to disintegrate India by giving liberty to any component state or territorial unit to secede from the Indian Union or Federation. Even though the Congress stated that "it cannot think in terms of compelling the people in any territorial unit to remain in an Indian Union against their declared established will," \textsuperscript{51} the post-independent India wanted to inherit as much as the British India.

The Indian subcontinent after the end of the Second World War witnessed a different political environment "where it became difficult to effect this policy as popular will was often suppressed by the ambition of the rulers."\textsuperscript{52} With the imminent lapse of paramountcy, the more ambitious rulers were dreaming of sovereignty and reversion to the old autocratic ways. In the meantime, a new upsurge of states people's movement had begun everywhere in 1947-48, demanding political rights and elective representation

\textsuperscript{49} V.P. Menon. \textit{Integration of Indian States}. Hyderabad: 1956, p. 476.
\textsuperscript{50} Resolution of the Working Committee of the Indian national Congress on United India and Self Determination, 12-18 and 21-24 September, 1945.
\textsuperscript{51} \textit{Ibid.}
in the Constituent Assembly. They were against attempts of reversion to autocracy and demand for responsible governments. Therefore, a number of schemes were envisaged, demanding sovereign homelands, responsible governments, a state within the Indian federation and threat to join Pakistan or Burma. The task of the new nationalist government was to stop the disintegrative forces, integrate them with the mainland and protect the territory handled to them by the British. A States Department was created which was headed by Sardar Vallabhai Patel and V.P. Menon as secretary, to carry out the arduous task of integrating the princely states and all dissident groups. He said that: “Our first task to prevent the balkanisation of the country and to stop any possible inveiglement of the States by Pakistan as was to bring the States into some form of organic relationship with the Centre.”

British India was granted independence on August 15, 1947 as the separate dominions of India and Pakistan. The British Government dissolved its treaty relations with over 600 princely states, which means that, “The rights of the States which flew from their relationship to the crown will no longer exist and that all rights surrendered by states to the paramount power will return to the states.” The vaccum which arises from the lapse of political arrangements between the States and the Crown was to be filled in either with the states entering into federal relationship with “succeeding Government or Governments” in British India or enter into particular political arrangements with or without them. The states were given freedom whether to associate with India or Pakistan or to stand alone. The British Government did not put any pressure on the states in deciding which dominion they desired to accede. Most of

54 Ibid. p. 83.
55 Ibid. p. 476.
the states acceded to India, and some to Pakistan. Hyderabad and Manipur opted for independence, however, the armed intervention of India brought Hyderabad into the Indian Union and the coerced tactics let Manipur Maharaja into signing a merger agreement with India.

The integration of Indian states took place in two phases, with a skilful combination of baits and threats of mass pressure in both. The primary “bait offered was that of very generous privy purses, while some princes were also made into Governors or Rajpramukhs.” One of the most difficult in the process of integration was that of the integration of states with the neighbouring provinces or into new units. By August 15, almost all states has agreed to sign an Instrument of Accession with India acknowledging central authority over the three areas of defence, external affairs and communications. The gaining of independence was “a culmination of long-drawn, multi stream process of transformation, unification and integration of the Indian people into one political entity.” By January 26, 1950 when the Constitution of Indian Republic came into force all states and outlying areas were fully integrated.

Many princely states were merged with the neighbouring Governors’ provinces of British India to form Part A states under the 1950 Constitution. A large number of princely states which were governed by a rajpramukh were combined into “states union”; and together with the three biggest principalities, Hyderabad, Jammu and Kashmir and Mysore, they acquired a separate existence as Part B states for a while. For strategic and other reasons, former Chief Commissioners’ Provinces and other centrally administered areas, except Andaman and Nicobar Islands, were Part C states. The Part C states were

Ajmer-Merwara, Bhopal, Bilaspur, Coorg, Delhi, Kutch, Himachal Pradesh, Manipur, and Tripura.

With linguistic reorganisation the distinctions between Part A, B, and C states ended, and a complex recombination of ex-princely and ex-British territory was carried out. Therefore, the great ideal of geographical, political and economic unification of India: an ideal which for centuries remained a distant dream and which appeared as remote as a difficult of attainment as ever, even after the advent of Indian Independence, was consummated by the policy of integration. Great credit can be given to Sardar Patel for the rapid integration of Indian states. The Indian nationalism of the freedom struggle was responsible for the integration of people belonging to different religion, languages, and cultures into a single political entity.

India's Northeast Scenario

The Northeastern region of India had interaction with the British East India Company as early as 1792, at the request of the King of Assam, for commercial advantages by a friendly and open intercourse. The repeated invasion by the Burmese forced the Ahom King to request assistance from the British East India Company, where the company responded to the request and defeated the Burmese. By the right of conquest Assam became a Non-Regulatory Province of the British Indian Empire in October 1838.

The whole of the present Northeastern region was under Bengal province till 1874. Due to the British policy of expanding areas under their control and administrative rearrangements since 1857, Assam province was created and governed by a Chief

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58 Quoted in V.P. Menon, op. cit., p. 490.
Commissioner. In the subsequent changes in administrative policies, a new arrangement was made where Assam province became a distinct unit directly administered by a Governor-General. Since their contact and subjugation, the British administration took steps to give hill people a paternal government which allowed them to exercise their own genius in the management of themselves, with just that amount of control from above.\textsuperscript{60} However, these were regarded as the policy of "segregation"\textsuperscript{61} by mainland scholars. A series of acts and regulations were passed by the British to protect the peoples in the hill areas of the Northeastern region. The legal enactments made for the rest of the country could not be enforced automatically in these areas, except when they were specifically adopted for them. Thus, the various legal and administrative decisions taken between 1874 and 1935, the separation of British India and Burma in 1937 and the partition in 1947 gave Northeast India, a distinct region and identity.

According to S.K. Sharma and Usha Sharma, the British rulers kept certain areas of the Northeast as "excluded" from the rest of the country with two fold objectives: (i) to keep the area as a buffer region between India and the neighbouring countries; and (ii) to protect them from exploitation by the plainsmen.\textsuperscript{62} All these regulations and acts stopped the little interaction that existed between the mainland Indians and the hill peoples of the region and allow them to exist independently almost like the pre-colonial period. Therefore, the British policy of non-interference allowed the freedom of conducting the affairs of tribal life to the tribes themselves and on the other hand, it imposed a kind of strict neutrality on the British state. Such a mix between autonomy to


the tribals and neutrality of the British state avoided the path of confrontation and it prevented the influence of the mainstream political movement on the hill tribes.\footnote{Rafiu Ahmed & Prasenajit Biswas. Political Economy of Underdevelopment of North-East India. New Delhi: Akansha, 2004, p. 3.}

As the politics of mainstream political parties did not have any effect in the Northeastern region the people realised their own struggles against the expanding British arising out of the need to protect their freedom and land. Their resistance to British rule was not connected to the Indian freedom movement. According to Rupert Emerson the “one common aspect of their lives has been the brief period of subjugation to foreign rule, and this, for the bulk of them, has often meant virtually nothing in the way of common life...they have been under a common government with its uniform economy and system of law and administration, but in practice they have lingered very largely within the framework of their traditional societies and have perhaps only recently been brought into any significant degree of association with their fellow colonials.”\footnote{Rupert Emerson, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 20.}

When there was a clear indication that the British were to leave India soon, the minds of the hill people were full of uncertainty and anxiety. The plain people whom they considered weak and inferior races were going to replace them as rulers and the idea was resented by them. One of the initial responses of the hill people to this rush of events was political activation and unification of the tribes to safeguard their interests and aspirations. They felt the need to participate in the political process and to be allowed to decide their future themselves.

In order to articulate their political aspirations, the tribals of the Northeast initially formed the Hill Leaders Union in 1945 at Shillong which worked for the welfare of the Hill areas of Assam. To make the movement stronger and broader and to unify the
hill and plain tribals to this endeavour another union, the Plains and Hill Tribals and Races Association was formed in the same year. However, both the associations broke down within few years. The tribal students in Calcutta formed an association called the Indo-Burma Movement in 1946 which aimed “to unite into one unit all the party of the land lying along the border of India and Burma and other adjacent areas which are inhabited by a similar kind of people and which can be convincently demarcated into a unit; the unit thus formed designed as ‘Indo-Burma’ and the people dwelling it be called collectively Indo-Burmans whilst retaining their tribal names separately. The future status of Indo-Burma thus formed will be decided by the representative body of the peoples.” Ever since independence in 1947, extension of the Indian state and political apparatus has been challenged and questioned by various extremist groups of the region. The processes of integration of the Northeastern states are briefly discussed below.

1. Manipur

William Riker’s theory of “bargain” under stress may be applied to Manipur’s political integration into the Indian union. One of the staunchest opposition of integration into the Indian union came from the princely state of Manipur. There was much activity before India’s independence in Manipur to restore its past glory and independence. Hijam Irabot, a communist leader of Manipur, was one of the forerunners in mobilising people. In 1946, Irabot along with Longjam Bimol formed a political party of Manipur called “Praja Sangh”. Irabot wanted an independent Manipur with its own parliament, constitution and cabinet. Instead of the monarchical system, he wanted the

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representatives of the people to administer the state formed based on socialistic pattern of society. Those who did not subscribe to Irabot’s ideas setup a new political party called Manipur Congress, which has no link with the Indian National Congress, to counter Irabot’s movement.

The Constitution of Manipur was framed in 1947 by the constitution making body under the initiative of the president of Manipur State Durbar, Pearson. Under the provisions of the Manipur Constitution Act, 1947, assembly election was held in 1948. This election in Manipur was the first ever election held in India based on adult franchise. A coalition government was formed by parties other than the congress. The Manipur Congress, which started working against the Manipur constitution, also launched a movement for the merger of Manipur with India. Irabot and the Maharajah of Manipur, Bodhachandra, strongly opposed the move for merger of Manipur with India. Irabot also strongly opposed the proposal of Sardar Vallabhai Patel to form the state of “Purbanchal” consisting of Manipur, Cachar, Lushai Hills (present Mizoram) and Tripura.

After India’s independence Akbar Hydari, the then Governor of Assam, visited Manipur to assess the political situation and explore the possibility for the merger of Manipur with India. Through Hydari’s visit the Government of India came to know the king’s and people’s mind. Dhabalo Singh, president of the ruling party in Manipur, wrote a memorandum to the king on December 17, 1948, conveying his desire that Manipur should remain as a state and autonomous unit enjoying responsible government with the king of Manipur as the constitutional head and with its sovereignty intact. The

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ruling party's general secretary, N. Ibomcha Singh also stated in another memorandum that majority of the people of the state were against integration or merger. Due to its deep concern over the present international situation, especially the communist uprising in Burma, the Manipur Congress party stood for the consolidation of India through integration and merger of native states, especially Manipur.

The Maharajah of Manipur was invited to Shillong in September 1949 for talks with regard to integration. An already prepared "Merger Agreement" was placed before the Maharaja on the first day of the meeting by Akbar Hydari, whereby Manipur would be merged into the Indian union. The Maharaja stood firm that he could not sign the agreement without prior consultation with the Council of Ministers. The Maharaja was placed under house arrest and debarred from any communication with the outside world. Under such circumstances the Maharaja was forced to sign the "Merger Agreement" with India on September 21, 1949, and Manipur become "Part-C state" of the Indian Union. In Manipur the bargaining negotiation was under stress and there were no rewards to the political actors of the periphery and thus loyalty to the core cannot be expected. The manner in which the merger was brought about has left a residual bitterness that the insurgent groups successfully tap into. A number of insurgent groups regarded the merger as illegal and unconstitutional, and many among the Manipuri intelligentsia are bitter about the way it was effected. In previously separate principalities like Manipur, political integration should involve overcoming parochial

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loyalties and residual loyalties; however the transitional government’s approach failed to overcome these loyalties.

2. Nagaland

One of the other regions which opposed integration into the Indian union was from the then Naga Hills District. During the first half of the twentieth century education had made great advances in the district and led to the rise of small middle class among the Nagas. With British patronage the Naga Club was formed in 1918, which was “the first attempt at organised political opinion in the Naga Hills.” However, the club’s activities faded after their memorandum submitted to the Simon Commission in January 1929.

The inactivity of the Naga Club led Charles Pawsey, Deputy Commissioner of the Naga Hills District, to establish the Naga Hills District Tribal Council with Naga leaders. However the Naga Hills District Tribal Council did not last long as it was not a representative body of the different tribes. To meet the fast changing political changes, the Tribal Council was reorganised and rechristened as Naga National Council (NNC) in a meeting held by various Naga tribes at Wokha in February 1946. The emergence of NNC out of the Naga Hills District Tribal Council heralded the rise of middle class intellectuals. One of the first activities of the NNC was a call upon the Nagas for self-determination and for acquiring fundamental rights. However, the NNC was talking more in terms of full regional autonomy and not in terms of complete independence. The tone and content of Jawaharlal Nehru’s letter to NNC leader T. Sakhrie, in August 1946,

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show that the independent status of the “Naga territory” was accepted by the Indian leadership but it felt that for historical as well as strategic reasons this territory must form part of Indian union.  

When the Cabinet Mission Plan was for a federal India and a grouping plan was discussed in which most of the hill parties were grouped with Assam, the NNC held a meeting at Wokha on June 19, 1946. The meeting passed a resolution strongly opposing the integrationist and grouping plan of the Cabinet Mission in grouping the Naga Hills District into Assam and demanded for autonomy. Nehru talked of giving autonomy to the Naga Hills within the province of Assam. But the NNC was divided on this issue, with one section putting forward the idea of an independent Naga homeland. Others preferred a mandatory status, with Great Britain as the guardian power. Nevertheless, they were unanimous on one point that the Nagas never formed part of India and they must be given the choice to decide on the nature of relationship with the later.

Unsatisfied with Nehru’s assurance, the NNC demanded a ten years “Interim Government” for the Nagas, to the Advisory Committee on Aboriginal Tribes which visited the Naga Hills in May 1947, where the Nagas would run their own government under the supervision of a guardian power. The negotiation between the Sub-committee and the NNC ended in a deadlock on the question of autonomy and the Nagas relationship with the guardian power. The deadlock was attempted to be broken by the Hydari Agreement, by recognising the right of the Nagas to develop according to their freely expressed wishes and provided full safeguard to the Naga customary laws. Even though NNC approved the Hydari Agreement by a majority vote, the extremist section within the council refused to accept it by stressing ninth point of the Agreement that the

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Nagas should be given the right to choose their future whether to be part of the Indian Union or to choose independence.

The moderates within the NNC soon lost ground and declared that the ninth point actually gave the Nagas the right to complete independence. The Indian government interpreted that this point (article) gave the Nagas the freedom only to suggest revision of the administrative pattern within the Indian Union after ten years but not that of secession. The extremist group leader A.Z. Phizo went with a five member delegation to meet Mahatma Gandhi on July 19, 1947. Gandhi, after unsuccessful argument with the Naga delegation, said that: “The Nagas have every right to become independent.”

Phizo after returning home declared independence for Nagaland in August 14, 1947. Aliba Imti also met Nehru to press the NNC view, where nothing substantial came out from the meeting except Nehru asking Imti to accept the Sixth Schedule. Phizo became the President of NNC in November 1949 and the moderates in the council were silenced and the demand for Naga independence gained momentum.

Being unable to resolve the political demands of the Nagas through dialogue, the Government of India cracked down the NNC in 1953. It tried to accommodate the Naga revolt within the ambit of the India constitution by creating the state of Nagaland and draw the Naga people into the democratic process. Yet some of the issues raised by the Nagas remained largely unresolved. Many views that much of the tragedy unleashed on the Naga Hills could have been avoided had a serious and consistent effort been made to understand the Nagas initial demand for “home rule”. But pre-conceived notions, arrogance and the heady brew of power prevented the national leaders from trying to see things from the other’s view point even after the NNC’s successful boycott of the 1952

elections and its plebiscite.\textsuperscript{73} Like in the case of Gujarat, political integration in stages could have been adopted in Nagaland so as to permit the time for adjustment to the constraints and opportunities to the new system and develop a homogeneous political culture.

3. Assam

The state of Assam has been a meeting ground of different ethnic communities and a hotbed of many social and political agitations since the colonial period. It was the centre of British administration and India's political activity after independence in integrating the Northeastern region. The idea of \textit{Swadin Asom} (independent Assam) came into limelight after the British annexation of Assam and the subsequent peasant uprisings (1857-8) due to ever increasing rates of taxation. It arose after the consolidation of Assamese nationalism based on linguistic lines. The forces of \textit{Swadin Asom} were to re-read, re-interpret and even re-create history in order to build up the theoretical base that Assam had always been a free nation and that its amalgamation into British India was based on trickery and fraud.\textsuperscript{74} This idea of independent Assam gain momentum after Assamese public became increasingly agitated by the large scale migration from East Bengal and the occupation of cultivable lands by immigrants.\textsuperscript{75}

It was in this background that Assamese middle-class intellectuals put forward the need to defend Assamese homeland against foreign incursions. The failure of the Congress to adopt clear stand on the issue of continued influx which threatens Assamese

\textsuperscript{73} U.A. Shimray. "Naga Issue and Nehru: A Brief Note", \textit{http://www.kanglaonline.com}
\textsuperscript{74} Udayon Misra. \textit{op. cit.}, p. 83.
\textsuperscript{75} \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 83-84.
identity and its attempt to force Assam to accept Cabinet Mission Plan were some of the factors which pushed Ambikagiri and Jatiya Mahasabha to express sentiments which bordered on a demand for an independent Assam. When after independence, the Congress government in Assam failed to provide adequate checks to infiltration from the newly created East Pakistan, Roychoudhury and Jatiya Mahasabha started espousing the cause of an independent Assam. The Jatiya Mahasabha started exposing in a meeting held on January 1, 1948, declared that Assam should come out of Indian Union and become independent country.

The idea of *Swadhin Asom* was propagated by many Assamese intellectuals of the pre-independence period. The leading intellectual of Assam, Jnananath Bora, said that: “Today, Kamrupa, which had always been a separate country, has become a province of India. The history of our country is not the same as that of the other provinces of India and there is no need to reiterate that our culture and society have little in common with them. Till today our people have not been able to accept our country as a province of India.” He maintains that although the British forcibly incorporated Assam into India, the Assamese have always considered themselves to be an independent nation and Assam cannot become a part of India just because they are brought under a single administrative unit under British India. Bora blames the educated section amongst the Assamese for having betrayed Assam’s cause. “The educated section amongst us have been trying to prove for a long time that since Assam has been under British administration for quite sometime, it is naturally a province of British India...It is these people who are trying in different ways to turn our country into a

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province of India." This argument is very similar to ULFA's present stand regarding the role of intellectuals in Assam who are, by and large, dubbed as Indian agents. During the initial years, ULFA was keen on building a strong trans-ethnic solidarity as a bulwark against the "colonialism" of Delhi. Time and again, the ULFA leadership issues warnings to the intellectual class to desist from acting as the agent of New Delhi. Grievances include loss of self-determination, Indian colonial attitude, exploitation and neglect, cultural anxiety, nativism and illegal immigration, citizenship and irredentism.

Even though the radical section of the Assamese people glorify Assam's past glory and independence and they succinctly espouse secession from India, nevertheless, Assam was the centre of activity of the Indian government for negotiation with and holding the adjoining hill areas and the princely states of Manipur and Tripura.

4. Mizoram

The political changes during the 1940s affected Mizoram too. Political awakening among the Mizos in Lushai Hills started taking shape and being apprehensive about their future and their uncertain present the Mizo intellectuals felt the need to have a political party of their own which is the first step to determine the course of their future. The first political party, the Mizo Common People's Union was founded in April 1946 and was later renamed as Mizo Union. The Mizo Union was the major political force in the Lushai Hills and had a programme of social reform in Mizo society, against the rule of

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80 S.K. Chaube, op. cit., p. 25.
tribal chiefs. The Bordoloi committee accepted the Mizo Union as the sole representative body of the Lushai Hills and the sub-committee invited the union to be a co-opted member. There was a debate over the membership but the party joined the sub-committee as co-opted member.

The joining of the sub-committee implied Mizos consent to be part of the Indian union since the sub-committee represents the Northeastern region in the constituent assembly framing the constitution. This sparked off a public debate among the Mizo leadership and they were divided on this ground. The right wing groups were against the merger with India while the left wing favoured merger with India, provided the interests of the Mizos were safeguarded by the Constitution. However, the Mizo Union adopted a resolution in support of the merger of Lushai Hills with the Indian Union. In its first General Assembly on September 24, 1946, at Kulikawn, Aizawal, the party resolved that in the event of India attaining independence, the Lushai Hills must be included within the province of Assam.81

In July 1947 the United Mizo Freedom Organisation (UMFO) was formed in reaction against the formation of Mizo Union, with the support of the chieftains to oppose the merger with India. One of the main objectives of the UMFO was to officially start a movement for joining Burma during the transfer of power. They put an argument that Mizos are ethnically and linguistically close to the Burmese and politically it would be more advantageous to join Burma as it was smaller than India and hence Burma would grant the Mizos a voice in the political affairs.82

The poor handling of the famine (mautam) of 1959-60 and inadequate relief measure caused great frustration among the Mizos, coupled with the imposition of Assamese as the official language in the state accelerated the politics of negativism. The Mizo National Famine Front was formed in 1960 to launch relief operations and it was converted into a political party known as Mizo National Front (MNF) in October 1961 with Laldenga as its president. The objective of the party was to achieve independence of Greater Mizoram. The Union Government, in July 1971, offered the proposal of turning Mizo Hills into a Union Territory. The Mizo leaders were ready to accept the offer on condition that the status of Union Territory would be upgraded to statehood and therefore the Union Territory of Mizoram came into being on January 21, 1972. After prolong negotiations with the Union Government the MNF agreed for a state within the union and therefore the state of Mizoram was created in February 20, 1987. However, the demand for greater Mizoram comprising Southern Manipur (Churachandpur District) and some areas of Cachar Hills was not achieved.

5. Meghalaya

The present Indian state of Meghalaya, during the British rule, consists of the twenty-five Khasi states, Jaintia and Garo Hills. The British Government recognised the twenty-five Khasi states and categorised them as semi-independent and dependent. The rise of political activity in these hills in the early part of the twentieth century affected the rulers of the states who in early 1934 formed the federation of Khasi States. As early as April 1945, when the tribal people in the Northeastern region were beginning to take a more vocal interest in their own future, the Khasi, Jaintia and Garo people also raised such
voices. A meeting in Shillong which was attended by most of the prominent men categorically opposed their inclusion either in India or Pakistan.\textsuperscript{83}

The Federation of Khasi States on August 8, 1947, agreed to accede into the Indian Union on three terms: defence, communication and foreign policy. On the following day the Khasi States signed the Standstill Agreement, where the states agreed that with effect from August 15, 1947, all existing administrative arrangements between the Province of Assam and the Union and Khasi States would continue in force for a period of two years, or until new or modified arrangements would be arrived at. The Government of India found a problem in the question of getting the Khasi states to sign the Instrument of Accession.\textsuperscript{84} However, Akbar Hydari, with an order from Delhi informed the Khasi chiefs on December 2, 1947, that they should sign the Instrument of Accession, where the Khasi chiefs signed subsequently. With the executive notifications and the promulgation of the Constitution of India, integration of the Khasi States into the Indian Union was completed.

There was no strong popular reaction or support to independence or incorporation into Assam. However, in response to the uneven political developments during the 1940s the Garos formed the Garo National Council. Three Garos representing their people were filled with dismay to hear the rumours that there was a plan of some Britisher officials in Assam to exclude their districts from Assam and India.\textsuperscript{85} Mikat Sangma, who had been educated at Calcutta, reacted sharply towards independence and

\textsuperscript{84} D. R. Syiemlieh, “The Political Integration of the Khasi States”, in B. Pakem (ed.), \textit{op. cit.}, p. 149.
He proclaimed himself as chief of the southern parts of Garo Hills after returning home from his education. Even though he failed to get the title recognised, Mikat Sangma gathered a band of followers protesting against the partition of Garo Hills into India and East Pakistan.

6. Tripura

The state of Tripura was a small tribal kingdom. During the British rule in India the kingdom did not come directly under the British but the king pay tribute every year and was counted as one of the princely states of British India. However, during the Partition of Bengal in 1897 many Bengali Hindus migrated to the state and occupy mainly the plains. The migration of people from Bangladesh continued even after independence. The Tripuri people, for instance, who constituted more than 85 percent of the population in 1947, are now less than 30 percent.

Tripura was never part of India. Even during British rule Tripura was never annexed to British India. Bir Bikram, the last independent king, died on May 17, 1947. Three months later, when the British left India, the situation was fluid enough for India to annex the kingdom. Indian agents spread the rumour that Muslim refugees from neighbouring East Pakistan were hatching a conspiracy to merge Tripura with Pakistan. As a condition for India's "help", the Queen of Tripura was made to sign the Tripura Merger Agreement, in September 1947. However, its final integration with India was given effect from October 15, 1949, and then Tripura became "Part-C state" state of the Indian Union administered by a Chief Commissioner as its administrative head. Tripura

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became a Union Territory without legislature with effect from November 1, 1956, and it attained statehood on January 21, 1972.

Thus, mode of integration involved negotiations, promises, baits and even force. Some areas like Naga Hills and Manipur refused to merge with India and desired withdrawal from the Union. Even before the national government could stabilise itself, the fragility of the integration was visible. Secessionist demands and withdrawal declarations were voiced from several quarters of the union.

Fallout of Political Integration in Northeast India

In the formation of a new and sovereign India, the integration of more than five hundred princely states and other loosely administered areas enjoying varying degrees of autonomy, was a great challenge to the new government and it pose serious obstacle to the unity, cohesion and stability. While some princely states willingly joined the union, most of them made a stiff opposition to the integration process. As hypothesised by Claude Ake, in most of the process the Indian state adopted an authoritarian approach in integrating the Northeastern states, where different techniques was used to coerce the constituent units to come to terms.

Considering the various ethnic communities that are found in the region there is inadequate incentive for political integration as its components lack what Etzioni calls "elements of shared culture." The failure to understand the political history and cultural uniqueness of the region on the part of the Indian ruling class led to acute "democratic deficiency" in the process of integration of Manipur, Tripura, Naga Hills (Nagaland),

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and Lushai Hills (Mizoram). In most of these processes the Indian state adopted various methods of assimilation to integrate the diverse ethnic groups in the Northeast.

Like most post-colonial countries, it was the state which came first and the nation later in India. Therefore, India can be categorised as a state-nation rather than nation-state and the process of nation-building are not yet complete.\(^8\) The communities in Northeast India have all the attributes, such as independent historical experience, racial, ethnic and religious peculiarities and geographical isolation, which are integral for the formation of regional forces. Thus, political integration in India involves overcoming parochial loyalties and residual jealousies in the previously residual principalities and the problems of ethnic cleavages.

The tribal people in Northeast India have been given limited opportunity for protected political representation during the transition period. The politicians or leaders of ethnic communities of the region did not gain broad identification as they did not participate in the national politics. This resulted in resentments in various forms from various ethnic communities.

The specific problems in integrating the princely states of Manipur and Tripura into India and the failure of the Government of India to adequately address the political aspirations of other ethnic groups in the Northeast India resulted in secessionist movements. By emphasising the federal nature of the Union of states the Government of India could not draw strength from a popular sense of national identity. Each state in India developed a sense of sub-national identity. The ethnic criterion of sub-national identity building is also on the rise.

\(^8\) B. Pakem, "Nationality Question in the Hill Areas of North-East India", in B. Pakem (ed.). \textit{op. cit.}, p. 324.
As political integration of the Northeast to India was brought about without the approval of its people, the leaders of the present-day insurgent outfits continue to struggle for independence. The main argument for separation and secession was that tribal peoples were simply not Indians at all. This mindset of not being an Indian at all still dominates the propaganda and ideological set-up of most of the secessionist groups of the region. As Rajni Kothari points out, there is "no easy approach to the development of a manifest and categorical 'national identity'... the Indian identity will continue to evolve in the forms of a complex network of relationships rather than a unit relationship."