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QUARTERLY

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Editorial Perspective

Recent Assembly Elections: The Emerging Trends

The emerging trends in the last Legislative Assembly elections of the five States of our country, especially in the case of Uttar Pradesh Assembly elections, have shown certain positive trends, some of which are the following:

- i. The voters, by and large, have rejected the family-based politics;
- ii. They have voted against the caste-politics;
- iii. They have voted to defeat the politics of vote-bank;
- iv. Some parties, as for example Congress, are fast moving to the margin due to various factors, such as the lack of mature leadership, family based politics, over reliance on the politics of social divide;
- v. BJP is acquiring new grounds, as for example in Manipur in the last election;
- vi. The trend of voting is clearly against the crime and muscle-power as lesser number of candidates with criminal records have succeeded in winning the elections;
- vii. The overwhelming vote for the party, elected to rule Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Punjab, clearly indicates that the popular conscious wish of the electors was for the empowerment for delivery;
- viii. The parties relying on the mechanism of social divide for winning elections have failed to a great extent;
- ix. The people have duly rewarded for positive performance, and punished for the negative performances;
- x. It was the endorsement of the Prime Minister's policies and actions, keeping in view that he was the main campaigner, especially during the last phases of the campaign; at the same time, he was also the main target of the opposition campaign, and a section of the electronic and print media;

- xi. The outcome clearly indicated the maturity of the Indian electorate;
- xii. It is a sad fact that a large section of the Indian media and Indian intellectuals raise emotional issues during the elections; they mostly confuse, rather than educate; they lack nation-centric/society-centric agenda. This election has clearly shown that their designs may be thwarted;
- xiii. The electoral win is the endorsement of the organizational capacity of the BJP and the RSS, and that of the Party President, Amit Shah.

This country had suffered for decades due to inertia in the field of policy initiatives. Prime Minister, Narendra Modi has broken the trend by taking multiple initiatives in many fields. Many of his initiatives have started showing results; some may take years to bring result. The point is that a mature leadership must take calculated risk in taking initiatives, and a mature electorate must ignore even if there is only partial success. Both the Prime Minister and the Indian electorate has done it in the case of demonetization. Anyway, the initiative must be rewarded even if partially successful.

So far the government formation in U.P. is concerned, a very hard signal has been sent to the opponents, especially to a section of intellectuals and journalists, that the people have empowered the “elected” to carry out their own agenda, rather than the agenda of those rejected by them.

The BJP government in UP, like in Maharashtra, Haryana, Uttaranchal, Jharkhand, has elected fresh faces as Chief Ministers, rather than old action leaders. This is certainly a novel way of getting rid of the faction politics, a malady of the present day power politics of India.

North-East and the Act East Policy

North-East region of our country is most suitably located to derive maximum benefit from our ‘Act East’ policy due to its geographical contiguity with East and South-East Asia.. The country and the region, however, must fulfil the following conditions for the success of the same:

- i. Infrastructural input: The intra-regional and inter-state connectivity with the rest of the country, as well as the connectivity of the region with South East Asia need to be improved. This is key to the success of Act East Policy.

- ii. Generation of the export potential in the region: The region must develop export potential of whatever our eastern neighbours need. A preliminary survey of the needs of our neighbours keeping in view our capacity of producing the same is the first need for the same.
- iii. The North-East region of the country has huge tourism potential. For the fuller utilization of the tourism potential of the region, we need (a) to have developed tourism infrastructure, especially the roads and proper accommodation and developed modes of conveyance; (b) the security scenario must change; and, (c) tourism potential, including, natural beauty and cultural richness of the region, need be adequately publicized.
- iv. Awareness generation about our historical, cultural and trade links need to be promoted.

In our country, the transition from “Look East policy” to “Act East policy” has not been smooth. It is a sad fact that we have practically done nothing to make the transition smooth. We have not moved an inch to make the endeavour succeed. The bureaucratic inertia and the lack of political will are perhaps the main reasons of our failures. Anyway, there is an urgent need today to take positive steps to ensure the success of the Policy.

—**B.B. Kumar**

North-East Scan

The Myth of 'Community' in Meghalaya

Patricia Mukhim*

The Book Development Dilemma: Displacement in Meghalaya 1947-2010 published by the North East Social Science Research Centre, Guwahati and authored jointly by Walter Fernandes, Veronica Pala, Gita Bharali and Bitopi Dutta is a very revealing study of the status of land ownership in Meghalaya and how a huge tract of land acquired by Government over the years for public purposes are not properly recorded. The study was carried out by interviewing people in the Government, retired Government officials and key informants. The writers admit that getting data from official sources was a big challenge because of poor record keeping. Officials in Meghalaya claimed that since the state was under Assam until 1972, the land records were kept in Guwahati, but officials in Assam say that all papers have been sent to Meghalaya. Another interesting information is that land donated by an individual or community to the Government is not recorded. Citing from A.K. Nongkynrih's study (2009) the book says that about two-thirds of the land in Meghalaya is Common Property Resource (CPR) but that neither the village councils nor the State keeps proper record of such land. Hence it is difficult to get reliable information of the land holding system in Meghalaya.

This brings me to a topic I have spoken and written on times without number, and that is the urgent need for a cadastral survey in Meghalaya, so that it becomes clear and transparent as to how much land Meghalaya actually has, as against land claimed, which is 22,249 sq. kms. and who owns how much land in our State? This should then be followed by a Land Reforms Bill and the legislation for a Land Ceiling Act. People who share my views are cynical that such legislation

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will ever come about, since politicians, local bureaucrats and business persons own the bulk of the land in the State today. Well, we can ignore the need for such legislation at our own peril since poverty is stark in Meghalaya today. And by poverty I mean, land poverty, the poverty of access to health and other services which are easily available to the 'haves' only.

What's interesting about the book is that it has gone in-depth and recorded every aspect of land acquisition details from different departments of the State Government. There is mention of more than 4000 acres acquired for administrative structures and as such should have been listed under the General Administrative Department (GAD) but the land was listed as being required by the Home Department which looks after police and jails. No further details are known about this land. The question that arises then is that if a large acreage of land acquired by the Government is neither recorded nor the purpose for acquisition made known then it follows that an intelligent revenue minister or person in charge of revenue could easily convert that revenue land into private land. And that is what's happening in Meghalaya. I once asked a senior official to provide us with details of land acquired by Government since 1972 and how all that land is used. He told me to take the route of Right to Information because he said: "it's a lengthy process and someone will have to sit and do grunt work for days." So that's the situation as far as government land is concerned.

Consider another fact. The Relief and Rehabilitation Colony in Rynjah is land allocated to the refugees who came to Meghalaya from erstwhile East Pakistan on account of their being Hindus and persecuted in that country. The land given should have been recorded and this being revenue land, if any person no longer resides on it then it should revert to the Government. One wants to know how this land has been converted to private land where MLAs, ministers and other wealthy tribals have been able to buy such land. The questions we need to ask is (1) Who sold the land and to whom? (2) How did the seller convert revenue land to private land? Who gave that permission? The answers we get will also give us an idea of how those in the government and their cohorts use their clout to take over revenue plots in the city of Shillong and elsewhere.

Only when you read the book do you realize that Government is a land guzzler. Land is incessantly being acquired for so-called development projects such as power projects, defence and security establishments, tourism purposes, educational purposes, road transport and communication and for extension of reserved forests.

When it comes to mining, the cement plants in Jaintia Hills have used a total of 2606.91 acres. It was only after the Supreme Court instituted a Joint Inspection Team (JIT) following allegations that the companies were occupying forest land that it was reported that 9 companies are on forest land. The JIT also found out that out of the 2150 hectares inspected, 838 hectares was forest land, 1254 hectares non-forest land and 58 hectares was listed as “unresolved.” But another 1142 hectares under cement plants was not surveyed. And in all probability this is forest land!

The report further adds that an independent surveying agency must be tasked to assess the mining areas of the cement plants, “since most mines prima facie are larger in extent than shown on the map or on the lease granted to them.” The cement plants showed mines as being under 5 hectares since any area larger than that would require clearance from the Union Ministry of Environment and Forests. This is clear indication that the State Environment and Forest Department is in cahoots with the cement companies. This is also the prime reason why the definition of forests in Meghalaya was changed.

Insofar as coal mining is concerned, the survey says forest cover has decreased substantially between 1975 to 2007, during which time there was a three-fold rise in coal mining activities. The gradual decline of forests during the above years is visible in the 56 sq. km. of dense forests and 29 sq. km. of open forests which have become non-forest area. Interestingly, only 0.7 sq. km. of land is transferred directly for coal mining. Hence there is a total loss of 85.6 sq. km. of forests to coal mining. Gradually the local people also converted agricultural land to coal mines. In all these transactions there is no clarity as to whether the land acquired outside of the forest land belonged to the community or to individuals. There are no records even in the district councils about the transactions. Land ownership in Meghalaya is therefore opaque and “people” and “community” are words that hide a multitude of sins. The phrase, “land belongs to the people,” is a myth that will be blown apart once a cadastral survey is conducted. That is why those in the seat of power will continue to resist this process which was first proposed by B.B. Lyngdoh and resisted by Hopingstone Lyngdoh in his wisdom. The absence of a cadastral survey is what has caused landlessness especially in rural Meghalaya.

As can be gauged from the name, the book looks primarily at development induced displacement or project affected displacement. The findings reveal that Meghalaya has no clear relief and rehabilitation package for families displaced from land acquired by government or by

mining companies. One would have liked to see a table giving the total land area in Meghalaya; the total land mass lost to mining and other activities; how much land is still available etc. More importantly, the study could have gone a little further to delve into the issue of community land so as to give the reader a feel of how much land is still held by the community. If so, is there a consultation with the community each time land is alienated in favour of “development?” Or are only a few people in the Dorbar Shnong or the Syiemship taking that critical decision?

I am disappointed at the fact that the book mentions traditional institutions as being actively involved in the conservation and management of forests, of community land and other resources. If so, how did forest land go to cement companies and to coal mining? The statement, “Activities like selling of land, establishment of factories, hospitals, schools etc., can take place with the knowledge and permission of the village headman,” actually is a misnomer. The village headman has no right to sell or barter land. It is the dorbar-in-council (meaning the entire executive body) after due consultation with the public under his jurisdiction which has the right to give away any land for public purpose.

Let’s not fool ourselves that land is still owned by the community. I am part of the Khasi community. I am not allotted any community land. And so are thousands of other Khasis. So who are we trying to fool? ‘Community,’ is a word that needs to be deconstructed by researchers from outside of the community for greater objectivity. Community, if it means decision making by the Syiem or village headman then it’s the biggest symbol of patriarchy.

And this is not to say that one is anti-development. But development at what cost is the question!

Customary Law and the Northeast

Pradip Phanjoubam*

The unseemly social unrest in Nagaland over the issue of reservation of 33 per cent seats for women in urban local bodies, brings to the fore once again the question of the extent customary laws can be allowed to

*The writer is editor, Imphal Free Press.

be pushed even at the cost of their anachronism causing dangerous social frictions, as well as undermine modern norms of justice and laws.

The development in Nagaland is not altogether dissimilar to the Jallikattu controversy. If the latter is a case of whether causing immense distress to animals for the fun of it and just because you can, and in the name of culture and custom, should be given legal sanction, Nagaland trouble raises the question of whether keeping women out of decision making institutions of the community just because this was the way it was in the traditional Naga society, can at all be justifiable in the modern times.

The concern is not new, and it has been a big stumbling block in any effort to codify customary laws in the wake of the indigenous people's rights movement now adopted by the United Nations. For one, there are as many customary laws as there are indigenous tribal communities, and many neighbouring communities often end up advocating mutually antagonistic values thereby causing conflicts. For another, the question of compliance with the principle of peremptory norms, also sometimes referred to a *jus cogens*, has always been a big issue.

Under this principle, there are certain practices which must be treated as absolutely and unjustifiably wrong. These would include slavery, piracy, colonisation, racism etc. The list can have no boundaries, for many previously overlooked situations and experiences of injustice peculiar to individual communities can and always do come up, child marriage, sati, female genital mutilation, traditional practices which result in gender inequality, to name some examples. Naga customary law's objection to what in the modern society is an important initiative for women's empowerment arguably would make this list.

The Nagaland controversy which has already cost two lives and destruction of many public infrastructures and finally a change of chief minister is a call for a review of the adherence to customary laws and their supposed infallibility. This is so not just in Nagaland, but most of the rest of the Northeast as well. It may be recalled in neighbouring Manipur, the now over four months old blockade along two major highways that connect the state with the rest of the country by the United Naga Council (UNC), rests on a similar clash of vision between customary and modern laws.

The blockade began on November 1 last year in anticipation of the Manipur government creating two new districts from what the UNC

considers as part of the traditional Naga homeland. After nearly a month and a half of the blockade, the Manipur government decided to disregard the UNC's objection and created seven districts instead by bifurcating seven existing districts, four of which the UNC considers to be part of their ancestral Naga homeland. The question here is, do administrative districts divide people? This is especially relevant considering Assembly and Parliamentary constituencies have been left unaltered by the new districts. The more important question is, can there be a reconciliation of the two visions? The answer is currently being explored in a talk in New Delhi between the UNC leaders, representatives of the Manipur government and the Union government, and on the outcome hangs the fate of the atrocious blockade.

The violence in Nagaland last week has its genesis in the 74th amendment of the Constitution in 1993 which provides for 33 per cent reservation for women in urban local bodies nationwide. This was not immediately adopted in Nagaland. In 2006 however, keeping in the spirit of the Constitutional amendment, the Nagaland Assembly passed the Nagaland Municipal (First Amendment) Act which provided for reservation of 33 per cent seat for women. However, the Act met with objections as it was deemed contravening Article 371A of the Indian Constitution, a clause in the Constitution introduced in 1963, when Nagaland state was formed, stating that "no Act of Parliament in respect of religious or social practices of the Nagas, customary law and procedure, ownership and transfer of land and its resources shall apply to the State of Nagaland unless the Legislative Assembly of Nagaland by a resolution so decides." Consequent upon this objection, elections to municipal bodies were not held.

In the meantime, in 2009 a powerful women's organisation, the Naga Mothers' Association (NMA), took up the issue. At their initiative, a newly formed Joint Action Committee for Women Reservation (JACWR), filed a writ petition before the Kohima Bench of the Guwahati High Court in 2011, challenging the state government's refusal to hold municipal elections. The court ruling went in their favour and in its verdict directed the Nagaland government to hold municipal elections before January 2012 with the due 33 per cent seats reservation for women. The legal entangle however did not end, as the government managed to stay the order on the strength that it violated Article 371A. In September 2012, under pressure from Naga tribal bodies, in particular the Naga Hoho, a Nagaland Assembly resolution overturned the Assembly's earlier decision to have the reservation.

The JACWR, however, moved a Special Leave Petition in the Supreme Court and finally got a ruling on April 20, 2016, wherein the Supreme Court upheld the High Court of October 2011. The state government, now under chief minister T.R. Zeliang decided to support the cause of the women reservation and passed the Nagaland Municipal (Third Amendment) Bill 2016, which revoked its September 2012 resolution. The state government also decided to conduct polls in 12 of the 32 municipal bodies in the state on January 31, following another directive from the High Court. Street violence followed.

It is rather ironic that Nagaland, and indeed most tribal communities of the Northeast, which are known for their liberal approach to gender equality and status, should have such structural gender oppression embedded within its customary norms. This being so, many in the state are also of the opinion that the present trouble is a fallout of sinister political instigation by those pitted against the Chief Minister, Zeliang. Considering the latter's bitter rival, the former Chief Minister and now a Member of Parliament, Neiphiu Rio, has come out strongly against Zeliang and those advocating reservation for women, there may indeed be more to the present Nagaland trouble.

BJP Comes Out on Top in the Manipur Election Cliffhanger

Pradip Phanjoubam

True to prediction that in the event of a hung verdict in elections to the 11th Manipur Legislative Assembly, it would be advantage BJP by virtue of its clout as the party in power at the Centre, it seems most likely at this moment that the next government in would be of the BJP. The BJP today has virtually snatched victory out of the jaws of defeat and a BJP led coalition government has been sworn in on March 15.

Earlier, the results of the elections to the 11th Manipur Legislative Assembly, vote counting for which concluded on March 11, was a cliffhanger. The two major contenders to the state's seats of power, the ruling Congress and the BJP, are now left precariously balanced on a knife

edge photofinish hung mandate of the electorate. In the house of 60, the Congress won 28 seats, just three short to be in majority to return them to power for a record fourth term, and the BJP could return 21 seats, 10 short of the magic number.

Of the remaining 11, four were won by National People's Party, founded by the former Lok Sabha Speaker from Meghalaya, Purno A. Sangma and now led by his politician son Conrad Sangma, four by the Nagaland based Naga People's Front, one each by Bihar's Lok Janshakti Party of Ram Vilas Paswan, All India Trinamool Congress and an independent candidate.

Belying expectation that the single largest party would be first given the chance to form the next government, the Governor of the state, Najma Heptulla extended this courtesy to the BJP led coalition first, claiming she was certain this was the post-election groups with the people's mandate. The governor's decision may have valid reasons. Though under normal circumstances, it should have been relatively easy for the Congress to get three more supporters to qualify to form the government, there was more to this mixed mandate than met the eye.

The NPF which won its four seats on the campaign plank of carving out Naga dominated areas of Manipur to be merged with Nagaland towards ultimately the creation of a Greater Nagaland, would not support the Congress, and the LJP is an ally of the BJP led NDA government at the Centre. This leaves the NPP, Trinamool and the independent candidate, totalling six MLAs, for the Congress to look for support.

There is however a hitch. Under the stewardship of Assam minister Himanta Biswas Sarma, a former Congress leader who defected to the BJP to ultimately play an important role in pulling down the Tarun Gogoi government in the 2016 Assam Assembly elections, a group called North-East Democratic Alliance had been formed last year and this group pledges allegiance to the NDA. The NPP is part of this group. The question is, would the Manipur unit of this Meghalaya party feel obligated enough to honour this pledge in seeking alliances to form the government in the state? If it does, then the Congress will have only the Trinamool and independent MLAs to win, but this can bring the coalition's number to just 30 leaving the Assembly in a hopelessly hung status.

On the other side, a BJP led coalition has its share of problems. Of the 11 MLAs to rope in, it is only the Trinamool which may refuse an alliance with the BJP, reflecting the party's stance at the national level. If this is so, the BJP will be left to win the support of all the remaining 10 to be able to claim majority support in the house. Given the resources at the command of the party and its clout as the party in power at the Centre, it probably will be able to do this.

However, this will not be the end of the BJP's problem as such a coalition will include the four MLAs of the NPF. The NPF would most likely agree to support the BJP, so as to keep the Congress at bay, but they could also as easily withdraw support if and when the issue of the question of Greater Nagaland comes to the fore again and a government response becomes necessary. There is also no gainsaying such a scenario surfacing sooner than later is almost a foregone conclusion in the backdrop of the much hyped but little known Framework Agreement being negotiated between the Union government and the Naga militant organization National Socialist Council of Nagalim (Isak-Muivah). This is so because the BJP too, and by no less other than the Prime Minister Narendra Modi himself, has pledged during the election campaign that no agreement with the NSCN(IM) would be allowed to affect Manipur territory. The only possible coalition left to the BJP can have to achieve a majority therefore is unlikely to guarantee a stable government.

Striking a deal with the NPP it seems was not altogether trouble free for the BJP. The NPP is new as it is, but very new in Manipur, and most of its leaders are disgruntled politicians from other established parties who left their original parties to join it. Of the four candidates who have returned seats on the party's ticket for instance, two till only recently were in the BJP camp and they rushed out of the party when they were denied party tickets and walked into the willing arms of the NPP. Although the NPP has joined the BJP coalition, the Congress would still be trying to win the party's loyalty ahead of the trust vote on March 21.

The BJP has also had to give away plenty too. All four NPP MLA elects were absorbed into the cabinet to ensure they are not wooed away by the Congress. One NPF MLA, one LJP and surprisingly, one Congress defector, who is most likely to be disqualified soon because of his defection, have already been sworn in, although still without portfolios. From the BJP itself, only two made it to the first round of swearing in, the Chief Minister, N. Biren Singh and another important BJP leader, T. Biswajit Singh.

Since, under the Anti-Defection Law, there is a ceiling on the size of state cabinets, and for Manipur this is 12 including the Chief Minister, it means there are only three more cabinet berths to be distributed. With its own party hopefuls also to be accommodated, it will not be an easy way ahead for the BJP leadership to keep everyone satisfied. The bargain probably will then be for the MLAs to accept other compensations. Plenty of loyalty auctions, hopefully not too ugly, are therefore to be expected in the next week ahead.

Development Experience of Northeast India: From Post-Colonial Reversals to Twenty-First Century Resurgence

M.P. Bezbaruah*

The image of Northeast India as a troubled peripheral region of the country has finally begun to change. The present write up is an attempt to narrate and understand how the seemingly insurmountable troubles afflicting the region in the aftermath of partition of India have finally begun to yield to positive developments. While the recent turn of events within and in the surroundings give ample reasons for optimism, actions will be needed to iron out the residual inefficiencies and rigidities holding back the region from its rightful place in the socio-economic ordering. In conclusion three critical areas for action have been discussed

1. Northeast India: The Region of Seven Sister States

The region today called Northeast India is a post-independent post-partition construct. Under colonial rule, the region used to be well within the eastern extension of the British Empire in India and Burma and not a peripheral border region it was reduced to after independence of India. Prior to independence, the region comprised three broad types of administrative units. First, there were a few nominally independent pockets, like the princely states of Tripura and Manipur. The second category was the hills, predominantly inhabited by tribes, which were lightly administered by the colonial authority. The tribes were more or less left to be self-governed as per their respective traditional arrangements. The remaining plains, which formed the third category,

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were the parts of the region which were directly and more effectively under colonial administration. These are also the areas where colonial economic activities mostly flourished. When India was partitioned into two independent nations in 1947, this area heterogeneous in topography, ethnicity, and administrative and economic organization, suddenly found itself bound by a border, which is 98 per cent international. The remaining 2 per cent of the border has been the mouth of a narrower passage to rest of India, popularly, called the Siliguri Chicken Neck. Initially, the region was mostly known to outsiders as Assam, after the Assam Province under colonial administration. But as political reorganization took place in course of time, the name North-Eastern Region, and more recently, North East India gained currency.

The region comprised the seven states¹ of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura constitutes slightly less than 8 per cent of geographical area, 4 per cent of population, and about 2.5 per cent of economy of India.² Despite its rather small size, the region derives importance due to its crucial geo-political position. Being surrounded by foreign countries, with some of which India has not had the most cordial of relations throughout or from time to time during the entire post-independence period, the region is often looked upon with serious security concern from the Central Government's point of view. Lately, however, with India trying to reach out to her eastern neighbours under the 'Look-East' policy, the geographical proximity of the region to the prosperous Southeast Asia has attracted greater attention. Accordingly, there has been a change in the perception of the region as one of remote outpost of the country to a possible gateway to the east.

About 70 per cent of the regions surface is mountainous which is relatively sparsely populated. About 30 per cent of the region's population inhabits these mountainous terrains of different altitudes. Community ownership of land and shifting cultivation used to be the predominant traditional features of economic organization in the hills. The plains of the region constituting only 30 per cent of the area hold 70 per cent of its population. Besides settled agriculture, the modern industrial sector developed by colonial capital was a significant component of the economy in the plains (Sarma 1993). These industries based on minerals, such as coal and oil, plantation and forest products were extractive in nature though. The railways developed to transport the output of colonial industries constituted another modern component brought into the economy (Ganguly 1986). Though railways, roads,

and industries might have been developed primarily for facilitating colonial administration and exploitation of the land, yet it cannot be denied that these developments introduced elements of modernity in the economy and the society of the region.

In 1951 the State of Assam, which at that time accounted for most of the present Northeast India, had a comparatively high per capita income among Indian states of that time.³ This position, however quickly changed thereafter. In a span of ten years, Assam slipped from its status of a high per capita income state to a state with per capita income less than the all India average. Both exogenous shocks arising from partition and endogenous dynamics emanating from identity aspirations of communities within kept the region in considerable stress and turbulence in the post-independence period.

2 Reversals Following Partition of India at Independence

2.1 The Exogenous Shock of Partition and its Fall Out

The partition of the country at independence struck a big blow to the process of development of the region in a number of ways. Partition cut off the region's approach routes to the rest of the country and the world through East Bengal, which became East Pakistan in 1947. Consequently, the narrow corridor of North Bengal remained the only link of the region with the rest of the country; and the region got burdened with a transport bottleneck and high cost of movement of man and material to and from it. Full restoration of road and rail link of the region to the rest of the country, even through this longer and roundabout way took several decades to be completed. Even today, the sole rail link to the region though the Siliguri Chicken Neck being mostly single tracked, the traffic to and from the region moves at an arduously slow pace.

Apart from the surface connectivity disruption, the wars with neighbouring countries in the 1960s⁴ raised security concerns about the region among potential investors. Consequently, attractiveness of the region as a destination of investment took serious beating (Sarma, 1966).

Moreover, partition also caused influx of refugees to the region. There had been inflow of immigrants to the region even in the decades before independence and indeed the inflow of population in those days had some positive contributions to the region's economy. As Ganguli (1986:20) puts it 'there was growth of agricultural production through extension of cultivation over larger and larger areas (in Assam plains), which was possible owing to the immigration of farm population from

the neighbouring districts of Bengal.’ However, sudden increase in the rate of immigration following partition and consequent step-up in the rate of growth of population in the post-independence period has had several adverse consequences.⁵ Exceptionally higher rate of growth of population in the decades following independence put pressure on the region’s natural resources of land and forests, and its inadequate social and economic infrastructure besides acting as a drag on the per capita indicators of development (Bhattacharjya 2010). Moreover, the heavy influx of population has also been at times the source of considerable social tension in the region.

2.2 The Endogenous Dynamics Driven by Ethnic Identity Aspirations

Internally, the period also witnessed a surge of identity aspirations of one ethnic group after another, which found expressions in various forms of mobilization and movements, often leading to disruption of regular life and giving birth to insurgency. Under colonial dispensation, barring the princely states of Manipur and Tripura, the region administratively consisted of the undivided Assam Province. As stated above, the administrative arrangement throughout the then Assam province was however not uniform. While the plains were under effective administration of the provincial government, the hills inhabited mostly by tribes were virtually left out of that system of administration. In fact, the hills were classified as ‘excluded’ or ‘partially excluded’ areas depending on ‘whether the area was inhabited by a compact aboriginal population or the aboriginal population was mixed with the other communities’ (Agnihotri, 1996). The ‘excluded’ areas were subject to the ‘inner line’ restrictions, which restricted the entry of people from other areas to these areas. With the goal of integrating the erstwhile ‘excluded’ and ‘partially excluded’ areas to the administrative network of the new nation without infringing upon the traditional self-governance of the tribes in such areas, the instrument of district/regional ‘councils’ were designed as outlined in the 6th Schedule of the Constitution of India. This arrangement, however, did not meet the aspirations of a section of newly emerging political leadership of some of these tribes. They came up with political mobilisations with demands for greater autonomy or separate statehood, and even complete ‘self-determination’ in some cases. Besides causing frequent disruptions to normal life through agitations, these movements have also contributed directly or indirectly towards perpetuation of insurgency and bloodshed in the

region. Needless to emphasize that such things vitiate the environment required for developmental activities to flourish.

3 Central Government's Policy Response to the Troubles in the Region

3.1 During the Early Plan Period (1950s and 60s)

During the early plan period, when India pursued a public sector led industrial and economic development strategy, there was not adequate appreciation of these difficulties faced by the region at the central government's policy making circle. While foreign colonial interest in taking up new industrial ventures in the region waned, there was no significant step up of investment by domestic private or public sector for sustaining the growth of industries. The State government did not have the resources for the purpose and the Central Government and the domestic private capitalists seemed to lack interest in investing in the State (Sharma 1966). The apparent indifference of the Central Government to the region came to be locally viewed as an attitude of neglect for the region. The feeling gave birth to a sense of alienation. Some of the seeming unjust decisions in allocating public sector industrial investment did not help matters (Goswami 1981). As a consequence of such lack of effective initiative in the industrial sector during the early planning era, the share of manufacturing sector in Assam's NSDP dwindled from 12.49 per cent in 1950-51 to 7.93 per cent by 1973-74.

3.2 Changes in the Policy Perspective in the 1970s

Subsequently, responding to the growing public discontentment in the region, the Central Government started paying greater attention to the social turmoil and economic hardship in the region. In response to the demands for territorial autonomy by tribal groups, a process of political-administrative reorganization of the region was set in motion, which culminated in the creation of the present structure of seven full-fledged states. In recognition of interdependence among these states, North Eastern Council (NEC) was constituted in 1972, which was to take up Regional Plans consisting mainly of projects which would be of common importance to more than one state in the region.⁶ Investments by some central Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs) also started to flow in.

The creation of fiscally unviable small states in the region also necessitated concessional and enhanced inflow of the central fiscal

resources. These new states of the region along with a few more like Jammu and Kashmir were designated as ‘special category states’⁷ for preferential treatment in devolution of central pool of fiscal resources. The whole process actually created some growth impetus in some of the newly formed states – so much so that in mid-1980s, Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram and Nagaland managed to achieve per capita income levels higher than the all India level. This spurt was, however, driven primarily by expansion in ‘public administration’ and ‘construction’ sectors resulting from intensification of the administrative apparatus in these newly formed states rather than by genuine economic growth impetus in agricultural, manufacturing or even services like trade and commerce (Bezbaruah, 2001). Such a source of growth would obviously have a limit. Hence, it is hardly surprising that the growth spurt was short-lived.

To sum up, Central Government’s policy response to the region during the 1970 and 80s was more active. However, the responses were more reactive to the pressures and unrests surfacing from within the region rather than proactive in nature to address the fundamental problems infrastructure and basic service deficits in the region.

3.3 Fund Infusions in the Post-Liberalization Period

Significant liberalization of economic policy regime in India unleashed in 1991 created a new set of problems for the region. With market forces and private sector coming to play more decisive role in investment decisions, regions like the Northeast, backward in infrastructure and beset with locational disadvantages, found themselves handicapped as destinations of investment – both domestic and foreign.⁸ In order to counter the disadvantages, fiscal concessions in the form of tax exemptions and special subsidies were brought in. In addition, some special provisions have been made in the form of allocation of 10 per cent of budget of each Central Government department for the region and keeping the portion of the allocation that remains unutilized during the year in a non-lapsable pool. Several Prime Ministers of India during this period announced special packages for the development of the region. Though there was a tendency in some quarters to interpret such provisions as doles to pacify the sense of alienation in the region, the Shukla Commission⁹ report adequately explained that the enhanced fund flows were warranted for helping the region to overcome its deficiencies in infrastructure and backlog in basic services. As a result of such initiatives and measures by the Central Government and the

Planning Commission, there has been a significant enhancement in the allocation of development fund for the region since the mid-1990s. Consequently, funds for building up the necessary infrastructure to activate the inherent growth potentials of the region have not remained a constraint. The question has since shifted to the ability of the region to access, utilize and absorb such large infusion of financial resources.

4 A More Recent Records of Development

4.1 Improved Growth Performance and narrowing Per Capita Income Gap

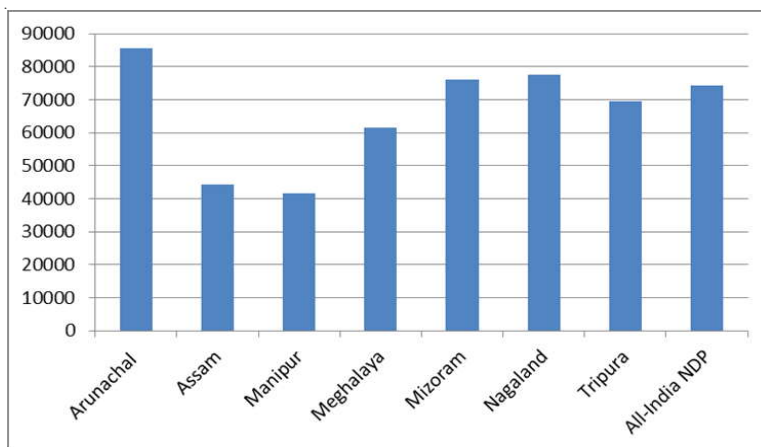
The data since the turn of the century seem to indicate that the above-mentioned inflow of central development resources have had a positive impact on economic growth in the region. The growth rates of real Gross State Domestic Products (GSDP) of all the states have had an improvement during the 10th and 11th Five Year Plan periods of 2002-07 and 2007-12. In fact in four out of the seven North-east states, namely Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Tripura, the growth rates in the 11th Plan period were higher than that of the Indian economy as a whole (Refer Figure 1).

Three of the states namely, Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram and Nagaland now have per capita income levels higher than the all India per capita income. Tripura is also fast catching up with the all India level. However, the populous states of Assam, Manipur and Meghalaya still have a lot of distance to cover to reach the all India level (Refer Figure 2).

An interesting structural break in the growth trends in the North-East States can be traced in Figure 3. Here the NSDP per capita of the States are shown as percentages of NDP per capita of India of the respective years. The downward trend of the relative per capita income of most of the states continued up to 2007-08. But the downslide was arrested in the subsequent years. In fact there is a moderate rise in trend for most of the states. As a result of this positive reversal of trend, the gap between the regional per capita income and the all India per capita income has started to narrow down since 2012-13 (Refer Figure 4)

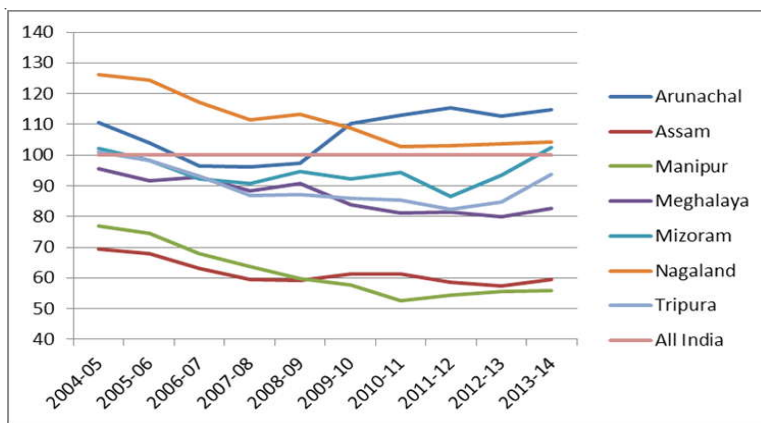
A significant fact about the recent growth experiences in the North Eastern States, which is not revealed in the figures mentioned above, is that the revival of the economic growth in the region in the recent years appears to be based on more robust footings than the short lived growth spurt of the 1980s.

Figure 1: Average Annual Compound Growth Rates (%) of North East States During 2002-07 and 2007-12



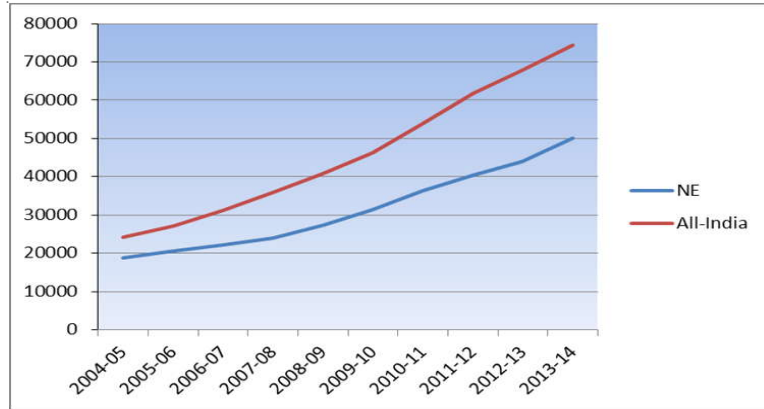
Source: Basic Data taken from different issues of Economics Surveys, Ministry of Finance, Government of India

Figure 2: NSDP Per Capita of Northeast States at Rs Current Prices in 2013-14



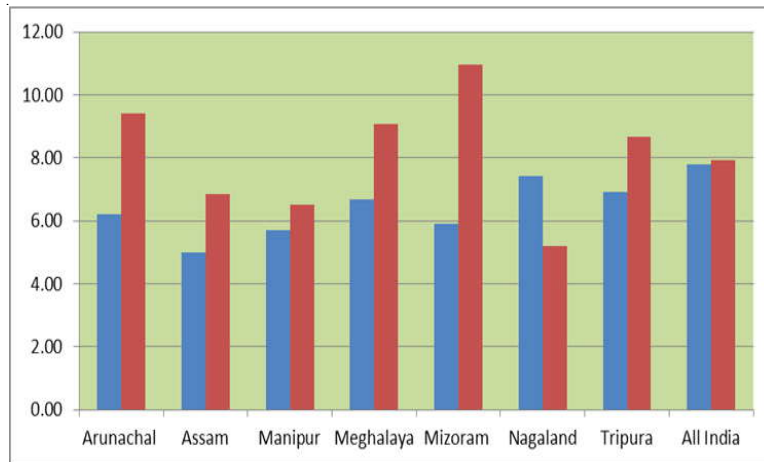
Source: Basic Data taken from different issues of Economics Surveys, Ministry of Finance, Government of India

Figure 3: Per Capita NSDP of Northeast States as % of All India NDP Per Capita



Source: Basic Data taken from different issues of Economics Surveys, Ministry of Finance, Government of India

Figure 4 Trends in Per Capita Income



Source: Basic Data taken from different issues of Economics Surveys, Ministry of Finance, Government of India

Mizoram, for instance, has been mostly free of insurgency and has had a prolonged run of peaceful social environment. The state seems to

be harvesting 'peace dividend' by making proper use of funds available for bridging infrastructural gaps and also promoting new ventures.

Tripura has had a prolonged political stability with the reputation of having the best governance among the seven sister states of the region. Tripura is in the forefront among the states of Northeast India in implementing the *Panchayati Raj* Institutions in letter and spirit of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act of 1993. Apart from actively implementing and empowering *Panchayati Raj* institutions, the state has been largely successful in containing insurgency and resolving ethnic conflicts. Tripura's success thus can be described as driven by good governance.

Though Nagaland is not in the purview of the 73rd Constitution Amendment Act for democratic decentralization to the grassroots level, the state has devised its own institutions called Village Development Boards, which are empowered and entrusted to implement development programmes. These Boards have had a good record of effectively utilizing development funds in parts of the state.

In the last few years, Arunachal Pradesh has had infusion of large dose of public and private investment primarily for harnessing its hydel power potential. The multiplier effect of such and related investments must have contributed to the surge in the states' domestic product.

Though no obvious explanation presents itself for the step-up in Assam's growth rate, it can be hypothesized that Assam has been a beneficiary from its location at the centre of the region. Trade and transportation to and from the other states of the region cannot generally bypass Assam. Thus, when progress and prosperity take place in the surrounding states; Assam is naturally benefitted from spill-overs. It is worth mentioning here that private transport network has been an endogenously propelled notably successful sector in Assam for the last three decade or so. Hospitality, health care, education and trade are other service activities in Assam, which profit from spill over of prosperity in surrounding states.

4.2 A Mixed Record in other Components of Human Development

As for attainments of the states of the region in the other two area of human development, namely health and education, the experiences across the states have been less uniform.

In case of literacy, the region as a whole has been able to keep ahead of the country average. In fact, the states of Mizoram, Tripura,

Nagaland and Manipur have substantially higher literacy rates than the all India average rate. However, Assam and Meghalaya have remained more or less around the national rate in this regard. In Assam, the most populous state of the region, the rate has remained relatively low primarily due to lower literacy attainments among some communities such as the people of the tea-plantation labourer origin and the Muslim population of immigrant origin (Government of Assam, 2003). The literacy rate of 67 per cent for Arunachal Pradesh in 2011 may look particularly low not only in the region but even in the whole country. But in light of the fact that the state started with a literacy rate of only 11 per cent in 1961, achievement of 67 per cent by 2011 marks significant progress.

As for the Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) – the parameter used here as the indicator of attainments in health-region as a whole in 2011 had a slightly higher rate than the national rate of 44 per 1000 live births. However, the state of Manipur was able to achieve a truly remarkable low IMR of only 11 per 1000 live births. Apart from Assam and Meghalaya, all the other states of the region managed to achieve significantly lower IMR than the all-India rate. Assam’s high rate is again due to prevalence of high infant mortality among some population sections including the two communities mentioned in the context of the literacy rate.

From 2001 to 2012 the Infant Mortality Rate declined in all but one state of the region. But the declines had been in fewer points than at the all-India level. Mizoram, the highest achieved in literacy rate, ironically recorded a rise in the IMR during this period. There is no apparent explanation for this dismal trend. Under-reporting of incidence of infant mortality in the early years has been suggested as the explanation by some informed source.

Table 1 Some Indicators of Non-income Components of Human Development of North-East States in 2011

States/Region/Country	Literacy Rate (% of population)	Infant Mortality Rate (per 1000 live births)
Arunachal Pradesh	66.95	32
Assam	73.18	55
Manipur	79.85	11
Meghalaya	75.48	52
Mizoram	91.58	34
Nagaland	80.11	21

Tripura	87.75	29
Northeast Region	75.48*	46*
India	74.04	44

Source: Economic Survey 2015, Ministry of Finance, Government of India

Note: *authors own calculation using weighted average of state level data

5. Areas Calling for Attention for Consolidating the Recent Positive Developments

The statistics for the last decade show that there has been significant step-up in the rates of growth in the states of the region. It appears that the enhanced resource transfers from the Central Government and the other initiatives have finally yielded some results. What is more encouraging is that this time round the step-up in the growth rates is founded on more robust footings.

Lately, insurgency in the region seems to have winded down considerably. Several factors might have contributed to this happy turn of events. One is India's improved relation with some of the neighbours such as Bangladesh and Myanmar, following regime changes in these countries. Because of improved relations, the territories of these countries are now not as safe or hospitable a refuge for the insurgent groups as they used to be earlier. Secondly, improved economic performance within and out-migration of youth from the region for taking up employment in other parts of India may have made recruiting youth for insurgent activities less easy. Moreover, with all major insurgent organizations like NSCN (I-M), ULFA, NDFB etc., now being engaged in peace talks with the government, insurgent activity has naturally receded. The tough stand of zero tolerance for violence signalled by the Central Government after the ethnic violence in Kokrajhar District of Assam, following the 2014 Parliamentary elections should have also contributed its bit for discouraging insurgency.

While these are encouraging signs, there are areas of concern which require urgent attention for putting the region firmly on a path of sustained robust development. While infrastructure deficit, developmental backlog and even insurgency are getting addressed, for completing developmental transition process some other issues inherited from the past now require greater attention. Further, a few emerging issues also need to be responded to. We discuss below three such pending and emerging issues in some details.

5.1 Need to Improve Governance

There are several studies and indicators from which it can be argued that the states in Northeast India can do with substantial improvement in governance.

A study endorsed by World Bank Group (KMPG, 2015) on Implementation of Business Reforms in States, which covered almost all the States and Union Territories of India, shows that all the seven North Eastern States had ranks at the lower end of the list of states. Even Tripura, which otherwise has a reputation of being a better governed state, ranked several places below Assam in this regard. Assam occupied the highest ranked state from among the seven North-Eastern states, but only with the rank of 22 in a list of 32 States and Union Territories of the country. Other studies on state of Governance in Indian States do not often cover all the states of the region. Most studies only include Assam. In Mundle et al (2012), Assam is ranked 12 among 17 major states of India. A more recent report by Mundle et al (2016), which goes into different components of governance, does not show the state in any better light on most of the counts. A study by Khera (2011) shows that Assam had leakage of as much as 90 per cent from the food-grains allocated for Public Distribution System. Obviously these findings are by no means flattering for the region as far as the state of governance in it is concerned

A more efficient government machinery can not only help the region to access the central funds available for its taking, but also for producing better outcome from these funds in terms of overcoming the region's deficit in infrastructure and basic services. Once the deficit is overcome, a long standing hurdle in attracting business and industrial investment in the region will get removed.

5.2 Need to Raise Interactions with the External Neighbours

The partition inflicted geographical isolation, from which the Northeast region is yet to fully recover, can ease considerably if the region can revive its access to its external neighbours and through these countries with the rest of the world.

In this context it is necessary to mention that there are apprehensions in some quarters that the Northeast Region may not benefit much, or even lose out, if trade with the neighbouring countries are opened up. The pessimism is often derived from the perception that the region may not have many exportable and/or much exportable surplus, and hence,

simply end up providing markets to foreign, mostly Chinese, producers. This view is partial for at least two reasons. First, it ignores the possibility of benefits to the consumers from inflow not just of the cheaper manufactured items but also of essential consumer goods like pulses and onions. Secondly, it does not take into account the possible gains for the region from growth in export of services such as transportation, communication, hospitality and health care, and the resultant multiplier effect on the farm and the non-farm sectors within the region (Bezbaruah 2015).

Till a fairly recent past, it was difficult to foresee India's ties with her eastern neighbours improving to an extent that would turn her remote border outpost in the northeast into its gateway to Asian prosperity. However, with improved relation with Bangladesh and the winds of change finally blowing in long-stagnating Myanmar, the geo-economics of the transnational region comprised Bangladesh, Northeast India and Myanmar is now poised for positive changes. Time seems to be opportune now for pushing ahead the planned connectivity improvements in the region and other institutional reforms supporting free transit of men and merchandise across the region.

5.3. Need for Economic Integration Within the Northeast

While geographical isolation is often cited as a major hurdle in the path of developing the Northeast Region of India, a counter argument can also be made out. Since geographical isolation raised the cost of moving materials and men to and from the region, the region within should have been a sizeable protected domestic market in which local producers could profitably operate. However, this potential benefit of the protected domestic market has remained substantially unexploited as the markets within have remained fragmented due to physical and institutional factors.

The prospects of economic integration within will be brighter, if the different states in the region perceive a stake in the process. The benefits of internal economic integration are not difficult to foresee. A larger market within the region can give it the advantage of scale economies to its producers to become efficient and competitive. For illustration of the following scenario of agriculture in the region can be considered. Natural resource bases in the hills and the plains of the region are suitable for specialization into complementary cropping patterns. The plain areas are better suited for the HYV seed-fertilizer technology of food-grains production. Hills are endowed with agro-

climatic conditions for horticulture and other high value crops. But the existing level of market fragmentation does not allow farmers to give up their existing subsistence-oriented cropping patterns and specialize into potentially more rewarding cropping patterns. But if it becomes possible to move goods freely throughout the region at reduced cost of transportation, farmers in the hills will be assured of getting supply of food-grains at reasonable price and also market offering remunerative prices for their commercial farm products. Specialization will then be viable and total agricultural output of the region can expand from it. While the surplus food-grain production in the plains can be marketed in the hills, the marketable agricultural surplus of the hills can find outlets in the plains and even in markets outside the region.

Tourism is another sector for which Northeast India is acclaimed to have enormous potential but has remained largely un-tapped till date. One of the reasons for this is the lack of enough coordination among the states which together possess the capital for attracting visitors from within and outside the country for nature, adventure, eco, ethno-cultural and various other types of tourism (Sarma 2003, Bezbaruah 2008). An integrated approach of the states within the region is expected to pay rich dividend.

Some of the factors for which the economy of Northeast India has remained fragmented are the following.

- (a) High cost of movement of men and materials within the region due to its difficult communication network
- (b) Lack of uniformity of tax structure among the states, and
- (c) Historically inherited institutions that obstruct mobility and distort factor markets

In recent years connectivity within the region has improved appreciably. Air connectivity within the region and with outside has improved. The work on the portion of East-West corridor extending into the region, other highway projects and road networks connecting the interiors to these highways are in various stages of completion. While the outlook on the connectivity front appears to be bright; there is much less movement forward on the other fronts.

The implications of local norms rooted in customary practices such as those relating to ownership and transfer of land, and of systems such as the Inner Line Permit inherited from the colonial era are often cited as hindrances for emergence of efficient factor markets conducive for supporting broad based economic activities, especially in the hills of Northeast India. The economic implications of the existing

institutional set-up deserve more open, intensive and dispassionate examinations. If it is found that these institutions do indeed stand in the way of economic integration but cannot be dispensed with as they otherwise are still socially relevant, it would be necessary to invent ways of working around them to secure economic integration in a socially acceptable way.

6 Concluding Comments

The impression that the Northeast Region of India is a perennially troubled territory, mired in backwardness and insurgency, should be changing now with the positive developments within the recent past. With the outlook in the external surrounding also turning from bleak to bright, the region is now poised for taking faster strides in the path of development. But to be able to realize its full economic potential several areas beg attention without further loss of time. While governments need to be efficient and effective for delivering the basic services and supplying other public goods, civil society also needs to contribute by imparting constructive orientation to public opinions and keeping divisive and distortionary tendencies at bay.

Notes

- ¹ The state of Sikkim is also now officially included in the Northeast Region and it has been inducted into the North Eastern Council in 2002 as the 8th Member State. However the state is neither contiguous nor has shared history with the original 'seven sister' states. Development indicatorwise also the state constitutes an outlier in the Northeast Region. Its per capita NSDP in 2013-14, for instance, was 3.33 times that of Northeast (without Sikkim) and double that of Arunachal Pradesh, the state with the highest NSDP per capita among the original 7 NE States. Accordingly in the present study the Northeast Region is confined to the original seven sister states only.
- ² In terms of share in India's Gross Domestic Product.
- ³ It is however debatable if standard of living of the masses in the region was particularly higher than that of an average Indian at that time. The high income generating modern component of the economy was there more like an enclave economy with very little inter-linkage with the rest of the economy. The per capita income hiked by this component cannot therefore be taken as true indicator of the level of living of an average inhabitant of the region at the time of independence.
- ⁴ With China in 1962 and Pakistan in 1965.

- ⁵ The worst affected part of the region was Tripura where there was a growth of population by 78 per cent within just 10 years from 1951 to 1961.
- ⁶ However the council was kept under the administrative control of the Union Home Ministry for about three decades which aroused doubts about actual purpose of the Council (Prabhakar 1973). The council was finally revamped in 2002 as regional planning body and placed under the Ministry for Development of the North Eastern Region (DoNER).
- ⁷ ‘Historically, the concept of a special category state followed the Fifth Finance Commission’s decision to accord preferential treatment to a few disadvantaged states. Later, in 1969, to recognize the inherent disabilities of some states to mobilize resources for development, certain criteria reflecting these features were laid down. On the basis of these criteria, 10 states – eight northeastern states, Himachal Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir – were accorded special status. The criteria were: i. Hilly and difficult terrain, ii. Low population density or sizeable share of tribal population, iii. Strategic location along borders with neighbouring countries, iv. Economic and infrastructural backwardness, and v. Non-viable nature of state finances because of low resource base’ (Sarma, 2014: pp 32-33).
- ⁸ Out of total FDI inflow from April 2000 to June 2009 of Rs. 427,335.71 Crores, the 7 Northeastern States managed to get only Rs. 228.50 Crores or just 0.06 per cent of the total. [Source: FACT SHEET ON FOREIGN DIRECT INVESTMENT (FDI) From AUGUST 1991 to JUNE 2009, which was accessed from RBI website www.rbi.org.in on September 1, 2009.
- ⁹ ‘Transforming the Northeast: Tackling Backlogs in Basic Minimum Services and Infrastructure Needs’, High Level Commission Report to the Prime Minister, Government of India, Planning Commission, New Delhi, 1997.

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The Border Trade in North-East India: The Historical Perspective

B.B. Kumar*

The North-East India was a very important part of the country as far as the border trade is concerned. The region had many important trade centres. The articles produced in the region were in great demand elsewhere. Many items were imported through North-East India and were exported through our ports to other countries or traded through our various land routes to other countries. When Chinese emperor Wu-ti (140-87 B.C.) sent his ambassador to Central Asia for the first time in 128 B.C., then the Chinese Ambassador, Tsin Kyang found Indian and Chinese goods, being sold in Bactria.¹ Needless to say that such items were brought by the Indian traders by the land routes passing through South-East Asia and North-East India, as well as through sea routes. Had the items been brought through Tun-huang-Turfan-Kucha-Kashgar-Bactria route or Tun-uang-Khotan-Kashgar-Balkh route or even through northern route,² then the Chinese Ambassador was certainly to be in the know of the same.

The North-East India had trade links with Tibet and Burma through land routes. There was an ancient land route from Peshawar to Parvatipur (now in Bangladesh) passing through Vazirabad, Lahour(now, Lahore), Jalandhar, Saharanpur, Lucknow, Tirhut and Katihar. It extended further to Assam³ from Parvatipur.⁴ It mostly passed keeping the Ganges to the south. A southern route from Lahore to Bhagalpur through Raivind, Firozpur, Hatinda, Delhi, Allahabad, Varanasi, and Patna, branched off to Ganga Sagar (Calcutta) from Patna. The route extended from Bhagalpur to Kajangal in Rajmahal and then to Calcutta.⁵ Another route branched off from this southern route to Kamarup from Kajangal by crossing the Ganges at that point. It may be mentioned that Bhaskara

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Varman, the king of Kamarup, and Chinese traveller, Yuan Chuang met the emperor, Harsha Vardhana at Kajangala,⁶ and they must have used the same route for travelling to that place from the Kamarup. The two monarchs marched towards Kanauj with their armies from that place. Harsha Vardhana proceeded along the southern route and Bhaskara Varman followed the northern one.⁷ The route to Kamarup extended upto the Yunnan province of China.⁸ Kamarup formed an important part of this trade route. An alternative trade route from India to China passed through Chumbi Valley in Sikkim and Tibet. The ancient silk route passed through the north and the north-west.

A proposal was made in the early part of the last century to open up Patkai trade route.⁹ That, however, could not materialise due to various reasons. That was, perhaps, to follow the ancient route linking Brahmaputra valley to the South-East Asia and Yunnan province of China. One of the reasons of not restoring the ancient trade routes through Brahmaputra Valley towards the east was the higher cost of road construction. The interests of the British owned Steam-Navigation Companies operating in the rivers of Burma were expected to be adversely affected by such land routes and their opposition certainly played crucial role in this case.

The Brahmaputra Valley was linked up with Burma through Manipur also. But, one or two routes linking the valley with Manipur were most difficult.¹⁰ This route was not an important one for border trade between Assam and Burma due to difficult terrain.

The human movement between India and Burma through Surma Valley and Manipur started in the remote past. According to Sir A. Phayre: "The route by which Kshatriya princes arrived (in Burma) is indicated in the traditions as being through Manipur ..."¹¹ According to Capt. Dun: "There can be no reasonable doubt that a great Aryan wave of very pure blood passed through Manipur into Burma in pre-historic times."¹² Johnstone has mentioned:

"In the days when the Indian branch of the Aryan race was still in its progressive and colonising stage, this district (Manipur) was repeatedly passed over by one wave after another of invaders intent on penetrating into the remotest part of Burma."¹³

It may be mentioned that there were regular routes between Burma and India which were used by the traders, colonizers and the Buddhist Missionaries. D.C.E. Hall mentions about one such road linking Lower Burma and India via the bank of the Irrawady, the bank of the Chindwin and the Manipur.¹⁴ K.M. Pannikar has mentioned about another route through these hills to China.¹⁵ It is obvious that the existence of such

land routes facilitated the trade between North-East India with Tibet and Burma on one hand and Bangladesh on the other. The land routes through Manipur continued to operate upto the present day. There were atleast three routes connecting Surma Valley with the Manipur Valley and two connecting the latter with the Kabaw Valley in the Chindwin river valley in the present day Burma.¹⁶ There were many minor routes connecting Brahmaputra Valley with Tibet which were used for the trade.

North-East India produced many items which were marketed outside the region. *Mahabharata*,¹⁷ *Harshacharia*,¹⁸ etc., mention about the products of Kamarup. Silk clothes, ivory products, etc. from Kamarup continued to be appreciated outside the region. Many items were imported from China, Tibet and Burma through this region and exported outside India. One of the routes of the import of Chinese clothes was through Yunnan and Assam,¹⁹ and the same was sent to the Bay of Bengal through Brahmaputra. It may be mentioned here that Brahmaputra was navigable from Gwalando in Bangladesh (the confluence of the Ganges and Brahmaputra) to Dibrugarh, and upto Sadiya during the floods.²⁰ Cinnamon was exported from China, Tibet and Burma. The route of its import and of many other products was through Assam.

There were many minor trade routes linking the region with the foreign countries through which considerable trade was carried. Considerable trade was also carried between the villagers of both sides of the international border. Such trade, though illegal, and called smuggling, still continues. The tribes inhabiting Indo-Tibet and Indo-Burma border had trade links with their neighbours across the border. Some of the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh used to be expert traders. The Monpas, the Sherdukpens, the Boris, the Ramos, the Bokars, the Pailibos continued to have trade links with the Tibetans. The Boris used to visit Nayi Lube market in Tibet and barter their raw hides, and chillies for rock salt, woolen clothes, raw wool, Tibetan swords, Tibetan vessels, earrings and brass bangles. They used to barter salt, iron and utensils brought from Tibet with the other groups of the Adis.²¹ The Bokars exchanged their surplus chillies, butter, hides, tamen (a creeper used for dyeing) for the cattle, sheep and goats, swords and woolen goods in the Tibetan markets.²² The Shimongs and Ashings used to carry their clothes to the Tibetan markets and exchanged them for salt, beads, etc.²³

It may be pointed out that two principal trade routes out of the several important ones in the Siang district passed through the Bori and the Bokar countries to the Tibetan plateau.²⁴ The Tibetans used to come

down through the Kepung La Pass to the Ashing area of Arunachal Pradesh and further down upto Pasighat for exchanging the rock salt, iron, hand-woven clothes, swords, musk, imitation turquoise necklaces, blue porcelain beads, yarn of different colours, snuff, China silver and wooden bowls and metal pots for mithuns, raw hides, deer horns, and white and red rice.²⁵ These trading activities reportedly continued in large scale upto the sixth decade of this country, as reported by Sachin Roy.²⁶

Gait has reported about the hectic trade between the Assam and Bengal.²⁷ and also between Assam and Tibet.²⁸ According to Gait, Rudra Singh is said to have received the submission of all the hill tribes, and to have established an extensive trade with Tibet.²⁹ This clearly indicates that the border trade also depended on the law and order situation of the country concerned. The quantum of trade might have varied from time to time, but it continued uninterrupted on our northern border in the past. Mackenzie has also reported about the border trade with Tibet. He quotes from Hamilton's description of the trade between Assam and Tibet based on the Pemberton's Report.

"Tibetan caravans conducted by 20 persons used to come down annually to a mart of Chouna on the Assam border after two months journey from Lassa and conveyed silver bullion to the amount of about one lakh of rupees, and a considerable quantity of rock salt for sale to the Assam merchants at Geegunshur four miles away. The large quantities of rice brought by the merchants at the latter place were purchased and imported into Tibet from Assam by the Tibetan merchants. Tussa silk cloth, iron and lac found in Assam, skins, buffalo horns, pearls, and corals, first imported from Bengal were traded by the Assamese merchants. The Tibetan merchants brought woolens, gold dust, salt, musk, horses, Chinese silk, etc. The annual fair was temporarily stopped due to Burmese occupation. Attempt was made to revive it in 1833. The fair was started at Udalguri later on."³⁰

Marts were regularly held (daily, biweekly, weekly or annual) at the foothills of the Himalayas throughout the country and also at the foot-hills bordering Bangladesh, Burma and Tibet. The border trade of Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Tripura was mostly carried through such marts. R.M. Nath has written about the trade of the Garos with Bangladesh:

"The Garos living in the areas bordering Goalpara, Mymensing and Rangpur districts as also the Garos of the interior came down to the plains to sell their cotton and chillies and purchase paddy, salt,

cloth and other necessities; and rulers of the states exacted taxes from them. To deal with the Garos, each ruler used to appoint a Laskar at every pass of duar. Often times the fraudulent tactics of the merchants and the officers of the states, were retaliated by the Garos by chopping off their head which were sold at high premium in the hills the price varying according to the wealth and position of the merchant or the officer.³¹

The Khasis and the Jaintias used to visit the marts of present day Bangladesh in the south and that of the Assam in the north. The Khasis used to visit the marts up to the central part of the Nowgong. Iron was manufactured in the hills and exported in the shape of hoes to the Assam valley and in lumps of pig iron to the Surma Valley, where it was used for clamps by the boat builders. An estimated 20,000 maunds of iron were exported from the hills in 1853.³² The ancient trade routes and the marts played important roles in the internal and border trade in the North-East region. The discussion about them provides insights in the historical perspective. The importance of the trade routes and the marts for the people may be understood from the fact that the British authorities used to close down the trade routes and prevent the marauding tribes from attending the marts to force them to behave. Mackenzie has described such closures and the impacts of the same. He wrote:

“In April 1861 the dwars were closed to Naga traders by order of the Commissioner of Assam, in consequence of the murder of one Tonoo Cachari in the Celeki Dwar, used by the Namsang and the neighbouring clans. In the February following, the Nangota Abor Nagas, who were not known to us to be the guilty tribe, surrendered five of their number as those who had committed the murder. This surrender, it appeared, they made under pressure brought to bear on them by the Boree Nagas of Tabloong, Jaktoong, Kamsang, and Namsang, who being such distressed by the closure of the Dwars threatened to attack the Nangotas if they did not give up the offenders.³³

Mackenzie further observed:

“In November 1867 the Geleki guard-house was again attacked at night... The Dwars were at any rate closed to trade; the out-posts strengthened; and neglected stockades hastily repaired. The stoppage of trade again proved a successful policy. The Tabloong, Namsang, and other Nagas who were carrying on a most profitable traffic with the tea gardens, which they could not afford to loss, speedily combined, and in a few months’ time they succeeded in tracing out the raiders, and arresting by force or strategy two of their leaders, who were delivered

over to the British authorities for punishment. These men proved to belong to the Yungia Abor Nagas, a remote clan in the upper hills, who actuated by a love of plunder and a craving for skulls had led a stealthy war party through the trackless jungles to the plains below; and had, as they said attacked the police-station under the notion that it was a settlement of ryots – a mistake not very creditable to the discipline of the post.⁷³⁴

The remarks made above underline the importance of trade, including the border trade, for the people of this region. Some points emerging from the above mentioned facts needs, which are:

- i) The North-East India was not the closed corner of the country; it has wider trade links. The region was linked up across the border through major and minor trade routes. The intra-national political, cultural and the economic linkages were the strongest.
- ii) The region continued to have flourishing trade with the neighbouring countries.
- iii) The trade flourished whenever the law and order situation was sound and suffered at the time of anarchy.
- iv) The quantum of illegal border trade today is almost the same as that of the actual trade with its neighbours; the border trade potential is really very high.

The partition of India created unnatural border and the age-old trade ties with the part of Bengal called East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) were snapped. The trade with Tibet received severe jolt after the occupation of Tibet by China, and especially after the Indo-Chinese border conflict in 1962. Situation on both sides of the Indo-Myanmar border remained fluid. This border trade highly decreased after the independence of India, and especially after the sixth decade of the century. The situation further aggravated due to the lack of roads and the speedier modes of communication. The costs of bringing in the locally needed items, and that of exporting the local produce became prohibitively high. The production of many agricultural and horticultural items, such as, potato, orange, pineapple, ginger, and other perishable products in the southern border areas of Meghalaya, became uneconomic. The people suffered. In this background, the steps envisaged by the Central Government to facilitate trade with Bangladesh and Bhutan generate optimism. The border trade with Tibet and Myanmar should also be encouraged.

The economy of the border areas is always of supplementary and complementary nature and this aspect of economy should always be kept in mind while promoting the border trade. Only such border trade

shall make the economy healthy. Appropriate steps should, however, be taken to prevent the flow of narcotics and the arms between the neighbours. The trade of the items produced in the third country, such as, the Korea and Japan, should also be discouraged in this case.

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Expanding Horizons of Opportunity for India's North-East from Look East to Act East: ASEAN and Beyond

P.P. Shrivastav*

Our Fascinating North-East

With waves of hills (<50 m to >5000 m above MSL) spread over 70 per cent of the 2.62 lakh sq. km. of geographical area (<8 per cent of the Country's area) rising from the evergreen plains of the mighty rivers Brahmaputra and Barak, reaching out to the crimson sky of the rising sun, our North-Eastern Region (NER) is the most delightful and enticing part of India. Rich in natural resources, fertile valley lands, luxuriant forests and substantial mineral wealth, NER has been the meeting point of great civilizations. Ever since the dawn of history, groups of people trickled in from all directions to settle in the habitable parts of hills and in fertile valleys, created by nature through the still ongoing process of the tectonic push by the Indian Plate below the Eurasian Plate lifting up the then sea-bed, creating the great Himalayan range, driving the sea southwards to the present Bay of Bengal and creating the mighty Brahmaputra, Barak, Meghna and other river systems to drain out the fresh water from the Himalayan ranges to the Bay of Bengal.

Over four and a half crore people (3.76 per cent of the country's population as in 2011) with unmatched cultural vivacity, inhabiting NER are among the precious human resources of the country. Over 68.37 per cent of the population of NER lives in the State of Assam

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alone. The density of population in NER varies from 17 per sq. km. in Arunachal Pradesh to 397 per sq. km. in Assam. The predominantly hilly terrain in all the States except Assam is host to an overwhelming proportion of tribal population. The region has over 160 scheduled tribes and over 400 other tribal and sub-tribal communities and groups. It is predominantly rural with over 84 per cent of the population living in the countryside. According to the 2011 Census, the total literacy rate of the population in NER stood at 64.69 per cent {ranging between 66.95 per cent in Arunachal Pradesh to 91.58 per cent in Mizoram and with Assam (73.18 per cent), Meghalaya (75.48 per cent), Manipur (79.85 per cent), Nagaland (80.11 per cent), Sikkim (82.20 per cent) and Tripura (87.75 per cent) in between} as against the country's average of 74.04 per cent. Unfortunately, **this respectable literacy rate has not translated into higher productivity or employability.** The following factors seem to have contributed to the denial to youth of the counselling, guidance and support that they need to harness their knowledge and skills in moving faster on the road to peace, prosperity, progress and happiness for themselves individually and collectively for the NE Region:

- *hangover of the anthropological attributes among isolated tribal communities, of inward-looking tradition-bound mindset suspicious of outsiders; that held them back from symbiotic exchange of knowledge and skills with more developed communities;*
- *erosion of the traditional system of peoples' participation and transparency in governance resulting from hijacking of decision-making by a few (self-serving persons) leading to perpetuation of the colonial-time feeling of alienation towards the Government, and lack of feeling of guilt or shame in misuse or misappropriation of public funds;*
- *emergence of self-serving pseudo-leaders who exploit the slogan of 'protection of tribal identity from outsiders' and organize agitations to block projects aimed at improved connectivity and development to retain their leadership and following;*
- *emergence of insurgent groups and spawning by them of anti-social groups and gangs that thrive on extortion, drug-trafficking, gun-running, kidnapping for ransom, etc.*
- *failure of leadership at the community and State levels, of course with a few notable exceptions, in becoming good models worthy of emulation by the youth. Preference of the youth for wage-employment under Government to productive entrepreneurship.*

The Feeling of Isolation in NER

Historical evolution of NER also reveals very interesting factors and facets. Notwithstanding the challenges of distance and terrain that made access difficult, right from times immemorial, socio-economic and cultural interaction had continued between the people in the rest of the Indian subcontinent with their brethren in NER although different parts of the country were ruled by different rulers at different times. This could happen because our people had always remained culturally united as children of the common motherland called Bharatvarsha (and much later as Hindustan by our western neighbours). Mahabharata has immortalised the rescue of Princess Rukmini, at her own request, by Shri Krishna himself from Bhishmak Nagar (in present Arunachal Pradesh); and the visit of Pandava Prince Bhima to Manipur. People could move freely all over and be understood by each other not only within the Indian subcontinent, but with the peoples inhabiting the vast command area of the mighty Ganga-Brahmaputra-Meghna-Irrawaddy-Mekong river systems and beyond to the Indonesian islands. This is supported by references in our mythology, in epics and in the striking cultural similarities among the people. *“Most striking, however, are finds from excavation in the Assam Garo Hills border dated to 1000 BCE, that show culture closely linked with Southeast Asia”* writes the noted historian, Prof. Imdad Hussain, formerly Professor of History in the North Eastern Hill University, Shillong. The role of Indian scholars, artistes, artisan and traders led to symbiotic exchange of knowledge, culture and skills leading to economic prosperity for all. It is through such people-to-people contacts and interactions at various levels that the highly developed Indian culture got adopted **and adapted** across this vast region. This was an entirely voluntary process free from coercion or force. That is how Hinduism, Buddhism and later Islam also came from the Indian side and all these faiths have coexisted peacefully so far.

Invasions from across Hindukush mountains on our western frontiers did affect this process to an extent, but it got rudely shaken after the entry (around the 15th Century AD) of European powers and their use of temptation, deception, coercion and force, to divide our people and start colonisation in Asia. Six or so centuries later, fighting broke out among European powers themselves and the two World Wars created conditions that led to end of colonisation and to emergence of a number of **politically** independent self-ruled nation-States in Asia.

The colonial administration in their times were interested more in revenue-generation from the new industries based on tea, coal and oil in Assam. They brought in the *Inner Line Regulations* primarily to keep the hill tribes confined to the hills, undisturbed by plainsmen basically to ensure safety for the flourishing trade and commerce in the vast plains of Assam. This added to the natural problem of communications in hilly terrain, and increased the feeling of isolation among the hill-people. Partition of the country in 1947, with the ill-conceived and mischievous Durand Line lacerating Bengal and cutting off the established surface-route communication links to the rest of the country, further compounded the problem of isolation.

NER at the Time of Independence

When Independence came, NER basically comprised the then British Province of Assam (including NEFA) and the two Princely States of Manipur and Tripura. The Partition of the country in 1947 suddenly and rudely interrupted the age-old traditional connectivity of the people with their neighbours, leaving NER physically boxed-in by an artificial legally impervious but physically porous barrier of international border with Tibet, Myanmar and the then East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). Over four and a half crores of our people (as in 2011) are connected with their brethren in the rest of their own country through just a single narrow land-corridor that has been given the name *Chicken's Neck*. With a few exceptions, trans-border roads hardly exist. Even air-services from S-E Asia overfly or skirt NER even now.

Expectations and Aspirations of the Youth in NER

Real architects of the future of any country or region are its educated youth. Thus it is largely for the will and willingness of our energetic, enlightened, educated youth to shape the destiny of NER in times to come. The NER youth born and brought up in the lap of Mother Nature are endowed not only with a sound body, healthy and strong, but also a perceptive mind blessed with the rare attribute of strong intuition, that comes with growing up in close touch with the elements of Nature. The literacy rate being reasonably high, they can easily learn the traditional knowledge and wisdom from their elders. However, they will need guidance in gaining knowledge and skills of science, learning the ways of earning a living by honest means and leading a happy life based on moral principles, from their teachers, elders and leaders in the

community. The leadership, with a few notable exceptions, proved unequal to the task of becoming good models worthy of emulation by their youth. The States also could not do much in providing the infrastructure to encourage and enable them to take to productive entrepreneurship.

New Windows of Opportunity in our South-Eastern Neighbourhood

Keen to restore the age-old socio-cultural and eco-political contacts with our neighbours in South-East Asia, the then Prime Minister, Shri P. V. Narasimha Rao, announced in his address at Singapore (1994) our emphasis on building of closer relations with our all-time friends in the S-E Asia, now divided into a number of nations. This came to be known as the ***Look East Policy (LEP)***. However, the people in NER, right at our borders with our neighbours in S-E Asia, could see nothing much happening on the ground for a long time.

It was after 20 years after ***Look*** that the keenly awaited ***Leap*** came in the form of an inspiring declaration by our new Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi, at the 12th ASEAN-India Summit and East Asia Summit (Myanmar: 12 Nov 2014) of transformation of the earlier ***Look East Policy*** to ***Act East Policy***. The very name of this Policy conveyed the sense of dynamism. Of particular interest, the Prime Minister explained, was the issue of ***enhancing connectivity between India and ASEAN, not just by land and sea, but also by air***. Moreover, ***institutional, digital and people-to-people connectivity were no less important***. He also highlighted the importance of the measures which could yield rich dividends, like ***free movement of people, particularly professionals; creation of regional value chains to increase economic inter-dependence for mutual benefit; recognition of each other's educational qualifications and degrees***, etc. The points made by him in his address were enthusiastically supported by the participating Heads of States/Governments. Let us now have a quick look at the potential opportunities awaiting the people.

Bundle of Opportunities Brought in by ASEAN and Other International Groupings

Apart from ASEAN and ASEAN-led mechanisms {e.g., ***ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF)***; ***East Asia Summit (EAS)***; ***ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus (ADMM Plus)***; ***Asia-Europe Meeting***;

Expanded ASEAN Maritime Forum, etc.}, India has taken other policy initiatives in the region that include taking advantage under Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation, from: **CICA (Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia)**; **EAC (East Asia Summit)**; **BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa)**; **IORARC (Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation)**; **MGC (Mekong Ganga Cooperation)**; etc. With finalisation of *Free Trade Agreement (FTA)* with ASEAN, *we shall be partners in the world's largest market with 1.8 billion consumers and a combined GDP of around \$3.8 trillion*. The *Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP 10+6)* including India envisaged translation of the already adopted *Vision Statement* into action on the ground.

The ASEAN Vision and Plans aim at a prosperous and peaceful community through collective effort to accelerate economic growth, enhance social progress and intensify cultural development to improve the living standards of the people. *ASEAN Tourism Strategic Plan 2011-2015* has since been updated to *ATSP 2016-2025*. The need is for our 8 NE States to integrate their individual Plans into a consolidated NER Tourism Plan and synchronise it with the national Tourism Plan and the ASEAN Tourism Strategic Plan in a manner that the different interests of international tourists are catered to. Such synergy of Tourism Plans will be of immense benefit to all. Larger inflow of tourists in the vast India-ASEAN region will result in enhanced demand for local products and services, leading to job creation, foreign exchange inflows and greater interactions between the tourists from all these countries and our people in NER. The suggested initiatives include enhancing the reach, quality and compatibility of ICT and education (including basic, technical, vocational and skills); culture, social welfare, youth, women, rural development and poverty eradication. Awareness of the diverse cultural heritages; studies on arts and cultures and of languages is also emphasized. The four prioritised areas of cooperation include *promoting regional awareness among its citizens*, particularly the youth; *strengthening the identity through education*; *building human resources in the field of education* and *strengthening the University Network*. *All these are of special interest to us. ICT also provides a large window of opportunity for our youth.*

Limitation of space would not permit detailing of the projects, but it is clear that the ASEAN **Master Plan covers practically all the points that** are of special relevance to NER and of interest to our youth. It is now for our youth to remain fully aware of the opportunities,

introspect on own shortcomings and eliminate them; organize and press the authorities to provide the needed facilities and then seize the opportunities for the betterment of all. *The success of Act East Policy will depend largely on all these factors.*

Civil Society Endeavour to Organize and Inspire the Youth: The First Step

Taking note of the aforesaid and inspired by the path-breaking initiatives of the Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, the *Asian Confluence*¹ joined the *Indian Council of World Affairs* to kick-start the process of organizing educated youth, scholars and researchers of NER, to make them aware of these developments and take advantage of them for their own prosperity and for progress of the Region. They were encouraged to introspect on the resources and capabilities, shortcomings and assets, etc., of the Region and come out with practical suggestions on the contours of a smooth, obstacle-free *Road Ahead* to peace, prosperity and progress for the people in NER, taking advantage of the dynamic *Act East Policy* initiative of our Prime Minister, in the context of the locational advantage of NER vis-à-vis the ASEAN neighbourhood. In their Conclave (Shillong: Dec 2015) the *Young Scholars Forum (YSF)* came out with an imaginative and excellent set of consensus-recommendations. Their sincerity and brilliance may be assessed from the enlightening manner in which they visualised:

Way Forward for Peace, Prosperity & Progress in NER: The 3 Highways:

- (i) ***P-2-P Connectivity Highway*** with the following milestones:
 - a) ***Physical***: Road/Rail/Air linkages to be developed through G-2-G contacts.
 - b) ***Intellectual***: Linkages among Scholars, Academia, Universities, Researchers, Professionals and Institutions.
 - c) ***Spiritual***: Heritage/Spiritual Tourism, Fairs and Festivals; Inter-faith Discourses, and such like.
- (ii) ***Prosperity Highway*** with the following milestones:
 - a) **Trade and Commerce**
 - b) Tourism
 - c) **Capacity Building**: Knowledge and Skills for *Value addition of local produce locally.*
- (iii) ***Progress Highway*** with the following milestones:
 - a) **Governance**: Transparency, Awareness and Stakeholdership of Citizens in Development.

- b) **Introspection:** Identification of own shortcomings and steps to overcome them.
- c) **Border Management:** Advocate concept of primacy to Human Security in Border Security.
- d) **Climate Change:** Concrete Plans of Awareness, Prevention, Early Warning and Mitigation of natural disasters.
- e) *Setting up of South Asia Centre in NEHU, Shillong.*
- f) **Periodic holding of such Conclaves** in association with Institutions of repute.

The Next Step

It is encouraging to see that the road map envisaged by the **Young Scholars Forum** is in tune with those drawn up by the Government of India, the ASEAN and the other international bodies and agreements in the South-East Asian region.

In this context, it will be pertinent to take note of the thoughts of Shri Toki Blah, a leading thinker of Shillong committed to improving governance, who left IAS in favour of social service. In his article **How Does NER Look at LEP**, he said that *‘LEP should not fly over or simply pass through the region. It must be part and parcel of the region and we must own it. Only then can it be meaningful, sustainable and viable for the people of the NE.... So let us not waste time trying to nitpick the LEP but it will be to our advantage if we tried focusing instead on how we can latch-on to it as best and as fast as we can and on our own terms.’* The problem, he added, lay in *‘...the apathy, ignorance and total indifference of the region’s political elite and intelligentsia towards the whole concept of change. The regions political leadership which lacks imagination and a sense of history is totally dependent on Delhi for interpretation of the LEP when actually they should be busy trying to understand it; to comprehend it; spread awareness; rouse curiosity and establish local stakeholdership and ownership over the LEP. To me this is the crux of the problem.’*

On the issue of tribal **Identity**, which is frequently exploited to whip up violent anti-outsider agitations, now largely for personal ambitions and gains – political and financial; and but for which Railways would have come to Meghalaya decades back, Shri Toki Blah says: *‘Identity is an issue that affects most of the indigenous people of the region’* and feels that *‘Central concern expressed through insensitive interventions has simply managed to heighten and aggravate the problem’* and most are *‘still paying the price for our inability to correlate*

Identity with the nature and process of Change. It is a consideration that now, more than ever, requires the most serious attention....Time, therefore is no longer a luxury. One recognizes the fear of being left behind and it's exactly what we should not allow to happen again, simply because we already are the victims of past administrative negligence and political mistake.'

These words of wisdom need to be taken note of and regional apprehensions allayed. Since local political leadership has failed, advocacy by Civil Society may be the way out for encouraging the youth and scholars of NER to express their objective views, publicly expose the exploiters and impress upon the political leadership to make the best use of the opportunity thrown open by the **Act East Policy** initiative of the present Government.

PM Road Map for Progress of NER

Prime Minister Narendra Modi attended (27 May 2016) the 65th Plenary Session of the North Eastern Council (NEC) in Shillong. What a coincidence that his illuminating Address included all the *milestones* of the **3 Highways of Peace, Prosperity and Progress** of NER as visualised by our **Young Scholars Forum**. Excerpts from PM's Address are quoted below:

“The government has been focussing on the development of the North East region through its pro-active “Act East Policy.” As part of this policy, we are focussing on reducing the isolation of the region by improving all round connectivity through road, rail, telecom, power and waterways sectors.

You may like to consider developing the North Eastern Council as a state-of-the-art resource centre for the North Eastern States with the necessary resources, knowledge and skills. The resource centre may enable the States and the implementing agencies to properly plan and execute projects, promote research and innovations and provide strategic policy vision for the region.

The North Eastern Council should also consider focussing on issues in emerging areas of livelihood, entrepreneurship, venture funds, start-ups and skill development. All this will help in generating jobs.

If the western region of the country can develop, if other regions of the country can develop, I see no reason why the North East region of the country cannot develop. I am also convinced that India can move forward if all the regions develop including the North East region.

The North East region is also very important to us for strategic reasons. And it is my conviction that we have to bring this region at par with the other developed regions of the country.

In the current Budget, more than Rs.30,000 crores have been earmarked for the North East region. It should be our endeavour to ensure that this money is spent well for the development of the region.

In the recent past, we have established two important projects in Assam – Brahmaputra Cracker and Polymer Limited and Numaligarh Refinery Limited's wax unit. These are big projects that would create huge employment opportunities in the North East region. However, it has taken us many years to complete these projects. We have to ensure that we are able to complete our projects in time and without cost overruns. Only then can we realise the true benefits of these projects.

The North East is the gateway to South East Asia and we need to take advantage of this. We are opening up both road and rail routes to our neighbouring countries. This should give a boost to the economic development of the region.

We have created a specialised highway construction agency for the North East – the “National Highways and Infrastructure Development Corporation” – that was incorporated on 18th July 2014. Since then it has set up its Branch Offices, one each in every North Eastern State. As of today, it is implementing 34 projects in the North Eastern States covering a length of 1001 kilometres at a total cost of over Rs. 10,000 crore.

In the road sector, we need to keep in view the special land and weather conditions of this area. Most of the North East areas get a lot of rainfall and are also prone to natural calamities and landslides. We thus need to be careful in using appropriate technologies in the construction of roads in this area.

We have recently implemented an improved internet connectivity project for the North East region in collaboration with Bangladesh. This will make available 10 GB of seamless alternate bandwidth for the region. This integration will benefit the North East region tremendously.

The Government is also making a heavy investment in power transmission projects covering all the eight North Eastern States at a cost of around Rs 10,000 crore. This would ensure power to more areas. The recent commissioning of Bishwanath-Chariyali-Agra transmission line has also brought 500 MegaWatt additional capacity to the region.

The railways have undertaken a major expansion in the region at a cost of around Rs 10,000 crore. In November 2014, Arunachal Pradesh and Meghalaya were put on the rail map. Agartala in Tripura has also been connected with broad gauge line. We are on the way to ensure that all the North East States come on the rail map soon.

In the North East, the Indian Railways has commissioned about 900 kilometres of broad gauge in the last two years, leaving only about 50 kilometres metre gauge lines to be converted in 2016-17. In addition, a 132 kilometre part of third alternative connectivity route to North East (that is New Maynaguri – Jogighopa) has also been commissioned.

There are a number of strengths of the North East which we need to harness for healthy growth of the region. All the States of the North East region are blessed with natural scenic beauty, distinct historical cultural and ethnic heritage. All this offers tremendous scope for tourism in the region. There is also a great scope for mountaineering, trekking and adventure tourism in the region. If developed and promoted well, this can emerge as the biggest employer in the region. It can also add to the growth and income of the region.

I understand that the Ministry of Tourism has identified a thematic circuit for the North East region. I hope that the North Eastern States will make the best use of the scheme to develop tourist circuits and attract tourists from all over the world. The region can also look into combining a few popular destinations of the neighbouring countries with their tourism circuits. This will be an added attraction for tourists. The majority of youth of the North East region is English speaking. With improved connectivity and language skills, you may look into setting up of the BPO industry in the region.

The Government has approved North East BPO promotion scheme in the Digital India programme for creation of employment opportunities. The North East States must avail facilities and get these BPOs operationalized in their respective States. This will promote growth and provide jobs to our youth.

The North East is home to exotic fruits, flowers, vegetables, aromatic plants, and herbs. Most of them are organic in origin. If we focus our development strategy on organic farming, it would help the region greatly.

A few months ago, I was in Sikkim and participated in a function to declare Sikkim as the first organic State in the country. Other States can take a lead from Sikkim and the North East Council can also play an important role in the development of organic farming in the region.

The North East can become the organic food basket for this country. Organic products are going to be increasingly used widely and if the North East Council can assist the States in the region to take a lead in this area, it will contribute immensely to the income of the people and the region.

There is a large rural population in the North East region. If we talk of Assam alone, 86 per cent of the population lives in rural areas. We have initiated the Shyama Prasad Mukherjee Mission to bring in economic, social and basic development of the rural areas in a cluster model. It should be the endeavour of the region's States to make use of this mission for the development of the rural areas....”

The Need for Effective Follow-up on the Ground

The Government of India, at the apex level (in the *First Space*) has taken the decisions needed for peace prosperity and progress of the people in NER, at a forum that includes and involves all the eight State Governments in the Region (since the membership of the North Eastern Council includes the Governors and Chief Ministers of all these States). These decisions are aimed at achieving peace, prosperity and progress of NER and its people. The Big Business (in the *Second Space*) is bound to follow as NER proceeds ahead on the three highways leading to these destinations as recommended by the Young Scholars of NER, who permeate all sections of the Society, and combine knowledge and skill with enthusiasm & energy. The field is thus left to *the large, intelligent, Third Space of the People* (for whose welfare the **First and Second Spaces** exist) to ensure that these decisions are translated into action on the ground with all due promptitude, expedition, diligence and tact, so that progress is not blocked by the forces of ignorance or mischief, or by self-serving leadership, or enemies of the society, the State, the Region or the Nation who are ever interested in wrecking our peace, depriving us from prosperity and stopping our progress.

The first task for the youth is to kick-start the process by spreading the awareness of the opportunity that is knocking at the doors of NER and the determination to seize the same with the confidence and faith that they can do it for the sake of a more prosperous and happy life for themselves and their children. Then will come the crucial task for the individuals to choose the task, the profession or the calling in the wide basket of opportunities thrown open now and prepare to start off. Upgradation of knowledge and skill has to go on forever, after one has

taken the plunge. While one is engaged in the chosen role and earning while learning will be the next step.

For the Civil Society and Young Scholars Forum, the next activity may be to introspect and suggest how the obstacles to smooth progress of entrepreneurial activity in different areas could be reduced and then finally removed and what practical steps would be needed for the purpose. For instance, the biggest and most widespread issue in many areas is that of corruption and extortion that adds to the cost of the saleable product to such an extent that it becomes unsaleable. The most effective remedy in such cases lies in mobilizing public opinion against it. This has actually happened both in Kohima and Imphal, where small traders started agitations and came on the streets protesting against unaffordable rates of 'taxes' imposed by the mafia groups. (As is well known in NER, the term 'tax' stands for the extortion money that the traders have to pay to the extortionist mafias). After a few days, the extortionists had to reduce their rates and only then the business was resumed. It has to be appreciated that this type of malaise can be solved most effectively not by outside agencies like Police or Administration but by the sane and far-sighted elements within the community, like the academic community. If Young Scholars Forum could spearhead this issue in their respective areas, that would be the occasion to celebrate.

Will the Government at the Centre be willing to support such an initiative in some of the areas in NER which are the worst affected by the menace of extortion?

Notes

- ¹ Asian Confluence is a Civil Society non-profit organization devoted to the cause of restoring the age-old cultural unity of the S-E Asian region, facilitating confluence of the commonalities of the various cultural streams into a common Asian stream; to end the feeling of isolation and backwardness and bring benefits, prosperity and happiness to all including to our people in NER, the land-bridge between India and our eastern neighbours.

Act East Policy: Attempting to Integrate Northeast India with ASEAN

Wasbir Hussain*

A. Overview

India's Northeast can rightly be described as the beginning of Southeast Asia. Geographically speaking, this is true. But lack of proper or no connectivity has deprived India's Northeast – a vast swathe of land inhabited by nearly 45 million people¹ – from the trickle-down effect of the booming tiger economies in the region's Southeast Asian neighbourhood.

Infrastructure is a major and sometimes the sole factor in connecting territories, which, in turn, can develop land and people. More so, if the area in question happens to be located in close proximity to as many as four foreign neighbours – Bangladesh, Bhutan, Myanmar and China – that, in turn, opens up to the rest of Southeast Asia. With linkage in mind, the Government of India launched the Look East Policy in 1992 with a view to usher in development in the Northeast by connecting it with the Southeast Asian neighbourhood. This policy was rechristened as the Act East Policy after the Narendra Modi-led BJP government came to power in May 2014.

The concept of an uninterrupted road link from Asia to Europe could be traced back to over 2000 years ago when Yunnan was the

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overland bridge between India and China. There was a geographical continuity then between Northeast India and the Sichuan Province of China, a fact recorded by Chinese traveller Hiuen Tsang. Recorded history says that Emperor Ashoka who ruled India between 268 BC and 226 BC travelled to Talifu the then capital of Yunnan and married Chienmeng-kui, a Chinese princess, and returned to India.²

In 1959, U. Nyun – Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East (ECAFE), now known as the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and Pacific (ESCAP) – incorporated the idea of an Asian Highway (AH). This idea gave birth to the Asian Land Transport and Infrastructure Development (ALTID) programme. In 1960, ECAFE mooted the idea of a Trans Asian Railway (TAR) project and in 1992, AH and TAR projects were integrated to further realize the Asia-Europe land-transport linkage.

If anyone thought linking India's Northeast with the neighbouring Southeast Asian nations was actually possible, history could certainly have been a motivating factor. Chinese history (2nd century BC) talks about import of cloth from Sichuan to India, suggesting that a south-west Silk Route was in use between India and China long before Marco Polo established a silk-route over the Karakoram (13th century).³ Noted writer B. G. Verghese states that the southern most route passed through Ruili, on the Myanmar-Yunnan border and crossed the Chin Hills to Manipur in Northeast India.⁴ The northern silk route passed through Mytkiyina, the Hukwan valley and into the Patkai and Naga Hills to Assam. Guwahati, Assam's capital, was a major market for Indo-Chinese trade, and it is not surprising, therefore, to find that the same link has been identified as a possible route for the Asian Highway, under the ALTID project.

B. Act East Policy and ASEAN

The Act East Policy represents India's efforts to cultivate extensive economic and strategic relations with the nations of Southeast Asia. It focuses on forging close economic and commercial ties, increasing strategic and security cooperation and emphasis on historical, cultural and ideological links with Southeast Asian nations. This policy has also led to Northeast India getting some importance in India's foreign policy.

The policy received its initial thrust with India becoming a dialogue level partner with the ASEAN, while the big push was felt when India became a summit level partner with the ASEAN in 2002 and engaged itself in regional initiatives like BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative

for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation), and the Mekong Ganga Cooperation. It was further enhanced by India becoming a member of the East Asia Summit (EAS) in December 2005. Properly executed, the Act East Policy can make Northeast India the commercial corridor of India linking the ASEAN nations and enabling its people to harvest economic well-being through trade, transit and tourism.

After the BJP government came to power (and Look East became Act East) in 2014, there has been increased dynamism in terms of ties with the ASEAN. This can be established from the fact that over the last two and a half years, India's top leadership – President, Vice President and Prime Minister – has visited 9 out of 10 ASEAN nations.

The Indian government has now accorded a new focus on promoting connectivity through Myanmar and Thailand with other ASEAN states. During the India-ASEAN Summit in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, in November 2015, Prime Minister Narendra Modi proposed a US\$1 billion line of credit to promote projects that support physical and digital connectivity between India and ASEAN. New Delhi has also recognized that success of the Act East Policy will be determined by its contribution to security and economic development of Northeast India.

The establishment of the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) in 2015 is another major milestone in the regional economic integration agenda in ASEAN, offering opportunities in the form of a huge market of US\$2.6 trillion and over 622 million people. Currently (2015-16), India's trade with ASEAN stands at US\$65.05 billion (Export: US\$25.15 billion, Import: US\$39.9 billion).⁵

Accessing the ASEAN market can be easier for Northeast India in terms of time and money spent on travelling, than accessing some far flung market within India. The integration of Northeast India with ASEAN will increase the per capita income in the region, will lead to development and creation of infrastructure in the region as well as enhance the productivity and efficiency of the local producers.

C. Initiatives to Link Northeast India with ASEAN

Various projects are currently underway to connect Northeast India to ASEAN. Below are some of the major initiatives in this regard.

C.1. Asian Highway

The Asian Highway (AH) project, a collaboration between European and Asian countries, was initiated by the United Nations in 1959, with

a view to promote the development of international road transport in the region. Several road networks have already been planned and completed under the project. For India, seven ASEAN countries — Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, Malaysia and Singapore — will be readily accessible through the AH.

The Asian Highway is marked from AH1 to AH88. AH1 is the longest route of the AH network running 20,557 km from Tokyo via South Korea, China, Southeast Asia, India, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran to the border between Turkey and Bulgaria where it joins with European route E80. The Northeast Indian states feature in this AH1. The routes include: Moreh-Imphal-Kohima-Dimapur; Dimapur-Nagaon; Nagaon-Numaligarh-Jorabat; Jorabat-Shillong-Dawki.

Asian Highway will provide the necessary transport infrastructure that is crucial in facilitating the trade and investment for economic development of the northeastern region. The Highway will also lead to intensification of connection between Southeast Asia and Northeast India in terms of people-to-people contact, which can lead to reawakening of centuries-old ties, especially between Assam, Manipur and Myanmar.

C.2. India-Myanmar-Thailand (IMT) Trilateral Highway

The dream of an all weather road to connect India-Myanmar-Thailand, that will go a long way to expand trade, tourism and people-to-people contact in the entire region, led to the idea of construction of the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway from Moreh (in Manipur, Northeast India) to Mae Sot (in Thailand) through Bagan (in Myanmar). The three countries signed an agreement for constructing the Highway in April 2002. However, the construction of the Highway has been facing inordinate delays and has already missed a couple of deadlines. It is now expected to become operational by 2018-19.⁶

The Highway is expected to boost trade and commerce in the ASEAN-India Free Trade Area, as well as with the rest of Southeast Asia. India has also proposed extending the Highway to Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam. A trial run of passenger vehicles on the IMT Trilateral Highway up to Naypyidaw, the capital of Myanmar, was carried out during November 9-14, 2015, in which Indian vehicles travelled to Myanmar on the Imphal-Mandalay-Bagan-Naypyidaw route and back, with Myanmar vehicles joining the Indian vehicles on the return journey.⁷

The Trilateral Highway is expected to boost communication between Northeast India and Southeast Asia. It will provide access for goods

from the northeastern region and other parts of India to markets of ASEAN countries through the land route.

On November 19, 2016, the Chief Minister of Assam, Sarbananda Sonowal, while flagging off an Indo-Myanmar-Thailand Friendship Motor Rally, said that the geographical disadvantage of Assam and the northeastern region would be turned into an advantage as the Trilateral Highway would facilitate massive economic activities with the neighbouring countries and the focus would be shifted from the mainland to the northeastern part of India in view of opening of the gateway to Southeast Asia. The rally covered a distance of 5,722 km along the IMT Trilateral Highway, on a journey originating in New Delhi and culminating in Bangkok, spanning a period of 19 days.⁸

C.3. Trans-Asian Railway Network

Seventeen Asian nations signed the Trans-Asian Railway (TAR) Network Agreement on November 10, 2006, as part of UNESCAP (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific) efforts to build a trans-continental railway network between Europe and Pacific ports in China. The TAR members are Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Georgia, India, Indonesia, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Laos, Malaysia, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Republic of Korea, Russia, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Tajikistan, Thailand, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Vietnam.

The TAR network covers 80,900 km of rail lines. Northeast India would be connected to the railway network of Myanmar to link up with the TAR network. For this purpose, a 118 km railway track would be laid between Imphal, Manipur and the border towns of Moreh (India) and Tamu (Myanmar).⁹ The state government of Tripura, in May 2016, had urged Union External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj to include the state in the TAR Network by extending a rail route from Jawaharnagar in Dhalai district of the state to Myanmar's Kalay, in the Sagaing Division, via Darlawn in Mizoram. If Tripura is connected to Kalay in Myanmar, then the Northeast can easily be connected to Singapore and Cambodia. If these states are connected to the TAR network, it will boost the economy, tourism and people-to-people contacts between Northeast India and Southeast Asian countries.

C.4. Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport (KMTT) Project

The Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project is a project that will connect the eastern Indian seaport of Kolkata with Sittwe seaport in Myanmar by sea; it will then link Sittwe seaport to Paletwa in Myanmar via Kaladan river route and then from Paletwa on to Mizoram by road transport. The project was approved by Union Cabinet in 2008 and the construction began in 2010. The project was expected to be completed in 2016, but it has not yet been commissioned.

When completed, the KMTT will shorten the current time taken to transport goods from Kolkata to Mizoram by 3-4 days and the distance by around 950 km. It would allow goods from eastern Indian ports such as Kolkata to reach India's northeastern states more cheaply. It also provides a strategic link to the Northeast, thereby reducing pressure on the Siliguri corridor, besides providing the northeastern region an alternative access to the sea other than Bangladesh. This project not only serves the economic, commercial and strategic interests of India, but also contributes to the development of Myanmar and its economic integration with India.

D. Regional Initiatives helping Northeast India's Convergence with ASEAN

D.1. BBIN Initiative

The BBIN (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal) Initiative had its origin as the South Asian Growth Quadrangle (SAGQ), a collective organization established by Bangladesh, Bhutan, India & Nepal (BBIN), in 1996 in a bid to emulate the success of other regional organizations such as the European Union (EU) and ASEAN. This sub-regional framework allowed them to engage in direct discussions focused on enhancing cooperation in regional transport, tourism, trade and investment, power and environment.

One of the positive steps taken under the aegis of the BBIN Initiative, which can truly help Northeast India, is the BBIN Motor Vehicles Agreement (MVA), which was signed on June 15, 2015. The agreement enables vehicles to enter any of these four nations without the need for trans-shipment of goods from one country's truck to another's at the border. The first cargo truck to take advantage of the MVA was flagged off from Kolkata on November 1, 2015.¹⁰ The truck travelled 640 km to reach Agartala via Dhaka. Prior to the signing of the BBIN MVA, the

truck would have had to travel 1,550 km within India via the Siliguri corridor in West Bengal, on the border with Assam, to reach Agartala.

Over the next five years, 30 road projects will be implemented at a cost of \$8 billion – to fill in, and upgrade, connectivity gaps. According to a World Bank study, the establishment of this transport corridor can increase trade within South Asia by 60 per cent.¹¹

The trade between India and the rest of the BBIN nations has been growing at a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 9 per cent for the past five years. With the development of the BBIN corridor, this growth rate could rise to 13 per cent. This would mean that by 2020, the BBIN corridor could increase India's trade with the rest of the BBIN nations by Rs. 23,000 crores. And out of this, it is expected that Northeast India's share would be at least Rs. 350-450 crores.¹²

The BBIN initiative will lead to better connectivity between the region and the rest of the BBIN nations and increase flow of tourists and boost people-to-people contact. It would also lead to increase in the Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) of the northeastern states, which is quite low compared to most of the major states of the country. Among the northeastern states, Assam has the highest GSDP (at current prices) of Rs. 1,59,000 crores in 2014-15, which is quite low than other states of India, like Maharashtra (Rs. 16,80,000 crores), Uttar Pradesh (Rs. 9,76,000 crores), West Bengal (Rs. 8,18,700 crores) and Gujarat (Rs. 7,50,475 crores).¹³ It is also expected to generate more than 15 lakh additional jobs for the region in the tourism sector alone.¹⁴

The BBIN corridor syncs well with other planned corridors, including the India–Myanmar–Thailand corridor, connecting South and Southeast Asia, which would enable seamless connectivity between South Asian and Southeast Asian nations and ensure higher economic integration with ASEAN.

D.2. BIMSTEC

BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation) comprises Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Bhutan and Nepal. It constitutes a bridge between South and Southeast Asia and represents a reinforcement of relations among these countries. It has also established a platform for intra-regional cooperation between SAARC and ASEAN members.

The proposed BIMSTEC Free Trade Agreement (FTA) has the potential of producing trade worth US\$ 43-50 billion and the northeastern region of India may profit very well from this FTA.¹⁵

Also, BIMSTEC would also lead to the integration of people of different socio-cultural and politico-economic backgrounds throughout the region via greater people-to-people contact among citizens of all member states. And this would mostly benefit people of the bordering states of Northeast – Nagaland, Manipur and Mizoram – who have close familial and community links with those across international borders, especially in Myanmar.

D.3. Bangladesh, India, China and Myanmar-Economic Corridor (BCIM-EC)

The Bangladesh, India, China and Myanmar-Economic Corridor (BCIM-EC) seeks to deepen friendly cooperation among the four member nations and link South Asia with Southeast and East Asia by building multi-modal connectivity, harnessing economic growth and enhancing people-to-people relations. The primary focus of the economic corridor is to facilitate trade and connectivity between the landlocked and underdeveloped southwestern parts of China and the northeastern region of India. The proposed economic corridor will originate from Kunming in China's Yunnan province and pass through Yangon and Mandalay in Myanmar, Chittagong-Dhaka-Sylhet in Bangladesh, before entering Northeast India and ending in Kolkata. Under the BCIM initiative, the Northeast in general and Manipur and the Barak valley of Assam are projected as the major beneficiaries since the proposed economic corridor will pass through these states.

D.4. Mekong-Ganga Cooperation (MGC)

Launched in 2000, Mekong-Ganga Cooperation was initiated to bring in cooperation and to conduct “strategic studies” in the areas of tourism, culture, education and communications between India and the five Mekong river basin countries – Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam. The MGC may evolve a lasting socio-political and economic partnership with this region and take it further in enhancing India's military and strategic equations with these countries. The project also provides a boost to India's bilateral relations with each country. The outcome of the project, however, is a mixed lot and India needs to accelerate its footwork to implement its grand vision and to keep pace with other major stakeholders in this region. In fact, China's rapid progress has put the country in the lead and this remains a subject of debate both inside and outside the Mekong region.

It has been observed that for an effective implementation of the MGC project, the Brahmaputra Valley stands as a crucial factor to consider. But it can become a worthwhile proposition for India (for overland trade with the MGC) only if there is sufficient trade and industry in the northeastern region. The MGC Six also decided to make efforts to develop transport networks, in particular the East-West corridor project, connecting Northeast India to the mainland and the Trans-Asian Highway.

E. Revitalizing Land Links

The three vital border roads in the Northeast that can well act as a catalyst for an overall development of the region and lead to improved connectivity with Myanmar are the Stilwell road or the Ledo road which connects Ledo in Assam to Kunming in Yunnan, China, via Myanmar; the Numaligarh-Moreh road which connects the states of Assam, Nagaland and Manipur with Myanmar through the border point at Moreh; and the Aizawl-Champhai-Zokhawthar road which connects Mizoram with Myanmar.

Sixty five years ago, the Stilwell road – built by Chinese labourers, Indian soldiers and American engineers, and named after American General Joe Stilwell – provided a vital lifeline to relieve China's besieged army as it fought Japanese occupation. Today, much of the Stilwell road (also known as the Burma road) lies disused and over grown, in parts little more than a jungle track. For decades it has exemplified the mistrust between Asia's giants, India and China. But it is slowly becoming a symbol of hope, as Beijing and New Delhi repair relations, and talk of repairing and reopening the road for trade, perhaps as part of a pan-Asian highway.

The road originated from Ledo in Assam – one of the rail-heads of the then Bengal-Assam Railway in the valley of the Upper Brahmaputra – connecting to the Burma road through Myittha, which is further north in Myanmar, with Baoshan and Tengchong in Yunnan. While the original Burma road has been designated as one of the routes preferred by the People's Republic of China (PRC) for the Asian Highway, and has been upgraded by Yunnan, the Stilwell road is no more in use. The road, however, covers 61 kms in Northeast India, 1,033 kms in Myanmar, and 632 kms in China, the total length being 1,726 kms.

The National Highway 39, that runs from Numaligarh in Assam through Nagaland into Manipur and ends at Moreh on the Indo-Myanmar

border – which remains closed for nearly one-third of the year, either due to strikes and law and order problems or due to landslides and other natural calamities – can open up big business avenues.

Significantly, this road was used for the 8,000 km mega India-ASEAN Car Rally in November 2004 which kicked off from Guwahati through the 10 nations of ASEAN, first through Myanmar and then Thailand, Brunei, Philippines, Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia, Malaysia and Singapore before crossing the finish line in Batam, Indonesia on December 11, 2004.¹⁶ The India-ASEAN Car Rally had established the existence of land route connectivity that could facilitate and be a catalyst to free flow of trade, investment and tourism between ASEAN and India.

F. Bottlenecks & Challenges

Linking the two regions, India's Northeast and Southeast Asia, depends on how far the networking countries are willing to ease their political concerns for individual and mutual economic benefit. In other words, the challenge lies in building a political consciousness about mutual benefits of economic cooperation within the sub-region.

Another issue is that infrastructure will need to be in place in the Northeast before benefits of the Act East policy come to the region. Lack of proper physical infrastructure, which has led to poor connectivity within the region, is a big deterrent. And, low level of industrialization in the Northeast would not allow it to fully utilize the benefits from the FTA with the ASEAN nations.

There are numerous products in Northeast India that can be exported to the ASEAN nations. This includes handicraft products like bamboo and cane items, basketry, textiles, jute craft, etc; spices like ginger, turmeric, chili, black pepper, large cardamom, etc; coal; limestone; tea; silk; dairy products; mineral oil, etc. However, there is a lack of specialization in any of the major manufactured exportable items in the Northeast. Also, the artisans are not trained for value addition to these products and neither do the producers have the capacity for large-scale production. And lack of skill development training means that their skill set, particularly in weaving, are lower than their fellow weavers in Myanmar for example.

Student exchange programme with neighbouring countries can benefit the northeastern region. But, such programmes with countries like Myanmar are not working properly as students there are not

interested to come to the Northeast as the exchange programmes do not offer popular courses in universities located in the Northeast. This is an issue that has to be resolved.

Some other major challenges that are hampering trade and development in the region include poor infrastructure at Land Custom Stations (LCS); inadequate banking and financial system, making pre – and post-shipment payments tedious; customs documentation and clearance-related problems; narrow roads and no last-mile connectivity; besides, railways or waterways are used only marginally for regional trade.

Another major challenge is that many of the proposed road links connecting Northeast India to Myanmar run through areas controlled by ethnic groups and separatist militants that demand autonomy or a separate state. These heavily armed groups can disrupt any peaceful transportation system. Unless armed insurgencies along the route to Myanmar (in Manipur, Nagaland or the spillover insurgency in Arunachal Pradesh) is controlled. New Delhi's desire to use Myanmar as a corridor to Southeast Asia may not succeed and may end up being unviable due to low traffic.

The Act East Policy is expected to bring in development in Northeast India. However, there is a fear among a section of the people in the Northeast that the benefits of greater connectivity via the Act East Policy will accrue far more to mainland Indians than to the people of the region. With India's focus under its Act East Policy moving forward beyond Southeast Asia, there is a feeling that development may bypass the Northeast. Unlike the Look East Policy, the Modi Government's Act East Policy is seen by many as India's 'greater Asia' policy in which the Northeast is only a marginal player.

G. Actions Required

G.1. Northeast India: The Yunnan Way

India's Northeast and China's Yunnan province have many similarities. Yunnan is an underdeveloped, landlocked region with an inhospitable terrain. Home to diverse ethnic groups, including Tibetans and Dai of Thai ethnicity, the province has seen secessionist movements from time to time. Its geographical isolation is accompanied by its location far from the political capital. But with Beijing's intensive endeavour to develop its infrastructure, the average per capita income of Yunnan has doubled over the last decade to just under US\$1,000. Tourism is

flourishing contributing 20 per cent of the Province's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Yunnan today is trying to make full use of its cultural and ethnic diversity to develop tourism and project the province as China's gateway to South Asia and Southeast Asia. Northeast India's competitive advantages lie in precisely the same areas as Yunnan's: tourism and as a gateway to the East. Also, connecting the northeastern region with its foreign neighbourhood have to be done on a priority basis by establishing land and air routes, as well as relaxing the Visa norms.

G.2. Improving Backward Linkages

Before we actually attempt connecting Northeast India with Southeast Asia, we have to first improve the linkages within the region and with mainland India. The East-West corridor connecting Silchar in Assam with Porbandar in Gujrat, which was scheduled to be completed in 2009, needs to be completed soon. As of March 31, 2016, the work has completed by 90.38 per cent.¹⁷ There is a need to establish air and railway connectivity between the capitals of the northeastern states. The river route in the region has to be developed, so that it can provide a very cost effective means of transportation to and from the region.

G.3. Market Survey

A detailed field survey needs to be undertaken on what Northeast India can export to the neighbouring nations like Myanmar and Thailand, including possible volume of such export. The demand for such products in the Southeast Asian nations needs to be assessed. Also, what modification may be needed to a particular product to make it suitable for Southeast Asian markets also needs to be studied.

G.4. Diversification and Improved Production Techniques

The handicraft items of the Northeast are of good quality, have an aesthetic appeal and the finish is excellent. But in order to make a mark in the international market, certain measures are needed to be taken. The production techniques need to be upgraded, more diversification in products could be done and most importantly, timely delivery of the products has to be ensured. The volume of export of tea could also be increased. At present, only 20 per cent of the tea produced in the Northeast is exported, although 50 per cent of the tea produced in India is from Northeast.¹⁸ To ensure increased exports of tea from

this region, the infrastructure for tea processing in the region has to be improved. More investment by the government in this regard is necessary.

G.5. Identification of Exportable Products

There is a need to identify more products which could be exported from the Northeast. The local products of the regions have to be catalogued and their quality needs to be evaluated. After identifying such products, infrastructure should be made available for their production on a commercial scale with internationally accepted quality control standards. The marketing of such products should also be ensured and for this export promotional groups could also be formed. Along with this, the local artisans need to be provided training on modern production techniques. The number of middlemen should also be reduced on the sale of such products, so that the producers can directly contact with the foreign consumers.

G.6. Consular Offices at Guwahati

The Consular offices, or at least offices that can provide Visa for the South and Southeast Asian nations, has to be established in Guwahati, the capital city of Assam. This will increase travel from this region to the neighbouring nations and will ensure increase trade and people-to-people contact.

G.7. Forming a Foreign Policy Unit

A foreign policy unit headed by the Minister for External Affairs and comprising the Chief Ministers of the northeastern states that can advise New Delhi on how to move forward on a gamut of issues, ranging from trade and security to migration and navigation, may be formed. This can be developed as part of the Ministry for Development of the Northeastern Region (DoNER).

G.8. Economic Policy for Northeast India

An appropriate economic policy for the northeastern region as a whole and creation of support infrastructure would help the region realise its economic growth and trade potential.

G.9. Coordination between Government Departments

Effective coordination among the Ministry of External Affairs, Ministry of Commerce and Ministry of Road Transport and Highways is also essential.

G.10. Creating a Class of Entrepreneurs

An entrepreneurial class has to be developed in the Northeast to take advantage of the Act East Policy. They have to be trained in the export-import technicalities that would include banking and customs procedures. They should also be trained on value addition to local products.

G.11. Improving Tourism

In order to make Northeast India an attractive destination for tourists from the Southeast Asian countries, there is a need to build hotels, restaurants and resorts with international standards. The local youths have to be trained in the hospitality sector. Without proper facilities, tourism will never grow in the region.

G.12. Security: An Integral Part of Act East Policy

Government of India and the governments in the Northeast must deal with insurgency and include law and order as an integral part of the overall Act East Policy.

G.13. Other Measures

International flights between Guwahati and the capitals of the major South and Southeast Asian countries needs to be introduced. Air cargo services with storage facilities should be established at the Guwahati airport. Adequate modern facilities like electronic weighbridges have to be made available in the Land Custom Stations and the border trade points in Northeast India.

H. Conclusion

India's Northeast has all the potential and resources to turn into a major commercial hub and the gateway to the dynamic Southeast Asian economies. The Act East Policy is of added interest to the Northeast. Once the region is connected with the Southeast Asian economies, it could move steadily towards economic prosperity and development. But

before that, all the bottlenecks have to be removed and the government has to be really keen in continuing its approach towards the integration of these two regions.

In order to enhance and create linkages between the Northeast and Southeast Asia, adequate infrastructure needs to be created along with a conducive environment for free movement of resources. The state governments in the Northeast should also be prepared to play its role in the economic integration of these two regions and should fully promote the potential of their respective states.

Northeast India has remained underdeveloped compared to the rest of India for a long period. Only during the last 10-15 years, this region is experiencing some developmental activities. While looking eastward, the government must ensure proper backward linkages connecting the Northeast with mainland India. Once this is done, one can see the region turning into a bridgehead that can link regions and also link the economies.

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India's Act East Policy - the Role of State Governments

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Strengthening India's economic ties, enhancing connectivity and with South East Asia and East Asia have been high on the agenda of the current government. While outreach to South East Asia and East Asia initiated two decades ago by the P.V. Narasimha Rao government was dubbed as 'Look East Policy,' the Narendra Modi government has stated that his government wants to not just 'Look' but also 'Act East.' While speaking at the East Asia Summit in November 2014, Prime Minister Narendra Modi stated:

“Since entering office six months ago, my government has moved with a great sense of priority and speed to turn our 'Look East Policy' into 'Act East Policy',”¹

Since the initiation of the Act East Policy, trade between India and ASEAN has increased manifold and is estimated at USD 65.04 billion in 2015-16, this comprises over 10.12 per cent of India's total trade with the world.² Efforts are off course underway to enhance the level of trade given the synergies between India and South East Asia.

In the past two and a half years in office, Modi has visited Myanmar (November 2014), Singapore (March 2015 and November 2015), Malaysia (November 2015) and Vietnam and Laos (September 2016). During all these visits there has been a thrust on accelerating economic ties, enhancing connectivity and off course finding common ground in the strategic sphere. He has also visited China, Japan and South Korea. There have also been high level visits from both South East Asian and East Asian leaders to India.

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Apart from the central government, a number of state governments are also playing a pro-active role in giving a boost to ties with South East Asia as well as East Asia. The North East has been given high priority in this outreach to South East Asia. Speaking at the North Eastern Council meeting in May 2016, the Prime Minister said³:

“The government has been focusing on development of the region through its proactive Act East Policy. As part of this policy, we are focusing on reducing isolation of the region by improving all-round connectivity through road, railway, telecom, power and waterways sectors.”

While replying to a question in Parliament, Minister of State for External Affairs Gen V.K. Singh too stated⁴:

The North East of India has been a priority in our Act East Policy (AEP). AEP provides an interface between North East India including the state of Arunachal Pradesh and the ASEAN region. Various plans at bilateral and regional levels include steady efforts to develop and strengthen connectivity of Northeast with the ASEAN region through trade, culture, people-to-people contacts and physical infrastructure (road, airport, telecommunication, power, etc.).

Some of the specific steps which have been taken in this regard are upgradation of infrastructure at Moreh, greater attention to the trilateral (India-Myanmar and Thailand) highway project, and the Kaladan multi nodal transport project – though the latter two projects have faced delays.⁵ In addition to a greater emphasis on connectivity, there is also an emphasis on enhancing people to people linkages between the North East and South East Asia. One strong example of this point is the setting up of the ASEAN study centre at the North Eastern Hill University, Shillong in August 2016.⁶

Role of Other States in India’s Act East Policy

It is not just North-East, but also a number of other states in different parts of India, like Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Rajasthan and Orissa which have been trying to strengthen ties with ASEAN in different ways.

This paper will give an overview of the role being played by state governments, and while giving an overview of the achievements, it will make recommendations for making such interactions more effective.

Whenever one talks of India’s Act East Policy, the focus is often on North-Eastern India. This is natural, given the fact that the state of

Manipur shares land borders with Myanmar, which happens to be India's gateway to South East Asia. The current government has been laying emphasis on upgrading the infrastructure at Moreh (Manipur) through which trade is carried out with Myanmar, and also enhancing maritime connectivity through the Kaladan Multi nodal project as has been mentioned earlier in the paper. Yet it is important to not only bank on the North East as India's gateway to South East Asia, given the political turmoil in the region, as well as a feeling in the North East, that it is being exploited. Those who are actually affected by these connectivity projects are also kept out of the decision making process. Sailo (2016:85) argues⁷:

'That much of the conversation about the grand connectivity plan is taking place without views of communities at the border, where lives are likely to be the most impacted highlights the dichotomy in the policy planning process and will have an impact on the implementing process and the outcome.'

There are those who believe that India's North East has not benefited from India's Act East Policy⁸:

"India's trade with ASEAN, which has increased from 2 billion dollars in the early 1990s to 72 billion dollars in 2012 is a great economic success for the country. But what has it done for the Northeast? It has done very little. After Look East Policy became Act East, significant movements have taken place. The prime minister has gone to Myanmar, China, Laos and Vietnam. The foreign minister and other ministers have gone to these countries, signed various defence and strategic agreements with these countries. But when you ask how these have all these helped the Northeast, I must confess, that it has been almost negligible,"

While the North East being India's land bridge to South East Asia is important, there are other states too which are important stakeholders in India's Act East Policy. Yet, Southern India too has strong links with South East Asia and East Asia due to a number of reasons. While Southern India has historical links with South East Asia as a result of ancient trade routes, Singapore and Malaysia are also home to a strong Tamil diaspora. The push in recent years has been India's Act East Policy along with increasing focus on FDI and infrastructural development.

If one were to look at two instance of South Indian states aggressively wooing ASEAN countries, they are Andhra Pradesh and Telangana.

Andhra Pradesh

Chandrababu Naidu, Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh is seeking assistance for the development of Amaravati from Singapore.⁹ The Andhra CM who is trying to develop AP as a logistics hub is also attempting to enhance maritime connectivity with South East Asia to take advantage of its long coastline. The state has brought out a port policy, one of the key highlights of this is to set up a maritime board for the regulation of ports, both owned by the government as well as private.¹⁰

The state of Telangana has been seeking to build closer links with Malaysia. In August 2014, the state Chief Minister embarked upon a visit to Malaysia and sought investment in infrastructure. **In May 2016, Malaysian Minister for International Trade and Industry Mustapa Mohamed visited Telangana, and met with the state Minister for Industries K. Taraka Ramarao. Telangana sought assistance of Malaysia for the development of Industrial Parks in the state, apart from other areas such as innovation and education.**¹¹ In August 2016, a delegation from Penang (Malaysia) visited Telangana and explored cooperation in a number of areas including skill development, which is one of the key focus areas of both the central government as well as a number of state governments.¹²

Table 1 Visits by Chief Ministers to South East Asia

Name	Designation, State	Country Visited	Dates
Chandrababu Naidu	Chief Minister, Andhra Pradesh	Singapore	November 2014, September 2015
K. Chandrashekhara Rao	Chief Minister, Telangana	Singapore, Malaysia	August 2014
Vasundhara Raje Scindia	Chief Minister, Rajasthan	Singapore	October 2014
Mamata Banerjee	Chief Minister, West Bengal	Singapore	August 2014

In addition to infrastructure, some states are seeking to enhance cooperation in areas like skill development. Rajasthan is seeking to learn from Singapore in the area of tourism and skill development. A Centre for Excellence in Tourism and Training was inaugurated during the visit of Singapore PM, Lee Hsien Loong in April 2017. Faculty of CETT will be trained in Singapore and the curriculum has been designed by ITE, Singapore. Singapore also has a direct flight to Rajasthan

which will help in boosting tourism. Speaking about the relevance of the direct flight, Rajasthan Chief Minister Vasundhara Raje said¹³:

‘the direct flight from Singapore to Jaipur has important implications for tourism in Rajasthan because Changi airport is the supreme air hub for south-east Asia — it handles over 55 million passengers every year — and is a perfect gateway for the 1.7 billion people who live within a five-hour flying time to fly directly to Rajasthan.’

Effort to Rekindle Historical Ties

Apart from economics, there are also efforts to tap on historical linkages. While Andhra Pradesh is trying to connect with South East Asia and East Asia on the basis of Buddhism. For this purpose, the state has created a Buddhist Pilgrimage and Tourist Circuit which includes the ancient city of Amaravati close to the new capital city of Amaravati near Vijayawada.¹⁴

Orissa is trying to rekindle ties with Indonesia. The Eastern state had close maritime links with Indonesia. The festival of Bali Yatra, celebrated during Kartik Purnima in November, commemorates the sea links between Orissa and Java, Sumatra and Bali.¹⁵ It would also be pertinent to mention that the current CM Naveen Pattanaik’s father, Biju Pattanaik shared close links with the Sukarno family of Indonesia. During the Indo-Asia Conference of 1946, Biju flew in then Indonesian Prime Minister Sutan Sjahrir from Indonesia to New Delhi, so that the latter could participate in the Inter-Asia Conference in March 1947.¹⁶

One of the significant steps taken in the direction of reviving ties between Orissa and Indonesia was the Kalinga-Indonesia dialogue, which was organized in November 2016. It was organized by the Government of Odisha, and held at the Ravenshaw University. The dialogue was attended by state and central government officials from India, as well as political leaders from Indonesia. Dignitaries included former President of Indonesia, Megawati Sukarnoputri, Governor of the State Dr. S.C. Jamir, Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik, and Union Minister Dharmendra Pradhan. The Orissa Chief Minister spoke about the need to enhance both people to people ties as well as economic linkages.¹⁷ Said Pattanaik:

“Recent exploration of oil and natural gas in Odisha will open vistas for partnership between the state and Indonesia. Youth exchange programmes between our people will foster people-to-people contact.”

State governments thus are not restricting their ties with ASEAN solely to the economic sphere.

Recommendations

While there is no doubt, that both the central and state governments have shown urgency in building ties between India and South East Asia, a number of steps need to be taken.

First, while there is no doubt that the North East is an important stakeholder in ties with South East Asia, it is absolutely imperative that other states in Southern India as well as Eastern India which share historical and cultural links with South East Asian countries, and are seeking to build economic ties with them be made stakeholders. They should be part of strategic dialogues with ASEAN countries.

It is also important to have more direct flights to South East Asian Countries.¹⁸ This will give a strong boost to people to people contact as well as tourism. Currently, there are direct flights only to Singapore, Bangkok and Yangon. It is important to have direct flights to other countries in ASEAN, such as Indonesia and Vietnam and flights should aim to connect tier 2 and tier 3 cities with the ASEAN region.

An Assocham Report (2016: 54) States¹⁹:

‘Out of 10 ASEAN countries, as on September 2015, only five ASEAN countries such as Malaysia, Myanmar, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam have direct flights with India. For the remaining five ASEAN countries (Cambodia, Lao PDR, Indonesia, the Philippines and Brunei), there is no direct flight with India, but have interconnection from other airports.’ During the Kalinga Dialogue, one of the issues raised by the Orissa Chief Minister was the need to have more direct flights between India and Indonesia. Direct flights with more ASEAN countries are also a necessity, with the growing interest in the Buddhist circuit.²⁰

Third, the diaspora from Southern India and other parts which has a strong presence in different parts of South East Asia needs to be successfully tapped. There is a significant diaspora from Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. While state governments have been trying to tap them, it is important to devise effective strategies so that the diaspora from these states can contribute to India’s economic growth and progress as well as bilateral ties between India and the countries where they reside.

In conclusion, while New Delhi has to take the lead in India's Act East Policy, state governments, not just from North Eastern India, should be brought on board with an eye on strengthening economic ties as well as giving a fillip to people-to-people ties with ASEAN countries.

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Northeast India and the Act East Policy: Opportunities and Challenges

Saswati Choudhury*

I. Introduction

The Northeast India as a region is landlocked, sharing most of its boundary with neighbouring countries of South and South East Asia. Historical records testify to the fact that the region had close social and economic relations with different regions of South and South East Asia. Besides, the Patkai route, there were several other trade routes to China via Burma, Bhutan and Tibet from Assam. There were also many other passes through which the northern mountains of Assam led to China, Afghanistan, and the West through Bhutan and Tibet¹. On the basis of historical records, Ray (2005) summed up the degree of openness of ancient Assam as follows: *“Assam’s and for that matter, north-east India’s prosperity was closely related to the high level of development of its local handicrafts, natural products, silk and other textile products, forest products, etc. as well as its easy access to the different parts of India in the west Myanmar and south-west China in the east, to the north through tribal intermediaries, and to the south through a direct sea route.”*

During colonial period, the resource based industries like tea, oil, timber etc. that developed in Assam had little linkage with the local commodity, factor and money markets.² During colonial period, Northeast India enjoyed maritime access through the ports in East Bengal (now Bangladesh) to the global market and tea industry flourished

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because of this accessibility. The surplus accruing to the industry was ploughed back to the industry or siphoned off for investment elsewhere. In essence, investment, consumption, output and employment multipliers did not work to the advantage of the domestic economy since the modern economic sector had little interactions with the traditional sector and import of cheap industrial products from Great Britain undermined the indigenous handloom and handicraft industries, the mainstay of the Assam economy.³

However, the partition of India truncated this traditional transport and communication links. As the Shukla Commission noted, "*Partition further isolated an already geo-politically sequestered region. It was left with over 4500 km of external frontier with Bhutan, China, Myanmar but no more than 22 km connection with the Indian heartland through the tenuous Siliguri corridor, the Gateway to the Northeast. The very considerable market disruption, socio-economic distancing and retardation that resulted has not been adequately appreciated or compensated.*"⁴ The region today has no more than a slender 27 km connection with the Indian heartland through the tenuous Siliguri corridor against the total 5437.15 km length of international border with Bhutan, Bangladesh, Myanmar, China and Tibet.

II. Northeast India and the (Look) Act East policy

In the post-independence period inward looking policy with import substitution pursued by India never viewed trade as a driver of the economy because India's primary thrust was to develop the key and basic heavy industries. As a result trade possibilities with the neighbouring Asian countries remained vastly unexplored and the Northeast region of the country with its strategic location along international boundaries coupled with the heterogeneous physiographic and demographic characteristics of the constituent states remained virtually outside this process. The region's overall economic growth has decelerated over the years, and over more than last thirty years (1980-81 to 2013-14), the contribution of the region to India's national income has been falling.⁵

The *Look East Policy (LEP)* since the early nineties created the hope for a new development perspective for Northeast region of India by placing it as a gateway to the dynamic East and South-East Asian economies. The scholars and development experts working on Northeast India argued for resurgence of the region by establishing trade links with the fast growing South East Asian countries under the aegis of

LEP. Recognizing the continental access, India built the friendship road to Myanmar in 1996 and the inauguration of the road was followed by the ASEAN Car rally. There were apprehensions that opening of the Northeast Region to the South East Asian countries would also add to the insecurity in the region as because the Region had been affected by cross-border conflicts and insurgency issues. Nothing much happened beyond opening of border trade points and carrying on bare minimum border trade. Almost after a decade since the opening of the friendship road, the Northeast perspective to the *Look (Act) East Policy* was developed by NEC under the aegis of Ministry of DONER and was incorporated within the *Vision NER: 2020* with the basic objective “to break the fetters of the geo-political isolation.” There has been growing interest within ASEAN on the potential gains of connecting Southeast Asia with South Asia. India, through its Act East policy and its status as a full dialogue partner of ASEAN, has sought to engage with the region through various channels and mechanisms. The Master Plan on ASEAN connectivity outlining the framework for ASEAN’s regional cooperation emphasizes on physical, institution and people-to-people connectivity to realize the goal of economic integration and sustainable development and it complements the three basic thrust areas of the *Vision NER: 2020*.⁶

An important breakthrough in ASEAN-India relation has been the growth of FDI from ASEAN in India. The trade volume had grown at an average rate of 22 per cent per annum during the decade of 2000-2011 and stood at approximately US\$ 76.53 billion in 2014-15 between India and ASEAN. Investment flows have been substantial both ways, with ASEAN accounting for approximately 12.5 per cent of investment flows into India since 2000. FDI inflows to India from ASEAN between April 2007-March 2015 was about US\$ 32.44 billion while FDI outflows from India to ASEAN countries, from April 2007 to March 2015 was about US\$ 38.672 billion, as per data maintained by Department of Economic Affairs (DEA). India’s trade with its neighbouring countries of Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam which have close geographical proximity to the Northeastern region has grown from Rs.81,385 crore in 2009-10 to Rs.184,687 crore in 2013-14 at a CAGR of 23 per cent (FICCI:2014). The Northeast Region has remained beyond its ambit and accounted for one to two per cent only in the current volume of trade; the bulk of the trade is routed through Chennai, Vishakapatnam and Kolkata.

While slack governance in the region (A.Baruah:2003, M. Hussain:2003, R. Dev: 2004, S. Baruah: 2003)⁷ is one reason, there are also issues with urban basic services (that are essential for attracting FDI) falls far short in the region. The region with 248 towns that spreads over an area of little more than quarter million sq. km, the mean distance between towns works out to 49.23 km as compared to 33.51 km. for the country as a whole. Further, a town in Northeast India on an average serves an area of nearly 2000 sq. km. as compared to 1000 sq. km. in the country. The urban services are far more distantly located in the region than in the country. The shares of urban development expenditures in the total budget of the respective states are also negligible.⁸ The remoteness and underdeveloped urban services and absence of rural urban linkages in the context of region's spatiality, therefore, have failed to attract inflow of FDI to the region. Given the large unexplored domains on spatiality, demography and economy of the region, it is therefore no surprise that even after a decade of envisioning Northeast India in the Look East Policy frame, the region continued to be isolated, bounded and landlocked.

In recent times, there has been considerable engagement by the Government of India on the question of development of the states of Northeast and there is a call to make the Northeast as the hub of our trade with South East Asian countries by "fast-pace development of the Northeast."⁹ The Northeast region is described as the "Economic Corridor of India" for entry into international market beyond the eastern borders of the country and India first needs to successfully "Act East" proximal to the Indian borders within the eight states in the Northeast, to "Act East" with the countries in the far eastern borders of India.¹⁰ There is recognition within the government that the isolation of the region needs to be reduced by improving all-round connectivity through road, railway, telecom, and power and waterways sectors; and the region is also important for strategic reasons and hence has to be brought at par with other developed regions of the country.¹¹

The North East India which has shared cultural history with some of the ASEAN countries of Thailand, Lao PDR, Vietnam, Myanmar enjoys comparative advantage in exploring for engagement in fostering people to people contact and forging closer social ties and people's diplomacy. To unlock the land locked Northeast region by developing the inherent strength of the region to access the South East Asian countries along international route via India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway and its extension to Lao PDR and Cambodia or the "Mekong-

India Economic Corridor (MIEC)” are inevitably necessary conditions. A deeper and broader regional integration (led by people who understand and accept the difference and diversity of each constituent unit) will ensure secure and peaceful engagement with the societies in the sub-region. Viewed from the physiographic location of India, one can easily see that North East Region of India stands as the central meeting point of Indian subcontinent with that of the South East Asian region. To put it succinctly, *South East Asia begins where North East India ends*.

III. Regional Cooperation and Development Corridors: How do they fare?

For development practitioners today, effective use of economic and regional geography for mapping the various economic agents of employment, production, together with key social and environmental aspects has become an important approach in understanding development of a region. The idea of an *economic corridor* is embedded within this regional geography approach to development. However, it is important to mention that an *economic corridor* is not merely a transport corridor along which goods and people move. They are an integral part of the socio-economic fabric of a region/space where they function as part of integrated socio-economic networks e.g. global and regional production and value chains and social and institutional networks. Bridging links from the local to the global significantly influences corridor development especially in landlocked regions. In the process, developing trade capacities by establishing strong linkages among the Small and Medium Enterprises (SME) along value chains leads to productivity and export diversification, and comprehensive transit agreements in the region facilitates access to new markets that sets in motion a virtuous growth cycle.¹²

Corridor development from various parts of the world has brought in diverse experiences. The European Union’s (EU) development of an internal market space shows the significant positive impact of regional integration of hitherto peripheral economic areas, as evident from the case study of the Baltic countries.¹³ The development of economic corridors has improved transport links to remote and landlocked locations in the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS) and the region has been connected to the Asian value chain networks. The linkage into East Asian production networks has been facilitated by international shipping from the main ports located in the GMS and the land routes

serve as feeder services from the production hubs located inland to the ports. Likewise the Karakoram Highway a 1,300 km long stretch of road connecting the strategic trading post of Kashgar in Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (XUAR) of the People's Republic of China to Pakistan's capital Islamabad, was built by China piercing through the formidable Karakoram-Himalayan (K-H) mountain range and it gave China easy access to the Strait of Hormuz and the Suez Canal. The Bangladesh China India Myanmar (BCIM) forum popularly known as the Kunming Initiative proposes a 2800 km long economic corridor that would connect Kolkata to Kunming.¹⁴ The road is currently motorable except for two stretches one from Silchar to Imphal in India (255 kilometers) and the other from Kalewa to Monywa (200 km) in Myanmar where the conditions remain poor, particularly during monsoons. This entire region encompasses a total of 165,000 sq. km area with a population of 440 million and also forms a part of the One Belt One Road (OBOR) Initiative.¹⁵ The completion of the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway and its extension to Lao PDR and Cambodia and the new highway project connecting North-Eastern part of India to the Greater Mekong Sub-region or the so-called "Mekong-India Economic Corridor (MIEC)" project in order to "*add greater momentum to the growing trade and investment linkages between ASEAN and India*" (ASEAN India Team, 2012) throws new opportunities for the sub-region. The Kaladan multimodal port built by India connecting India with Myanmar would provide access to sea routes. The connectivity plans are projected to generate enormous potential for building bilateral and regional cooperation in economic, social and institutional sphere.

Although such connectivity creates hope and aspiration for overall development of the regions involved, it is important to recognize that the effects of corridor development are not confined to the country or specific areas in which they are promoted. Corridor developments can also negatively impact natural ecosystems and may not add to economic growth of the region through which they pass. The six Mekong countries: Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, Burma and China, have seen rapid economic growth, but not all roads and highways have produced benefits popularly associated with economic corridors. Whether a new connectivity infrastructure improves the quality of life of the poorest and the most marginalized is not beyond debate.¹⁶ The so-called deep state (the military establishment) in Pakistan has used the Karakoram Highway for strategic purposes and socio-economic statistics of the

region show that the locals have not benefited despite the ongoing bilateral 'border' trade since the 1970s.¹⁷ Pakistan still ranks sixth and last among the trading partners of Xinjiang.¹⁸ Likewise in case of the BCIM and the OBOR initiative it is argued by critics that strategic concerns are more important for China than the economic reasons because it would help China in boosting its presence in the Indian Ocean region through chain of ports like Gwadar in Pakistan and Hambantota in Sri Lanka. It is argued that the proposed K2K route would benefit economies of China's south western region vis-à-vis the three member countries of BCIM (Bangladesh, Myanmar and India) which have large trade deficits with China. India's deficit with China was \$51 billion over the total trade turnover of \$73 billion in 2015 and most of the states of Northeast India except for the two states (Assam and Manipur) would remain beyond this corridor. The networked production system based on local resources in SME sector is yet to take off among the states of Northeast India.

Though changes in key economic variables (for example, exports, imports, price changes, production or consumption) are important attributes in understanding the economic implications of corridor development, social perspective also need to be taken into account as they often assume more importance in the context of regions like Northeast India. The absence of a settled border with China along the Arunachal Pradesh, bilateral security concerns with Myanmar on cross-border insurgency issue, concerns of cross-border migration with Bangladesh are some of the issues that continue to be major socio-political challenges in the process.

It is well known that the Northeast region is rich in biodiversity and is home to important populations of wildlife species and also has a high level of endemism (plant and animal species found nowhere else). It is also home to diverse groups of indigenous communities, with a substantial portion of the population dependent on natural resource-based livelihoods together with unique socio-cultural, agro-ecological and land-holding systems. The maintenance of ecology, therefore, occupies the centre-stage in dealing with economic efficiency of ecologically fragile region. There are arguments for compensating such regions for maintaining ecology at the expense of economic efficiency and thereby limiting negative externalities.¹⁹ The compensating mechanisms to offshoot the loss of biodiversity in one region should not impinge upon the rights of other people in other regions; rather this requires close interaction among the constituent states of the region to

evolve at a common perspective on development approach best suited for the region. To cite an example, the damming of rivers in Arunachal Pradesh will have differentiated effect on the communities, Idu Mishmi are a small population group with 9500 people in Dibang Valley and 17 small hydel projects have been planned in the valley. Displacement of the small Idu community obviously has little economic disadvantage when looked at from the total population of the country but it has large social cost if looked at in the perspective of local population.²⁰ The impacts of these developments on common pool resources vital to livelihoods of local communities and maintaining the biodiversity balances together with economic gains are important questions that need to be addressed in the context of fragile²¹ landscape of the region.

IV. Northeast Region of India and Engagement with Continental Neighbours

The starting of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) by ASEAN has assisted the prospect of trade and investment liberalization between the ASEAN and India and this is important in the context of India's Act East Policy. The implementation of the ASEAN-India free trade agreement (FTA) has enabled cross-regional trade and investment liberalization. Better connectivity between Northeast India and SE Asia—through hard and soft infrastructure—is pivot to unlocking the full benefits of closer economic ties between the two regions.

Although one talks of Northeast India as a *unit* for describing the region, yet the states of the region are heterogeneous in physiographic conditions, population density, urbanization process, resource endowments and economic growth. There are also restrictions on inter-state movements due to inner-line permit.²² The hilly terrains and high seismicity has made this region one of the least networked in terms of transport and communications and this in turn leads to high transaction costs and a fragmented market. Within the region, Assam acts as the main connecting node through which other states of the region can be accessed. To overcome the remoteness in connectivity within the region Special Accelerated Road Development Programme in North East (SARDP-NE) was taken up in 2005 for developing road length of 6418 km.²³ The railways which provide the cheapest mode of transport has a total route length of 2743 km with Assam alone accounting for 89 per cent of the route length.²⁴ The air connectivity

within the region is also low with 22 airports of which only 12 are operational. The region has only one international flight operation²⁵ and regional flight network in the region is yet to take off. The Road corridor connecting India (South Asia) to Southeast Asia is proposed through the 4,430 km long Kolkata–Ho Chi Minh City and passes through the North East India. The corridor requires a total investment of \$3 billion to offer adequate road connectivity between South Asia and Southeast Asia and \$1.9 billion has been allotted from the road programme that India is implementing for the Northeastern states.²⁶

The development of communication network without destabilizing the biodiversity of the region remains the major challenge for the states of Northeast India.

The region has diverse social groups with distinct livelihood practices and the economy of the region have *rigidities in terms of both factor and product market*.²⁷ However, such *rigidities* can be overcome through the development of an integrated market through agglomeration which can enable the state economies in the region to develop according to their comparative advantage, and this would require understanding of the basic agrarian and production relation together with labour market complexities in the region, so as to map the complementarities with the economies of South East Asia. The current level of economic exchange between Northeast India and South East Asia centres round border trade with Myanmar (much of which is not officially recorded) and the annual trade fairs in some of the countries and the states in the region. Such engagements provide little scope for accessing market benefits.

Act East Policy as a development frame for the Northeast India can perhaps draw insights from Yunnan province in southwest China which also has been an underdeveloped region, geographically isolated and home to diverse tribal groups and is far from the political capital of Beijing.²⁸ Yet, following a concerted effort to develop the economy of the province through a combination of infrastructure development, cross-border diplomacy and strategic marketing helped in binding restive minority groups to Beijing by giving them a stake in China's economic boom.²⁹ Politically, Yunnan enjoys substantial level of autonomy to work out the details of local-level projects like the Kunming Initiative to overcome its remoteness by developing its border trading routes and creating a regional economy that transcends international borders. This helped China to overcome its security concerns with its neighbours in south west and bring dividends.

The Northeast region today faces a paradox: cross-border trade that existed even during colonial period has been outlawed owing to security concerns; secessionist violence continues to wreck the region and the hill and tribal people remain marginalised. The *cosmetic federalism*³⁰ and *engineered development* in a securitized zone has kept the economies of the region at sub-optimal level. It is often argued that the Northeast Region has a fairly large market with more than 40.5 million people and holds the potential to develop into India's economic powerhouse with large reserves of energy resources viz. oil, natural gas, coal, limestone besides possessing India's largest perennial water system. The region's agro-climatic condition has endowed it with strong potential to develop into a fast growing export hub for agro-processing in horticultural products, plantation crops, vegetables, spices rare herbs and medicinal herbs. The region also offers unlimited tourism potential with its rich cultural and natural bounty, unique performing arts and varied cuisine and handicrafts.

The ASEAN India Vision Statement 2012 emphasizes on cooperation and promotion of greater people-to-people interaction including exchanges in culture, education and human resource development. India's effort to push for such people to people connectivity within the the framework of the Initiative for Integration and Narrowing Intra-Asia Development Gap and the Mekong-Ganga Cooperation Process with CLMV³¹ countries are important from the perspective of Northeast India. The strong cultural and social linkages of the Northeast with the countries in the Mekong Ganga sub-region hold strong prospects for developing strong social and institutional relations especially in health, education, and hospitality and tourism sector. It would be in the fitness of time that both economic and social complementarities between CLMV and NER states are recast within the framework of the India's Act East Policy such that the bane of remoteness and fetters of NER's isolation can finally be broken.

Notes

¹ Hariprasad Ray, "The Silk Route from North-East India to China and the Bay of Bengal: Some New Lights" (pp 43-65) in Alokesh Barua (Ed.) (2005), *India's North-East Developmental Issues in a Historical Perspective*.

² Sarma, Atul; Presidential address delivered at the Seventh Annual Conference of the North Eastern Economic Association held at Rajiv Gandhi (Arunachal) University, Rono Hills on October 21-22, 20006.

- ³ *Ibid.*
- ⁴ Transforming the Northeast – Tackling Backlogs in Basic Minimum Services and Infrastructural Needs, High Level Commission Report to the Prime Minister, New Delhi, March 7, 1997.
- ⁵ The contribution of the Northeast Economy to the national income has come down from 4.2 per cent in 1980-81 to 2.8 per cent in 2013-14.
- ⁶ *Look East Policy and the North Eastern States*, Government of India, Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region, 15th February, (2011).
- ⁷ a. Baruah, Apurba K., Tribal Traditions and Crises of Governance in North East India, with Special Reference to Meghalaya, Working Paper No. 22, Crisis States Programme, Development Studies Institute, Shillong, 2003.
- b. Sanjib Baruah, “Confronting Constructionism: Ending India’s Naga War,” *Journal of Peace Research* 40:3 (2003), p. 321–38.
- c. Rajesh Dev, “Ethno-Regional Identity and Political Mobilization in Meghalaya: Democratic Discourse in a Tribal State,” in Ramashray Roy and Paul Wallace, eds., *India’s 2004 Elections: Grassroots and National Perspectives* (New Delhi: Sage, 2007).
- d. Monirul Hussain, 2006; Internally Displaced Persons in India’s North-East in *EPW*, Vol. 41, Issue No. 05, 04 Feb, 2006.
- ⁸ Statistical data indicate that the ULB, Municipal Boards of this region can spend very little on basic core services e.g., the per capita expenditure of the municipalities and ULBs on core services is Rs.11 in Manipur, Rs.28 in Meghalaya, Rs.34 in Tripura and Rs.119 in case of Assam. The Municipality Corporation of Guwahati (largest city of this region) spends just 27 per cent of its total expenditure on the core services. A comparative picture reveals that the state of Maharashtra spends about 95 per cent of its expenditure on core services while the national average for India is about 74 per cent.
- Baruah, Apurba K., *Tribal Traditions and Crises of Governance in North East India, with Special Reference to Meghalaya*, Working Paper No. 22, Crisis States Programme, Development Studies Institute, Shillong, 2003.
- ⁹ ‘Government Wants To Make Northeast Hub Of Trade With South East Asia: Rajnath Singh,’ *Economic Times*, March 22, 2016.
- ¹⁰ Address by the Union Minister of Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER) Dr. Jitendra Singhat the inaugural session of the Northeast Business Summit hosted by the Ministry of DoNER in collaboration with Indian Chamber of Commerce (ICC) held in March 2015,
- ¹¹ Prime Minister Narendra Modi lecture at the 65th Plenary session of the North Eastern Council (NEC) on May 28th 2016 at Shillong.
- ¹² For further reading refer L Soproni, *Region- Engine of Growth in Global Economy*, *Transylvanian Review*, 2015. Available at papers.ssrn.com., Hope, A. and Cox, J., 2015. *Development Corridors*.

- ¹³ Same as 5 above.
- ¹⁴ It would connect Benapole/Petrapole on the India-Bangladesh border to Dhaka and Sylhet and then re-enter India near Silchar in Assam and traverse through Imphal to Tamu-Kalewa road in Myanmar and then connect through Mandalay and Lashio and reach Kunming via Ruili, Longling and Dali.
- ¹⁵ This route requires a total investment of \$1.4 trillion and is one of the prime focus of the Chinese foreign policy, and China has established a Silk Road Fund (SRF) of \$40 billion for building the required infrastructure to promote connectivity in the region. The Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), with a capital of \$100 billion and the New Development Bank (NDB), with a capital of \$50 billion (slated to increase to USD \$100 billion) — are poised to contribute significantly to the development of the proposed infrastructure.
- ¹⁶ A Citizens Guide to the Greater Mekong Sub-region: Understanding the GMS Programme and the Role of the Asian Development Bank, Oxfam Australia, November 2008.
- ¹⁷ The per capita per annum income of Gilgit-Baltistan is only one-fourth of Pakistan's national average and more than half 1.3 million of its inhabitants still live below the poverty line. Further, the literacy rate also remains very low at 15 per cent for males and 5 per cent for females. See Senge H. Sering, Expansion of The Karakoram Corridor: Implications and Prospects, IDSA Occasional Paper No. 27, IDSA, New Delhi, 2012.
- ¹⁸ Senge H. Sering, Expansion of The Karakoram Corridor: Implications and Prospects, IDSA Occasional Paper No. 27, IDSA, New Delhi, 2012.
- ¹⁹ Koch-Wester M.R.B. and W. Kahlenborn, "Legal, Economic and Compensation Mechanism in Support of Sustainable Mountain Development" in M.F. Price, L.F. Jansky and A. A. Latesenia (eds.) Key Issues for Mountain Areas, United Nations University, New York (2004).
- ²⁰ Vaghlikar, N. and Das, P.J., Damming Northeast India. Published by Kalpavriksh, Aaranyak and Action Aid India. Pune/Guwahati/ New Delhi (2010).
- ²¹ I call it fragile because apart from high seismicity, the region also is home to a number of ethnic groups with small population number and their displacement disrupts an entire socio-economic process. When such small groups are displaced its cumulative effect is bound to create serious political repercussions and therefore the whole socio-political frame of the region continues to be fragile.
- ²² Inner Line Permit (ILP) is an official obligatory travel document issued by the Government of India to allow inward travel of an Indian citizen into the protected areas of Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram and Nagaland for a limited period of time.

- ²³ This programme seeks to improve the connectivity of 88 district headquarters within the region by at least two lane roads, improve roads connectivity in border areas and access point to neighbouring countries.
- ²⁴ Assam has highest railway route length in the region (2434 km) followed by Tripura (151 km), Nagaland (13 km), Arunachal Pradesh (12.73 km), Mizoram (2 km) and Manipur (1km).
- ²⁵ It is operated by Druk Air with two flights a week Paro-Guwahati-Bangkok and four flights a week Paro-Bagdogra-Bangkok. The much hyped Guwahati-Bangkok direct flight operated by Indian Airlines was grounded on April 23, 2003 citing reasons of low seat occupancy in the flight and high cost of operation.
- ²⁶ Connecting South Asia and South East Asia, ADBI, 2015.
- ²⁷ Rigidities in terms of both factor and product market: It is often argued by economists that traditional self-sufficient economic system of the hill and tribal people has been biggest impediment in growth of labour market in the region. The tribal and hill economies of the region have been self-sufficient with active participation of both men and women in production process and therefore the concept of 'labour' as an independent factor of production did not emerge in these societies. The communalized production system and absence of any feudal production relation and subsequent transition to industrial production therefore did not take place in this region.
- ²⁸ There are 26 different minority groups in Yunnan, including Tibetans and the Dai, who are of Thai ethnicity; the province has been the focus of intermittent secessionist movements.
- ²⁹ Jin Cheng, Director General of the Yunnan International Regional Cooperation Office. Quoted from, Pallavi Aiyar, Yunnan Model; Frontline, Volume 23 - Issue 21, Oct. 21-Nov. 03, 2006.
- ³⁰ The Term cosmetic federalism is borrowed from Sanjib Baruah, in Nationalizing Space: Cosmetic Federalism and the Politics of Development in Northeast India in *Development and Change* 34(5):915 - 939. November 2003.
- ³¹ This was reiterated by India at The Third India-CLMV Enclave held in January 2016 at Chennai.

Act East Policy and ASEAN

Jajati K Pattnaik*

Act East Policy (AEP), a metamorphosis of Look East Policy (LEP) is catapulted as a major approach of India's economic diplomacy in the contemporary international relations to reinforce India's engagement with its eastern neighbours drawing sustenance from a host of economic, geo-strategic and cultural factors.

Origin of Look /Act East Policy

The global geo-strategic environment which emerged in the wake of disintegration of Soviet Union called for a rethinking on trajectory of world economic order. Subsequently, neo-liberal paradigm was advanced by many writers during this period. Globalisation as an instrument of this philosophy espoused the diffusion of knowledge and technology stretching de-territorialized economic growth.¹ India ushered economic reforms in the nineties to deal with the emerging trends of globalisation. The sustained growth rate in the subsequent period redeemed India's economic influence at the global flora. India sought to fulfil its national interest through a comprehensive neighbourhood policy and intended to locate an extended political and economic space outside South Asia to realize its objectives and act as an influential regional and global player.²

In this context, the Look East Policy (LEP) of India³ was formally announced by the Prime Minister Narasimha Rao in 1991 entailing India's economic engagement with its eastern neighbours based on shared history and culture. India became a sectoral dialogue partner

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of ASEAN⁴ in 1992 and full dialogue partner in December 1995. Moreover, ASEAN dialogue partnership was redeemed to ASEAN-India Annual level Summit in 2002. During this period, Prime Minister of India Atal Bihari Vajpayee paid maximum state visits to ASEAN countries to sustain Look East Policy in a decisive way.⁵ The policy shifted from exclusivist agenda of economics to strategic and spatial inclusivity.⁶ “The new phase of this policy was characterized by an expanded definition of ‘East,’ extending from Australia to East Asia, with ASEAN at its core. The new phase also marked a shift from trade to wider economic and security issues including joint efforts to protect the sea lanes and coordinate counter-terrorism activities.”⁷ Further, it focused on connectivity and economic assimilation building bridges between the subcontinent and South East Asia.⁸

Economic Engagement

India signed an agreement on Comprehensive Economic Cooperation with ASEAN in 2003 to bring economic integration in the region. The agreement clearly stated to expand trade, investment and economic partnership among the members; introduce liberal measures and encouragement of trade in goods and services having an ambience for liberal, apparent and smooth investment architecture; eliminate tariff and non-tariff barriers on all trade goods and liberalize trade in services; create a liberal and competitive investment culture to prop up investment between India and ASEAN Regional trade and investment area; and take steps for increasing economic integration among the members of ASEAN and fill up the gaps in development.⁹ After six years of dialogue, India and ASEAN signed the agreement on Trade in Goods on 13 August 2009 and operated it on 1 January 2010. The agreement sought to liberalize tariff over ninety per cent of trading goods between India and ASEAN while removing tariffs over 4,000 goods by 2016.¹⁰

Notwithstanding this free trade architecture, India could not gain much in the merchandise trade. The following table clearly indicated that India’s volume of exports (2000-2001 to 2015-2016) to ASEAN lagged far behind its imports causing unfavourable trade balance.

Table:1 India-ASEAN (Imports Exports)			
Year	India's Export to ASEAN	India's Import from ASEAN	Total Trade (US \$ in Million)
2000-2001	2913.78	4147.48	7061.26
2001-2002	3457.01	4387.22	7844.23
2002-2003	4618.54	5150.17	9768.71
2003-2004	5821.71	7433.11	13254.82
2004-2005	8425.89	9114.66	17540.55
2005-2006	10411.3	10883.67	21294.97
2006-2007	12607.43	18108.48	30715.91
2007-2008	16413.52	22674.81	39088.33
2008-2009	19140.63	26202.96	45343.59
2009-2010	18113.71	25797.96	43911.67
2010-2011	25627.89	30607.96	56235.85
2011-2012	36744.35	42158.84	78903.19
2012-2013	33008.21	42866.36	75874.57
2013-2014	33133.55	41278.9	74412.45
2014-2015	31812.58	25154.50	44714.77
2015-2016	39909.60	76527.35	65064.10

Source: Department of Commerce, Export Import Data Bank, Government of India, <http://www.commerce.nic.in/eidb/> Accessed on 26 February 2017.

Thus, India should venture into manufacturing as well as service sectors and take up capacity building and sustainable projects, specifically in Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam (CLMV)¹¹ countries in order to address such trade deficit.

Geo-Strategic Considerations

Act East Policy is deeply interwoven with the maritime security of the Eastern Sea Board in general and protection of the Strait of Malacca in particular. The geographical location of India and Myanmar provides adequate opportunities for joint cooperation. India is a 'credible naval power' in the region committed to regional peace, security and development.¹² The region banks upon the sea lanes of communication for global trade and energy supply, and herein lies the significance of Strait of Malacca which is one of the busiest waterways (800 km) linking Andaman Sea in the Indian Ocean and South China Sea in the Pacific Ocean. It

connects India, China, Japan, South Korea and ASEAN with the other economic groupings in a flourishing maritime trade and energyties.¹³

Comprehending the strategic importance of the strait, it is said that “Gulf of Malacca is like the mouth of a crocodile, the Peninsula of Malaya being the upper and the jutting end of Sumatra the lower jaw. The entry to the Gulf can be controlled by the Nicobars and the narrow end is dominated by the island of Singapore.”¹⁴ India can extend its strategic sea depth from Andaman and Nicobar Islands to safeguard the security of the shipping channel between Bay of Bengal and Strait of Malacca. Similarly, Great Coco and Small Coco islands provide easy access to Myanmar for surveillance of mercantile shipping.¹⁵ So, Indo-ASEAN strategic collaborations can thwart the challenges of terrorism in the region as well. Calling for enhancing counter terrorism measures with the ASEAN, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said: “Terrorism has emerged as a major global challenge that affects us all here. We have excellent bilateral cooperation with ASEAN members. And, we should see how we can enhance our cooperation at the regional and international level, including through support for adoption of Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism.” He further said: “As our rapidly transforming region navigates its way through uncertain times to a peaceful and prosperous future, we look forward to ASEAN leading the way in defining the regional architecture.”¹⁶

Soft Power and Cultural Connections

India through its soft power resources can deal with ASEAN to its own advantage. The Harvard scholar, Joseph Nye, defines soft power as “the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than through coercion” as contrast to hard power which is based on “military force, coercion and intimidation.”¹⁷ He says: “the soft power of a country rests primarily on three resources: its culture (in places where it is attractive to others), its political values (when it lives up to them at home and abroad), and its foreign policies (when they are seen as legitimate and having moral authority).”¹⁸ So, the definitional interpretation of soft power indicates in drawing the resources of a nation from culture, domestic institutions, values, and art of diplomacy or foreign policy behaviour.

Indian soft power is sustained on civilizational ethos, democratic governance and diverse cultural mosaic. Both Hinduism and Buddhism originated in India and later spread to South and South East Asia. A cursory glance of South East Asian history indicates that it is deeply

interwoven with the Indian cultural milieu as vividly exemplified in the Indianised Kingdoms of Funan, Khmer and Sri Vijay Sailendra and Majapahit in South-East Asia. The use of Indo-Sanskrit language in Thailand and Bhasa in Indonesia as well as Malaysia, presence of Indo-Dravidian temple architecture in Angkor (Cambodia) as well as Borobudur (Indonesia) and literary works on Ramakein in Thailand based on Ramayana are quite a few examples to justify India's greater cultural connectivity with the Southeast Asia.¹⁹ Kadira Pethiyagoda of the Brookings Centre writes: 'it was Indian Buddhism that helped shape Chinese civilization. It is this age-old soft power that Modi must tap into, whilst avoiding the hubris that comes with it. Humility in promoting Indian culture is particularly important in Asia where a lack of it has worked against India's diplomats in the past.'²⁰ Given such cultural connection, India has to just rekindle this linkage and capitalise its soft power resources in the present context to cement its bondage with the ASEAN. In this context, India's project Mausam²¹ enunciated by the present political dispensation of New Delhi may facilitate India's greater cultural connectivity bridging the missed link or chasm of communication between India and its South East Asian neighbourhood in the Indian Ocean. The moves made by the Indian Government in the recent past to capitalise its soft power resources in sharing its expertise with ASEAN in human resource development, capacity building, science & technology, space, agriculture, environment & climate change, new and renewable energy etc. may put it in a higher pedestal in ASEAN compared to others.²²

India and ASEAN have collaborative projects on science & technology, quality systems in manufacturing, research & development schemes on bio-mining & bioremediation technologies and mariculture and agricultural missions on ASEAN-Indian fellowships for higher agricultural education in India and ASEAN, empowerment of ASEAN-Indian women through cooperatives and exchange of farmers, India is also organising training Programme for ASEAN diplomats, and building up closer contact through exchange of Parliamentarians, participation of ASEAN students in the National Children's Science Congress, ASEAN-India network of think tanks, ASEAN-India eminent persons lecture series in order to ensure enhanced people-to-people interaction with ASEAN.²³

Understood in the in the changing perspectives of contemporary international relations, India and ASEAN can really transform their

myriad opportunities in economic, strategic and cultural spheres in building a new partnership in the twenty-first century Asia. Hope, India's Act East Policy will bring Indo-ASEAN strategy to a new height in near future.

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endeavours', develop 'regional peace and stability through abiding respect for justice and the rule of law,' increase 'active collaboration and mutual assistance on matters of common interest in the economic, social, cultural, technical, scientific and administrative fields' and uphold 'close and beneficial cooperation with existing international and regional organizations with similar aims and purposes, and explore all avenues for even closer cooperation among themselves.' See, Association of Southeast Asian Nations, http://www.aseansec.org/about_ASEAN.html Accessed on 14 January 2016.

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multi-faceted approach to understanding past and present-day relationships’
d) advocating for ‘Indian Ocean Maritime Routes to attain transnational nomination under World Heritage, increasing scope for visibility, research, sustainable tourism, heritage development and promoting other Cultural Conventions across the Indian Ocean region.’ See, “Project Mausam: Objectives and Goals,” Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, New Delhi, http://ignca.nic.in/mausam_objectives.htm Accessed on 14 April 2016.

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Partition and Economy of the War Area of Khasi and Jaintia Hills of Meghalaya

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The change in the policy from ‘Look East’ to ‘Act East’ by the Government of India in recent times has drawn attention. India’s ‘Act East’ Policy originated in declaratory terms with the advent of Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s regime. India’s ‘Act East’ policy was not only impelled by India’s own strategic imperatives but also a call by the United States and Indo-Pacific countries that India should be more productive in Indo-Pacific Asia.¹ The central government through the Act East Policy has made Southeast Asian region a priority of its foreign policy and its security increasing the importance of India’s Northeastern states as the gateway to Southeast Asian countries. According to the central government, this policy will uplift the economy of the Northeastern region that has been hampered since the partition of India in 1947. Speaking at the 65th Plenary Session of the North Eastern Council (NEC) in Shillong, Prime Minister, Narendra Modi said: “The government has been focusing on development of the region through its proactive Act East Policy. As part of this policy, we are focusing on reducing isolation of the region by improving all-round connectivity through road, railway, telecom, power, and waterways sectors.” Describing the Northeastern region of India as India’s gateway to Southeast Asia, Narendra Modi asked the Northeastern states to take full advantage of this; he further said: “We are opening up both road and railway routes to our neighbouring countries. This should give a boost to economic development of the region.” He emphasised that the “The northeast region is also very important to us for strategic reasons.

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It is my conviction that we have to bring this region at par with other developed regions of the country.”²

It is in this background that the paper tries to trace the historical link of Northeast India with Southeast Asia especially the border people. Hence, this paper is focusing on the partition of 1947 in the Northeastern region and its impact on the economy of the region with special reference to the War areas of Khasi and Jaintia Hills of Meghalaya situated in the border areas of India and Bangladesh.

The study on the partition of India has long been focusing on the partitions of Bengal and Punjab. The Northeast India has received little attention in the study on partition, and most of the work on the partition related to Northeast India highlight only the issues of human migration, religious politics and politics of the partition. However, the economic dimension of the partition in the Northeast region has not received adequate attention even in recent studies.³ The trade relationship between the War people and the people of Sylhet plains of East Pakistan (present Bangladesh) and economic problem faced by the people residing on the Indo-Bangladesh border with special reference to the War areas of Khasi and Jaintia Hills of Meghalaya as the outcome of the partition is studied in this paper.

I

The economy of the Northeast region of India was neither taken into consideration by the partition plan of Sir Cyril Radcliffe nor by the Bengal Boundary Commission. The Commission was instructed to demarcate the boundaries of the two parts of Bengal, Sylhet (based on the outcome of the referendum in that district) and the adjoining districts of Assam on the basis of ascertaining the contiguous majority areas of Muslims and non-Muslims.⁴ The Commission failed to take into consideration the economic aspect of the Northeastern region while demarcating the boundaries. The members of the Commission were inclined to view the question more from the point of view of Bengal than of Northeast India. The decision of the Boundary Commission to hand over Chittagong Hill Tracts to East Pakistan, despite having only 3 per cent of Muslim population at that time, further aggravated the economic condition of Northeast India. The loss of the Chittagong Hill Tracts by India to East Pakistan denied the region an easy access to the other parts of the sub-continent and made the region land locked.⁵ Since the partition of India took place in 1947, the Northeast India has been entirely surrounded in its southern and eastern parts by the borders

with East Pakistan (present Bangladesh). The new international borders of the region with present Bangladesh disrupted long established trade and commercial relationship between the two sides.

Trade Relationship in Pre-Partition Period

The areas on the southern slopes of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills are known as the War area and the people are called War people. The War areas extend to the Sylhet plains (Srihatta in the past). Over the years, the War region had served as link region between the upland Khasi-Jaintia Hills and the Sylhet plains in Bangladesh. This contributed to a close contact and interaction of the War areas with the neighbouring societies. Because of the very topography, the War areas had its natural connections with Sylhet plains then forming part of East Pakistan. Amwi, Sohbar, Shella, Dwar Nongtyrnem and southern ranges of Nongstoin-Langrin or Laur Hills served as *duars* or passes from the hills to the plains in the south.⁶

However, during the pre-colonial and colonial period, the trade relationship between the War people and the people of the Sylhet plains and Bengal was possible with roads and navigable rivers upto certain areas. The rivers Myntdu or Hari, the Lubha, the Umiam or Bogapani, the Kynchiang or Jadukata and the Punatit rivers, being navigable for a short distance into the hills from the Sylhet plains provided the means of communication where goods were transported by means of canoes.⁷ The trade relationship benefitted the two sides immensely with the War areas importing salt and rice, two important commodities from the Sylhet plains, and oil, tobacco, ghee, eggs, sugar, soaps, kerosene oil, molasses, onions, spices, wheat flour, pulses, tea, tamarind, fresh and dried fish, cloth, brass pots etc. Generally, the War people imported these items for their domestic consumption only. In return the War areas exported to the Sylhet plains betel leaves (*pan*), betel nuts, bay leaves (*tezpat*), oranges, bananas, pine apple, jack fruit, honey, wax, potatoes, chillies, coarse cinnamon, pepper, turmeric, Indian rubber, timber, coal, limestone, smelted iron, etc.⁸

The trade relationship between the hills and the plains of Sylhet and Bengal was further enhanced with the accessibility of trade centres or markets on both sides. In these trade centres many commercial dealings were transacted among the inhabitants of the Sylhet plains and Bengal and the War people. However, this age old trade and commercial relationship with the Sylhet plains and Bengal stopped after the Partition of India in 1947.

II

Consequently, the partition had an adverse impact on the people from both sides. Before the partition East Pakistan mainly acquired oil from Digboi region in Assam and in a small way coal from Jaintia Hills. The partition caused East Pakistan serious shortages of mineral resources. This put East Pakistan in worst economic circumstances.⁹ It also shattered the where economy of the War areas completely. The economic condition of the War people suffered a serious setback, subsequently the War areas was over-shadowed with unemployment, poverty and despair. The partition led to a disruption of economic activities and it completely closed the border *haats* and markets. All the cash crops, the mainstay of the War people, lost the nearby markets in East Pakistan and could not be transported to other parts of India as it was difficult at that time to have a direct communication with the market centres in the neighbouring regions. In fact, communications from War areas was more accessible to the then East Pakistan. The prices of some of the cash crops recorded a fall not seen before. The price of oranges which were at 20.00 to 25.00 rupees per *luti*¹⁰ tumbled down to 8.00 to 16.00 rupees per *luti* and that of betel leaf which was sold at 20.00 to 25.00 rupees per *kuri*¹¹ came down to 2.00 to 3.00 rupees per *kuri*. *Tezpat* or bay leaves and other fruits also suffered equally. The following figures indicated the extent to which the border trade of the War people suffered after the partition:¹²

In Thousand Maunds

Names	Pre-Partition Export			Post-Partition Export		
	Maunds	1948-49 Maunds	1949-50 Maunds	1950-51 Maunds	1951-52 Maunds	1955-56 Maunds
1 Oranges	12,00.0	2.40.0	12.0	10.0	1.0	10.0
2 Potato	4,00.0	80.0	50.0	60.0	200.0	70.0
3 Tezpata	3,00.0	60.0	.....	.....	.....	.....
4 Vegetables	1,00.0	40.0	15.0	10.0	70.0	10.0
5 Arecanuts	1,00.0	20.0	.....	.....	.....	.....
6 Pipul	1.7	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....
7 Betel leaves	3,20.0	64.0	3.2	2.0	160.0	80.0
8 Bamboo, Cane, Timber, etc.	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....

9	Spices, Turmeric, Chillies, Pepper.	2.0	0.5	0.2	0.1	0.3	0.2
10	Fruits, Banana, Plums, Pine-apples, Jack-fruits, Pears and Papaya.	1,25.0	50.0	15.0	10.0	50.0	50.0
11	Limestone	16,00.0	17,00.0	17,00.0	6,00.0	5,00.0	5,00.0

Staple food such as rice and other necessities of daily life could no longer be obtained from Sylhet after the partition that led to food crisis and this posed serious problems in the War areas of Khasi and Jaintia Hills. Due to communication difficulties in the area arrangement for adequate supply of these commodities from the neighbouring regions and the other parts of India suffered. The situation was more aggravated owing to the stringent measures adopted by the authorities of East Pakistan, on the plea of prevention of smuggling in December 1957 when the entire border trade virtually came to a standstill.¹³

This disruption in border economy has resulted in widespread unemployment among the War people. There being no market for the produce, thousands of labourers who were employed in the orchards lost their employment. Similar was the condition of those who were employed in the transportation of various commodities. A large section of the War people engaged in collection of limestone were also rendered unemployed with the setback received by the trade in limestone with East Pakistan. Due to closure of trans-border trade, petty traders engaged in distributive trade also suffered. All their communication system led to eastern Pakistan and their markets lay there also. According to Prime Minister Nehru, large numbers of prosperous people have been reduced to poverty because of the partition and yet the people produced oranges in very great abundance, also the people continued to produce bananas, pineapples, potatoes, Indian corn, sweet potatoes and to a slight extent tapioca. Nehru mentioned, all the people wanted markets for oranges, timber, bamboos, etc. some cotton also was grown but this was short staple, it was not used locally, it was used to be exported to foreign countries.¹⁴ The lack of trade facilities, scarcity of big markets, lack of economic opportunities, non-availability of communication with the other parts of the world and lack of other alternatives further worsened the economic condition of Northeast India and of the War areas of Khasi and Jaintia Hills in particular.

One of the most adverse impacts of the partition of India was the shifting of the settlements of the people from one area to another that brought hardships to the lives of hundreds of thousands of people living in the newly created border areas. Another adverse outcome of the partition was that the partition took place in an abrupt manner and many important factors were ignored during the demarcation of international borders with Pakistan.

Relief Measures

Since 1947, there was constant demand from the War people for relief and rehabilitation. The then Government of Assam undertook various measures to alleviate the people's condition, but these were inadequate. There was a feeling among the War people that whenever the situation in the border deteriorated owing to some measures adopted by the East Pakistan authorities, then only more attention was given to the border areas. Nevertheless, the state government formed the Border Rehabilitation Committee to expedite various schemes and measures in the border. One of the vital schemes was with the diversification of agriculture in the War areas but a large section of the War people skilled in the maintenance and operation of orchards were opposed to the idea of a complete switch-over from cash crops to food crops. Besides no adequate land in the vicinity was available for wet paddy cultivation. The problem of getting adequate funds for reclamation and improvement of available land suitable for cultivation was also a serious handicap to them. Lack of timely loans and quality seeds was another handicap.

The Public Works Department (P.W.D.) of the state government initiated the opening up of few vital P.W.D. roads connecting the War areas with Shillong town and other places that facilitated the movement of produces from the War areas to the neighbouring regions. Yet the problem of transporting produces from remote interiors of the War areas to the various local points on P.W.D. roads remained unsolved during the partition times. However, the interior areas, particularly during rains remained inaccessible. In fact, some of the places in the outer areas were more accessible to East Pakistan (Bangladesh).

With the creation of the District Councils in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills and the creation of the State of Meghalaya, there was a glimpse of hope for the War people. However, the new State, and the new District Councils could not improve the commercial opportunities for the people. Recent moves of the border management policy of the State of Meghalaya

to improve the agriculture, communication, create new markets etc. by setting up the Border Area Development Department, however could not satisfy the needs of the people. Thus, the people from the War areas turned their attention towards the upland regions of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills and other neighbouring areas for out markets for their produces. Consequently, forced migration started from the War areas to other areas of Northeast India in search of livelihood.

Soon after the emergence of Bangladesh there was an attempt between the Government of India and the new Bangladesh Government to resume border trade, to alleviate the sufferings of the people of the border areas on both sides, through official channels. After prolonged negotiations, few border *haats* were declared open for trade between December 1970 and March 1971. But this was short lived, due to the political developments in Bangladesh that led to the alarming influx of refugees into Meghalaya from Bangladesh (1970-71).¹⁵ Thus, the first Indo-Bangladesh Trade Agreement signed on 28th March, 1972, remained on paper.

The Look East Policy (1992) and the Act East Policy (2014) emphasises a more proactive role for India and its Northeastern region in the Southeast Asian region. The central government has been pursuing the Act East Policy to boost trade and commerce between the ASEAN¹⁶ (The Association of Southeast Asian Nations) countries and India, especially with the Northeastern region whose ethnic tribes share some similarities with the neighbouring countries. Preeti Saran, Secretary (East), Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India said: “Communities in the Northeast India have ethnic ties with Southeast Asian countries and connectivity has been the priority to link the Northeast India with ASEAN countries,”¹⁷ while addressing the gathering at the inaugural ceremony of the ASEAN study centre at North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong. India’s Act East Policy considers Bangladesh as the bridge between Northeastern states and ASEAN countries where air and road connectivity can be developed. It is hoped that through this new Act East Policy of the central government, the Northeastern region as a whole can soon revive the old trade links with the neighbouring countries especially with Bangladesh that were halted since the partition of India in 1947 and benefit, the War people of Khasi-Jaintia Hills.

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- ¹⁶ The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) was established in Bangkok with the signing of the ASEAN declaration by 10 countries of Southeast Asia comprising Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Brunei Darussalam, Vietnam, Lao PDR, Myanmar and Cambodia.
- ¹⁷ 'Shillong may help improve academic ties with ASEAN countries' in The Shillong Times, 9th August, 2016, also see 'Asean study centre opened in Nehu' in The Telegraph, 9th August, 2016.

Christianity Among the Scheduled Tribes of the Northeast: Arunachal Pradesh

Dr. J.K. Bajaj

Introduction

One of the main stories of the Religion Data of Census 2011 is about the Christian penetration into Arunachal Pradesh, a State that had largely escaped Christianisation until recently. We have discussed the issue in our earlier note, [Arunachal Joins the Christian Northeast](#).¹ Now we present the religious profile of individual tribes of the State; this data for 2011 has been released only recently.

Discussion of the individual tribes of Arunachal Pradesh is highly complicated because of the multiplicity of tribes listed in the census tabulations. In 2011, the census lists as many as 105 individual tribes in Arunachal Pradesh; the number was 100 in 2001. This numerousness of the tribes counted in the State has become possible because of the ambiguous language of the Constitutional Order listing the tribes to be included in the Schedule. The Order names only 16 tribes, but says that 'all tribes of the State including' these 16 would be part of the Schedule. This has made the list open-ended.

Many of the tribes listed in the census are divisions and sub-divisions of the same tribe. For example, there are 29 divisions of Adi and 28 of Tangsa listed in census 2011. These divisions and sub-divisions do not seem to be exclusive or fixed. The data is comparable over time only when we combine the numbers for the various divisions of a tribe.

We have tried to group the numerous tribes into a few groups that are ethnically distinct and inhabit distinct geographical regions of the State. The religion data for these groups indicates that some of the

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major tribal groups have been fully or largely Christianised, while many of the Buddhist and Hindu tribes have continued to retain their identity.

The most numerous and influential group comprising the Nyishi, Nissi and Nishang, inhabiting mainly East Kameng, Lower Subansiri and Papum Pare districts, has now become 63 per cent Christian. In 2001, Christians had a share of 41.5 per cent in this group. The second most numerous group of the Adi, inhabiting Upper Subansiri and Upper, West and East Siang, is now 28 per cent Christian; in 1991, only about 12 per cent of the Adi were Christian. The smaller communities of the Aka, the Apatani and the Tagin also have acquired considerable Christian presence in the recent past.

In the east, the Tangsa of Changlang are now 59 per cent Christian, the Wancho of Tirap are more than 95 per cent Christian and the Nocte are 67 per cent Christian. These communities were largely Hindu or ORPs till recently.

The Monpas of Tawang and West Kameng and the Khamptis of Lohit-Changlang region remain committed to Buddhism and the Mishmis of Dibang-Lohit region to Hinduism.

Thus, Christians have now come to dominate many of the major regions and tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. Most of the traditional religious practices—including the widely prevalent Doni Polo—are now in danger of being submerged in this flood of Christianity.

**Religious Demography of the Scheduled Tribes
Religious Demography of the STs and non-STs in
Arunachal Pradesh, 2011**

	Total	Christian	ORP	Hindu	Buddhist	Muslim	Others
Total Pop	13,83,727	4,18,732	3,62,553	4,01,876	1,62,815	27,045	10,706
ST Pop	9,51,821	3,89,507	3,58,663	97,629	96,391	3,567	6,064
Non-STPop	4,31,906	29,225	3,890	3,04,247	66,424	23,478	4,642
% of Total	100.00	30.26	26.20	29.04	11.77	1.95	0.77
% of ST Pop	100.00	40.92	37.68	10.26	10.13	0.37	0.64
% of non-ST	100.00	6.77	0.90	70.44	15.38	5.44	1.07

Scheduled Tribes Form Two-thirds of the Population

Of the total population of 13.8 lakh counted in Arunachal Pradesh in 2011, 9.5 lakh, forming 68.8 per cent of the total is from the Scheduled Tribe (ST) communities. This proportion is somewhat higher than in

1991 and 2001, when the share of STs in the total population of the State was nearer 64 per cent.

Four-fifths of the STs are Either Christian or ORP

Of 9.5 lakh STs counted in 2011, 3.9 lakh are Christian and 3.6 lakh are counted under ORPs. Of the latter, 3.25 lakh are followers of *Doni Polo* or *Sidonyi Polo*, a faith that incorporates the traditional beliefs and practices of a large majority of the numerous tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. As we shall see below, the Christians and the ORPs have together accounted for much of the population of the State for the last few decades; however, during these decades, the proportion of ORPs has been sharply declining and that of the Christians has been correspondingly rising.

Hindus and Buddhists Each Form About 10 per cent of the STs

In addition to the Christians and ORPs, Hindus and Buddhists each form about ten per cent of the STs. Their share in the ST population has been declining, though at a much slower pace than that of the ORPs. As we shall see later, there are specific tribes—often inhabiting specific regions of the State—who are either Buddhist or Hindu; others were mostly ORPs before their conversion to Christianity. There has been little conversion in the Buddhist and Hindu tribes. Even so the share of Hindus and Buddhists together has declined from 26 per cent in 1991 to 20 per cent in 2011.

Rise of Christianity and Decline of the ORPs

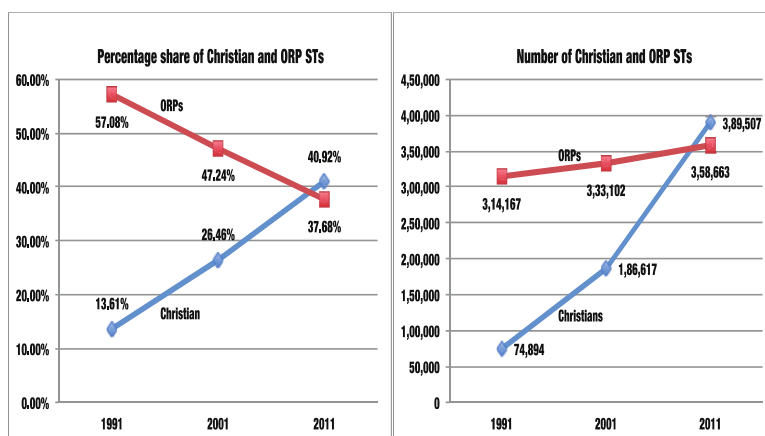
The Share of ORPs and Christians in the ST Population, 1991-2011

	Total ST	%ORP	%C
1991	5,50,351	57.08	13.61
2001	7,05,158	47.24	26.46
2011	9,51,821	37.68	40.92

As seen in the Table here, the share of Christians in the ST population of the State has risen from 13.6 per cent in 1991 to 40.9 per cent in 2011. Their share had nearly doubled between 1991-2001 and has increased again by more than half during the last decade. Since the total population of the Scheduled Tribes has also increased substantially in this period, the number of Christians in the State has multiplied by

more than five times, from about 75 thousand in 1991 to 3.9 lakh in 2011. The share of the ORPs in the ST population has meanwhile declined from 57.1 per cent in 1991 to 37.7 per cent in 2011. The Christians have recorded an accretion of 27 percentage points in their share in these two decades; somewhat more than 19 percentages points of this has been contributed by the ORPs.

The chart below graphically indicates the decline of ORPs and the rise of Christians during the last two decades. The absolute number of ORPs has indeed increased slightly during these decades, but that of Christians has multiplied five times. The share of ORPs in the total ST population has therefore precipitously declined and that of the Christians has sharply risen to overtake that of the ORPs.



Decline in the Share of Hindus and Buddhists

Share of Hindus, Buddhists and Others in the ST Population, 1991-2011

	%H	%B	%R	%O
1991	14.41	11.91	2.96	0.03
2001	13.13	11.72	1.29	0.16
2011	10.26	10.13	0.57	0.45

H: Hindu, B: Buddhist, R: RNS, O: Others

The share of Hindus in the population of the Scheduled Tribes has declined from 14.4 per cent to 10.3 per cent and that of Buddhists from 11.9 to 10.1 per cent. This decline may not be entirely because of conversion to Christianity; part of it seems to have been contributed by

a larger number among the Hindu tribes being counted as ORPs and perhaps by the relatively lower growth of the Hindu and Buddhist tribes. We shall explore these issues later when we look at the religious demography of the individual tribes. In any case, of the total accretion of 27 percentage points in the share of Christians, 6 percentage points are contributed by the decline in the share of Hindus and Buddhists.

Christians Have Gained 2 Percentage Points from the RNS also

The remaining 2 percentage points of the Christian gain has come from the decline in the number of persons counted under the category of Religion Not Stated (RNS). It is indeed remarkable that with the rise of Christianity, the share of RNS has declined to about half a per cent from nearly 3 per cent in 1991. This should raise concerns about the sudden steep rise in the numbers under this category in India as a whole and many of the major States, as we have discussed in [an earlier note](#).²

Issues Concerning the List of Scheduled Tribes in Arunachal Pradesh

Before looking at the religious demography—and the extent of Christianisation—of the individual tribes in Arunachal Pradesh, as we have done for other States of the Northeast, we need to notice certain issues concerning the large number of tribes included in the census lists of the Scheduled Tribes in that State.

Census Counts Numerous Tribes in Arunachal Pradesh

The census has divided the Scheduled Tribes of Arunachal Pradesh into a large number of often very small tribes. The census list runs into a total of 105 tribes, in addition to the residual category of Generic or Unclassified tribes. This number was 100 in 2001. Among the 105 tribes listed in the census 2011, 6 have a population of less than 10 and another 18 between 10 and 100. Only 25 of the tribes comprise more than 5,000 persons.

The Constitutional Order for Arunachal Pradesh Lists Only 16 Tribes

The list of Scheduled Tribes as given in the relevant Constitutional Order reads*³ “All tribes in the State including: 1. Abor, 2. Aka, 3.

Apatani, 4. Dafla, 5. Galong, 6. Khampti, 7. Howa, 8. Mishmi, Idu, Taroan, 9. Momba, 10. Any Naga tribes, 11. Sherdukpen, 12. Singpho, 13. Hrusso, 14. Tagin, 15. Khamba, 16. Adi.” Later, by an amendment of 2008, the tribe name of Dafla in entry 4 was changed to Nyishi, because of a perception that *Dafla* is a derogative term.

The Census Takes the List to be Open-ended

The census of India has interpreted the above Order to mean that the list of Scheduled Tribes in the State is open-ended and the 16 tribes named in that Order are only illustrative.*⁴ This is very odd and irregular. The list given in the Constitutional Order for a particular State is meant to define the groups that are to be treated as tribes under the Constitution in that State; the list is generally taken to be sacrosanct and any change in this list, even a trivial change in the name or spellings of a particular tribe, requires an amendment passed by the Parliament. In the case of Arunachal Pradesh, however, the list has been expanded far beyond that given in the Constitutional Order. This has become possible partly because of the extraordinary ambiguity in the language of that Order.

Not All of the Tribes Counted in the Census are Exclusive

Many of the tribes counted in the census do not seem to have a definitive identity; that is why the numbers of particular tribes can change widely from one census to the other. For example, the number of Abor counted in 1991 was 1,062; it rose to 19,927 in 2001 and has dropped to 1,672 in 2011. Similarly, the number of Adi Gallong counted in 1991 was 55,268; it declined to 48,126 in 2001 and has dropped precipitously to 18,604 in 2011. There are many examples of this phenomenon. This is because the 105 tribes that the census has identified in Arunachal Pradesh are not exclusive entities, and a person who refers to himself as Adi Gallong in one decade could well give the name of his tribe as Adi or Gallong or some other in the list at another time. Incidentally, the spellings of different names also have been changing from decade to decade; for example, Gallong was spelled with double *l* in 1991; in 2001 and 2011, it has changed to *Galong* while Adi Gallong continues to retain its double *l*. All this indicates that many of the numerous tribes counted in Arunachal Pradesh are not really distinct tribes with well-defined names and identities and that the list of 105 tribes is an artificial construct. Many of the tribes fall within a few groups and the latter have a more well-defined and exclusive identity.

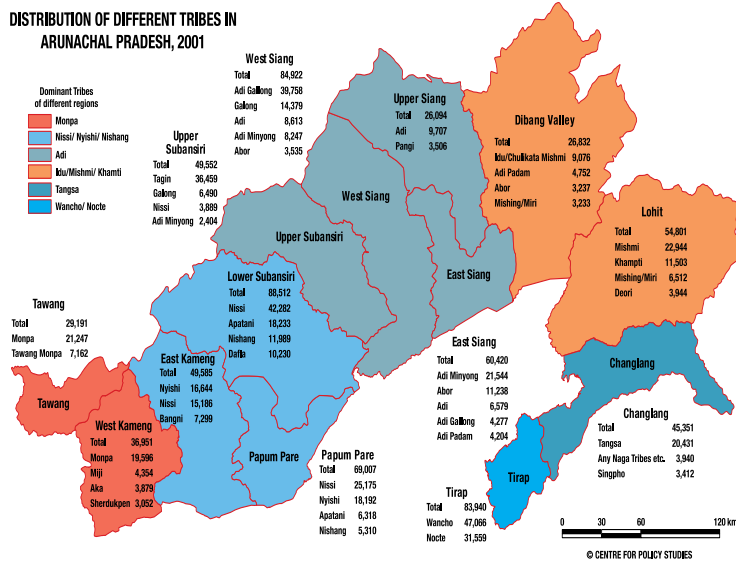
The Parliament Needs to Specify the List of Tribes

For the census data to be useful as a time-series, indicating the changing numbers and social parameters of different tribes over decades, it is necessary that only tribes that are exclusive to each other are listed and counted. Drawing up a firm list of exclusive tribes would require some sociological and anthropological study. But ultimately it is for the Parliament to specify such a list through an appropriate amendment of the Constitutional Order laying down the list of Scheduled Tribes in Arunachal Pradesh.

Tentative Grouping of the Scheduled Tribes

In case it is found expedient to continue with the long list of tribes for some reason, it would still be necessary to formally group several similar tribes in a few meaningful and exclusive groups. The tribes of Nagaland have been formally grouped into Naga and non-Naga tribes. The tribes of Arunachal Pradesh could similarly be grouped into a small number of distinct groups. In the following analysis of the changing religious demography of the Scheduled Tribes of the State, we have tried to work with a tentative grouping of the numerous tribes.

Distribution of Different Tribes Across the Districts of Arunachal Pradesh



Different groups of tribes seem to occupy distinctly different geographical regions of Arunachal Pradesh. We have tried to record this distribution in the Map above. It shows the population of the four most numerous tribes in each of the districts of Arunachal Pradesh. These numbers are from the count of 2001; for Census 2011, district-wise data for individual tribes has not yet been released.

The Map indicates that the western districts of Tawang and West Kameng are dominated by the Monpa, though the Miji and Aka do have some presence in the latter district. The districts of East Kameng, Lower Subansiri and Papum Pare to the east of Tawang and West Kameng are inhabited largely by the Nyishi, Nissi and Nishang. These three tribe names seem to be cognate with each other and represent essentially a single, and the most numerous, group. The Nyishi were earlier counted under the name of Dafla. Lower Subansiri and Papum Pare also accommodate a considerable number of the Apatani. To the east of this region lie Upper Subansiri and the three districts of the Siang valley. These four districts are dominated by the Adi group comprising the Galong, the Miniyong, the Padam, etc. Further east are the districts of Dibang Valley and Lohit. This is the region of the Idu, the Mishmi, the Miri and the Khampti, etc. Changlang to the south of Lohit is dominated by the Tangsa; the census lists as many as 28 tribes that carry the name Tangsa with different adjectives. Beyond Changlang is Tirap, inhabited by the Wancho and the Nocte.

The changing religious demography of Arunachal Pradesh becomes easier to comprehend in the background of this geographical location and clustering of different tribes and tribal groups in different regions and districts.

Religious Demography of the Individual Tribes and Tribal Groups of the State

As we have mentioned, the changing religious demography and rapid Christianisation of the Scheduled Tribes of Arunachal Pradesh is best comprehended by looking at the different groups into which the numerous tribes of the State are divided and the different regions that they inhabit. We attempt such an analysis below:

The Monpa and Momba of Tawang and Siang

The Committed Buddhist Communities Religious Profile of the Monpa and Momba

	Total	Buddhist%B	
Monpa	43,709	42,663	97.6
Dirang Monpa	7,172	7,010	97.7

Tawang Monpa	7,133	7,029	98.5
Lish Monpa	2,232	2,194	98.3
But Monpa	255	243	95.3
Panchen Monpa	24	17	70.8
Momba, Memba	4,495	4,352	96.8
Total of Above	65,020	63,508	97.7

The census of 2011 lists a total of 7 tribes that carry the name of Monpa or Momba. According to the census of 2001, Monpas are mainly in Tawang and to some extent in the adjoining West Kameng. Mombas are located largely in West Siang and Upper Siang. Both the Monpas and the Mombas are predominantly Buddhist. Christianity has not been able to make any significant inroads into these Buddhists communities. Of 65 thousand Monpas and Mombas, 63.5 thousand are Buddhist. Among the 1,512 non-Buddhist Monpas or Mombas, there are 476 Hindus, 93 Muslims, 568 Christians, 182 ORPs, 24 Sikhs, 107 Jains and 62 of those who have not stated their religion. These numbers are small, yet it is surprising to see such diversity in remote and disciplined Buddhist communities. This is particularly remarkable in the small group of Panchen Monpa; of 24 members of this community, 6 are Christian and one is a Muslim. In 1991, there were 18 Christians, 6 Hindus and 19 ORPs in their larger population of 114.

The Aka, Hrusso and Miji of West Kameng

Hinduism Survives Among the Aka and the Hrusso

The Aka, Hrusso and the Miji, 2011

	Total	%H	%C	%ORP
Aka	8,110	36.04	34.38	27.26
Miji	8,127	13.24	42.07	32.16
Hrusso	57	49.12	38.60	7.02
Total	16,294	24.71	38.23	29.64

Besides the Monpas, West Kameng is also inhabited by the Aka, the Hrusso and the Miji. These are closely related tribes. In 2011, their combined population is around 16 thousand. Of these, nearly a quarter are Hindu, about 38 per cent Christian and about 30 per cent ORPs. In 1991, nearly 55 per cent of the Aka were Hindu. A majority of the Aka counted under ORPs are followers of the Nyarino sect; there are not many followers of Doni Polo among them. Of the Miji ORPs, somewhat less than half are followers of Doni Polo and the rest of other tribal religions.

Rise of Christianity Among the Aka, Hrusso and Miji Rise of
Christianity Among the Aka, etc., 1991-2011

	1991	2001	2011
Aka	25	404	2,788
Miji	78	1,093	3,419
Hrusso	-	-	22

No Hrusso Were Counted in 1991 or 2001.

Spread of Christianity among the Aka is very recent; in 1991, few Christians were counted among them and in 2001, less than 8 per cent of the Aka were Christian. Among the Miji also, there were only a few Christians in 1991, but their presence increased to 19 per cent in 2001 and has increased further to 42 per cent in 2011. It is tempting to speculate that the delayed rise of Christianity among the Aka, as compared to the related Miji of the same region, is because a majority of the Aka were Hindu till a couple of decades ago, while a majority of the Miji were counted as followers of Doni Polo or other tribal religions.

The Sherdukpen and Khowa

The Sherdukpen and the Khowa or Bugun are another couple of important tribes inhabiting West Kameng along with the Monpa, the Aka and the Miji. The Sherdukpen are mainly Buddhist; of 3,463 Sherdukpen counted in 2011, 3,376 are Buddhist, but there are 26 Christians even among them. Of 1,432 Khowa or Bugun, however, 302 are Christian; of the rest 714 are Buddhist and 350 ORPs. These ORPs are all followers of unnamed tribal religions; there are no followers of Doni Polo among them.

The Nyishi, Nissi and Nishang of East Kameng, Lower Subansiri and Papum Pare

The Largest Tribal Group of the State Religious Profile
of the Nyishi, Nissi and Nishang

	Total	Christian	ORP	%C	%ORP
Nyishi	2,49,824	1,58,0487	4,108	63.3	29.7
Nissi	32,479	20,726	9,083	63.8	28.0
Nishang	2,849	1,835	535	64.4	18.8
Total	2,85,152	1,80,609	83,726	63.3	29.4

Nyishi, Nissi and Nishang together form the largest tribal group of the State. The name Nyishi is newly added to the list, in place of Dafla. But all of the names seem inter-changeable. Many of those who were counted as Nissi or Nishang in the previous censuses seem to have been counted as Nyishi in 2011. The three together constitute 2.85 lakh of the total 9.52 lakh Scheduled Tribes of the State. As per the district-wise figures of 2001 shown in the Map on p.80, these tribes are concentrated mainly in East Kameng, Lower Subansiri and Papum Pare districts.

Conversion of the Nyishi, Nissi and Nishang

Rise of Christianity Among the Nyishi, Nissi and Nishang

	Total	Christian	ORP	%C	%ORP
1991	82,509	31,653	44,371	38.36	53.78
2001	1,54,839	64,256	80,420	41.50	51.94
2011	2,85,152	1,80,609	83,726	63.34	29.36

Note: The Nyishi were listed as Dafla in 1991 and 2001.

This most numerous and important tribal group of Arunachal Pradesh has now been largely converted to Christianity. More than 63 per cent of the Nyishi, Nissi and Nishang have been counted as Christians in 2011. Christianity seems to have arrived relatively early in this community: there were already 38 per cent Christians among the Nyishi, Nissi and Nishang in 1991, when the share of Christians in the total ST population of the State was only 13.6 per cent. The rise in the proportion of Christians among them was somewhat subdued during 1991-2001; in that decade their share in the population of Nyishi, Nissi and Nishang moved from 38.4 to 41.5 per cent. But during the last decade, their share has risen steeply to reach 63.3 per cent. The success of Christianity in Arunachal Pradesh is largely due to the large-scale conversion of this community, and of the Tangsa, Wancho and Nocte in the east. Of 3.89 lakh Christians in Arunachal Pradesh in 2011, 1.81 lakh are from this community.

Conversion is Mainly From the Followers of Doni Polo

As can be seen from the Table here, the conversion of Nyishi, Nissi and Nishang has been mainly from those listed under ORPs, who are

all followers of Doni Polo or Sidoni Polyo. In the last decade, the share of Christians in this community has risen from 41.5 to 63.3 per cent and that of the ORPs has declined from 51.9 to 29.4 per cent.

**The Apatani of Lower Subansiri and Papum Pare
Rise of Christianity Among the Apatani**

	Total	Christian	ORP	%C	%ORP
1991	20,836	307	18,290	1.47	87.78
2001	27,576	2,350	23,761	8.52	86.17
2011	43,777	9,513	31,269	21.73	71.43

Besides the Nyishi, Nissi and Nishang, there are a considerable number of Apatani inhabiting mainly the Kumung Kurey component of Lower Subansiri and Papum Pare. The spread of Christianity among the Apatani is lower than in the Nyishi, etc. In 2011, 21.73 per cent of nearly 44 thousand Apatani have been counted as Christian. In 1991, only 1.5 per cent of the Apatani were Christian and their presence was less than 9 per cent even in 2001. Much of the rise of Christianity among the Apatani has taken place during 2001-11 alone. A large majority of the Apatani, however, continue to be followers of Doni Polo.

The Tagin, Bangni and Sulung of Upper Subansiri and East Kameng

Growth of Christianity among the Tagin, Sulung and Bangni, 1991-2011

	Total 1991	Population 2001	Population 2011	Christian 1991	Christian 2001	Christian 2011	Percent 1991	Percent 2001	Share 2011
Tagin	32,720	39,091	62,931	141	2,226	7,634	0.43	5.69	12.13
Bangni	34,909	7,870	691	982	2,115	325	2.81	26.87	47.03
Tagin Bangni	31	38	532	1	1	83	3.23	2.63	15.60
Sulung	4,432	3,554	4,519	143	310	2,085	3.23	8.72	46.14
Sulung Bangni	21	391	35	8	63	13	38.10	16.11	37.14
All of Above	72,113	50,944	68,708	1,275	4,715	10,140	1.77	9.26	14.76

These Tribes Seem Cognate with Nyishi, Nissi and Nishang

The Tagin, Bangni and Sulung are the other significant tribes in the Subansiri region. According to the count of 2001, the Tagin are mainly in Upper Subansiri and Bangni and Sulung mainly in East Kameng.

From the varying numbers of these tribes in different decades, it seems that at least some of these names are interchangeable; these tribes are also probably cognate with Nyishi, Nissi and Nishang. The total population of this group of tribes has declined from 72 thousand in 1991 to about 69 thousand in 2011. Many of those who were counted in this group in 1991 seem to have been counted with the Nyishi, etc., in the later counts. All the tribes of this region—including Nyishi, Nissi, Nishang, Apatani, Tagin, Bangni and Sulung—share the larger Tani identity.

Christian Penetration Among the Tagin Has Been Limited

There has been considerable growth of Christianity among the Tagin, Sulung and Bangni, even though the penetration of Christianity has not been as deep as in the Nyishi, etc. There were only about a thousand Christians in their population of 72 thousand in 1991, the number of Christians in 2011 is about 10 thousand in a smaller total population. Within this group, the presence of Christians is much higher in the Bangni and Sulung and remains fairly low in the Tagin. As seen in the Table, Christians form 47 per cent of the Bangni, 46 per cent of the Sulung and only 12 per cent of the Tagin. Notwithstanding the Christian penetration, a majority of the Tagin, Bangni and Sulung continue to be followers of Doni Polo.

The Adi of Upper Subansiri and Siang The Adi are the Second Largest Group of tribes in the State

A large number of tribes of Arunachal Pradesh fall within the Adi group. Of 105 tribes counted in the Census of 2011, as many as 29 seem to belong to the Adi. The Adi are mainly concentrated in the central part of the State comprising Upper Subansiri and in West, Upper and East Siang, though there are some Adi communities in Dibang Valley also. The total population of the 29 communities that we have identified as Adi is 2.38 lakh. The Table below gives the changing religious profile of six of the largest, which have a population of more than 5 thousand in 2011. These six communities account for 2.10 lakh of the total 2.38 lakh Adi population.

**Growth of Christianity Among the Seven Most Numerous
Adi Tribes, 1991-2011**

	Total 1991	Population 2001	Population 2011	Christian 1991	Population 2001	Population 2011	Percent 1991	Percent 2001	Percent 2011
Galong	7,237	27,239	79,327	961	5,126	21,879	13.28	18.82	27.58
Adi	24,423	32,582	67,869	3,379	7,949	14,861	13.84	24.40	21.90
Adi	26,562	33,984	25,112	1,869	5,378	4,147	7.04	15.83	16.51
Minyong									
Adi	55,268	48,126	18,604	6,811	10,526	7,011	12.32	21.87	37.69
Gallong									
Adi Padam	8,348	11,625	13,467	1,471	3,002	4,119	17.62	25.82	30.59
Miniyong	7,005	2,815	5,668	603	398	1,163	8.61	14.14	20.52
Total of Above	1,28,843	1,56,371	2,10,047	15,094	32,379	53,180	11.72	20.71	25.32
All Adi in 2011			2,37,997			65,691			27.60

Christianity Has Taken Root Among the Adi Also

As seen in the Table above, the share of Christians in the six most numerous Adi tribes increased from 11.7 per cent in 1991 to 20.7 per cent in 200; it has further increased to 25.3 per cent in 2011. The rise is not as spectacular as in the Nyishi, etc. But the Adi Gallong have now become nearly 38 per cent Christian and the Adi Padam are also more than 30 per cent Christian. The share of Christians is the least among the Adi Minyong at 16.5 per cent. But, as we have mentioned repeatedly, these names do not seem to refer to any fixed identities and perhaps the total numbers are more meaningful.

Share of the Christians in many of the smaller Adi tribes is much bigger than indicated by the average of all Adi communities. Thus 79 per cent of the Bori, 78 per cent of the Libo, 73 per cent of the Pailibo, 70 per cent of the Bagi and 67 per cent of the Bokar are Christian. Of these, the Bokar, the Bori and the Pailibo are fairly numerous communities.

Notwithstanding the Christian penetration, a majority of the Adi continue to be followers of Doni Polo.

The Idu, Miju and Degaru Mishmis

The census has mixed together some of these tribes. Dibang Valley and Lohit (including the new district of Anjaw) are inhabited by several Mishmi communities; their several groups live in different areas within the Dibang Valley-Lohit-Anjaw region. The Idu, also

listed as Chulikata Mishmi earlier, are largely in Dibang Valley and Miju largely in Lohit. But these designations seem to have been mixed up in census 2011 and Mishmis in general have been added to the Idus.

These tribes are largely Hindu
Religious profile of the Idu, Miju and Degaru Mishmi, 2011

	Total	Hindu	Christian	ORP	%H	%C	%O
Idu	32,219	16,884	1,602	13,218	52.40	4.97	41.03
Miju	9,406	6,636	139	2,506	70.55	1.48	26.64
Degaru	1,274	880	97	289	69.07	7.61	22.68
Mikir	1,068	1,038	22	8	97.19	2.06	0.75
Taram	11	5	4	2	45.45	36.36	18.18
Total	43,978	25,443	1,864	16,023	57.85	4.24	36.43

Note: The first 3 rows comprise several Mishmi communities. The Mikir, who mainly inhabit Karbi-Anglong of Assam, have a small community in one circle of Papum Pare district.

Hindus form a considerable proportion of this group of tribes. In 2001, when the Mishmi were counted separately from the Idu, 20 thousand of the 25 thousand Mishmis were Hindu. In 2011, Hindus comprise about 58 per cent of this group of tribes, more than 36 per cent are ORPs and there are only 4.24 per cent Christians among them. In 2001, there were only around 127 Christians in this whole group. The ORPs in this group are followers of Intaya, Nani Intiya and other tribal religions; there are few followers of Doni Polo among them.

Khampti of Lohit and Changlang
The Khampti of Lohit and Changlang, 2011

	Total	Hindu	Buddhist	%B
Khampti, Kamti	15,762	286	15,200	96.43
Thai Khampi	76	3	69	90.79
Khamba	777	6	753	96.91
Khamiyang	401	6	389	97.01
Total of Above	17,016	301	16,411	96.44

Khampti, Thai Khampi, Khamba and Khamyang comprise largely Buddhist communities that inhabit Lohit and parts of Changlang districts.

Of their total population of about 17 thousand, 16.4 thousand are Buddhist and another 3 hundred Hindu. There are 138 Christians even among these Buddhist communities.

The Meyor of Anjaw

There is also the small Buddhist community of the Meyor, also known as Zekhring, inhabiting Anjaw component of Lohit. Of 989 members of this community, 366 have become Christian. In 1991, there were no Christians among the Meyor and there were only 3 in 2001. This community has been converted largely in the last decade.

Singpho of Lohit and Changlang

This is another Buddhist community that inhabits Lohit and Changlang districts. Of 5,616 Singpho counted in 2011, 5,385 are Buddhist.

Deori of Lohit and Changlang

Deori are another significant tribe of this region. They are said to have been the priests of Ahom and Chutiya kingdoms; their name comes from that role. The Deorihave remained unconverted. Of 5,365 Deori counted in 2011, 5,289 are Hindu. But, there are 24 Christians and 18 Muslims even among them.

Tangsa of Changlang

Numerous Tangsa communities are counted in the Census. Changlang district is inhabited largely by the Tangsa, among whom the Census counts as many as 28 distinct tribes; all of them carry the name Tangsa. Curiously, the number and names of Tangsa in the census lists has been changing. There were 29 Tangsa tribes counted in 1991 and 28 have been counted in 2001 and 2011. Several names in these three lists are different from each other.

Christianity Has Made Deep Inroads in the Tangsa Rising Christian Presence Among the Tangsa, 1991-2011

	Total	Hindu	Buddhist	Christian	ORP	%H	%B	%C	%O
1991	19,75	6,245	753	5,710	5,136	31.62	3.8	28.91	26.00
2001	29,538	6,631	1,979	13,491	104	22.45	6.70	45.67	0.35
2011	36,120	3,595	2,543	21,291	62	9.95	7.04	58.95	0.17

Christianity has made deep inroads into this community. Of 36 thousand Tangsa counted in 2011, more than 21 thousand are Christians; they form 59 per cent of the Tangsa population. Of the remaining Tangsa, 3.6 thousand are Hindu and 2.5 thousand Buddhist. The share of Christians among the Tangsa has risen from 29 per cent in 1991 to 59 per cent in 2011. The share of Hindus has declined from nearly 32 per cent in 1991 to less than 10 per cent in 2011. The share of ORPs had declined from 26 per cent to almost nothing in the single decade of 1991-2001. Tangsa are perhaps the only community of Arunachal Pradesh that has converted from the Hindu religion at such an extensive level.

The share of Christians in some of the Tangsa tribes is much higher than the average of 59 per cent. The main Tangsa community of 15 thousand persons is 63 per cent Christian and the second largest community of Mossang Tangsa is 93 per cent Christian now.

The Yobin of Changlang

There is another small but significant tribe of the Yobin in Changlang. This tribe has been nearly completely converted. Of 2,994 Yobin counted in 2011, 2,965 are Christian.

The Wancho and Nocte of Tirap

Tirap district is inhabited by the Wancho and the Nocte. Both these communities had considerable presence of the Hindus and ORPs among them even in 1991. In 2011, the Wancho have been almost entirely converted, and two-thirds of the Nocte have now become Christian. The traditional tribal religions of the Wancho and Nocte, including the Rangfra, which is specific to the Nocte and the Tangsa, have now been nearly eliminated. It is widely believed that this large-scale conversion of the Wancho and the Nocte in the course of the last two decades has been achieved through intense coercion.

Wanchos are 95 Per cent Christian

The Christian Conversion of the Wancho, 1991-2011

	Total	Hindu	Christian	ORP	%H	%C	%ORP
1991	45,182	10,184	13,190	20,410	22.54	29.19	45.17
2001	47,788	5,003	35,057	7,585	10.47	73.36	15.87
2011	56,886	1,449	54,165	312	2.55	95.22	0.55

Of about 57 thousand Wanchos counted in 2011, 54 thousand are Christian. In 1991, 22.5 per cent of them were Hindu and 45 per cent ORPs. The share of Christianity among them rose from 29 per cent in 1991 to 73 per cent in 2001 and has reached above 95 per cent in 2011. Thus, this majority community of Tirap district has been nearly fully Christianised in the course of just two decades.

Noctes are 67 Per cent Christian
The Christian Conversion of the Nocte, 1991-2011

	Total	Hindu	Christian	ORP	%H	%C	%ORP
1991	23,418	8,992	2,328	11,490	38.40	9.94	49.06
2001	33,680	7,754	14,630	5,732	23.02	43.44	17.02
2011	34,664	6,787	23,093	4,453	19.58	66.62	12.85

Of about 35 thousand Noctes counted in 2011, 23 thousand are Christian. In 1991, there were just about 2 thousand Christians in the Nocte population of above 23 thousand. The share of Christians among them rose from less than 10 per cent in 1991 to 43 per cent in 2001 and has risen to 67 per cent in 2011. The share of Hindus has correspondingly declined from 38.4 to 19.6 per cent and that of the ORP from 49.1 to 12.8 per cent. This transformation of the religious demography of the Nocte has happened in the course of just the last two decades.

The Census also counts three smaller Nocte communities of Tutcha, Liju and Ponthai Nocte. There are 1,049 of the Tutcha Nocte, 60 per cent of them are Christian; there are 788 of the Liju, of whom 76 per cent are Christian and there are 68 of the Ponthai Nocte, of whom 82 per cent are Christian.

Conclusion
STs in General

1. Scheduled Tribes form nearly 69 per cent of the population of Arunachal Pradesh and 41 per cent of them are now Christian. The share of Christians in some of the largest and more important tribes is much higher than this average.
2. The rise of Christianity in the tribal population of Arunachal Pradesh is a recent phenomenon. In 1991, Christians formed less than 14 per cent of the ST population; their share was near 26.5 per cent in 2001.
3. Much of the conversion to Christianity has occurred from the populations that were counted as followers of Other Religions and Persuasions (ORPs).

4. The ORPs now form about 38 per cent of the ST population. Their share was 57 per cent in 1991 and 47 per cent in 2001.
5. The ORPs of Arunachal Pradesh are mainly followers of *Doni Polo* or *Sidonyi Polo*. This incorporates the religious practices of a large number of tribes of the Tani and Adi groups. But there are also a number of other faiths and persuasions followed by several tribes, especially in the eastern half of the State. All of these diverse faiths are rapidly losing adherents to Christianity.
6. Besides, the Christians and ORPs, there are about 10 per cent Buddhists and 10 per cent Hindus among the STs of Arunachal Pradesh. These two religions are prevalent in distinct tribal communities inhabiting geographically distinct regions.
7. There has been little conversion to Christianity among the Buddhist and Hindu tribes, excepting a few exceptions.
8. But the share of Hindus and Buddhists together in the ST population has declined by about 6 percentage points between 1991 and 2011. This is partly because of the relatively lower growth of the Hindu and Buddhist tribes compared to others.

Numerousness of the Individual Tribes

9. The STs of Arunachal Pradesh are divided into an unusually large number of individual tribes. Census 2011 gives data for as many as 105 tribes. In 2001, the number was 100.
10. The Constitutional Order listing the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh mentions only 16 tribes by name. But it is drafted in an ambiguous language. It begins with the phrase "*All tribes in the State including*" and then names the 16 tribes. This has been interpreted to mean that the list of Scheduled Tribes in the State is open-ended and has led to the inclusion of several division and sub-divisions of the same community as separate tribes.
11. Many of the individual tribes in the census lists of Arunachal Pradesh do not seem to have a definite identity. Their numbers keep changing from decade to decade and even the spellings and names do not seem to be fixed.
12. There is an urgent need for the Parliament to amend the order to provide a definitive list of exclusive tribes with distinct identities to be listed in the Schedule.

Tentative Grouping of Tribes

13. It seems possible to group the numerous tribes of Arunachal Pradesh in a few groups that are not only ethnically related but also inhabit specific geographic regions.
14. On the basis of the district-wise data provided in census 2001, a tentative grouping would include the following, inhabiting specific regions as we move from west to east:
The **Monpas** inhabiting Tawang and West Kameng; the **Aka**, **Sherdukpen** and **Miji** inhabiting West Kameng; the **Nyishi**, **Nissi** and **Nishang** inhabiting East Kameng, Lower Subansiri and Papum Pare; the **Apatani** inhabiting Lower Subansiri and Papum Pare; the **Tagin**, **Sulung** and **Bangni** inhabiting Upper Subansiri and East Kameng; the **Adi**, with their several subdivisions, inhabiting Upper Subansiri and West, Upper and East Siang; the **Mishmis**, including the **Idu**, **Miju** and **Degaru**, inhabiting Dibang Valley and Lohit; the **Khampti**, **Singpho** and **Deori** of Lohit and Changlang; the **Tangsa**, with their several subdivisions, inhabiting Changlang; and, the **Wancho** and **Nocte** of Tirap.

Christianisation of the Different Groups of Tribes

15. The Monpa are and remain committed Buddhists. Of the 65 thousand Monpas counted in 2011, 63.5 thousand are Buddhist.
16. The Aka, Miji and Hrusso, who together number about 16 thousand in 2011, are now 38 per cent Christian. There were a total of 103 Christians in this group in 1991.
17. The Sherdukpen continue to remain Buddhist.
18. The Nyishi, Nissi and Nishang are the most numerous and important tribal group of the State. Christianity has penetrated rapidly into this group and there has been an accretion of 22 percentage points to their share in 2001-11 alone. More than 63 per cent of their population of 2.85 lakh has now become Christian. Those of the Nyishi, Nissi and Nishang who have not yet converted to Christianity are mainly followers of Doni Polo or Sidoni Polyo.
19. The level of conversion among the Apatani, who have a population of about 44 thousand is relatively lower at 22 per cent. In 1991, the share of Christians among the Apatani was less than 1.5 per cent.

20. The Tagin, Bangni and Sulung have a population of 72 thousand in 2011 and 14.76 per cent of them are now Christian. In 1991, there were only about a thousand Christians among a somewhat larger population of theirs. The share of Christians in the Bangni and Sulung is high at 47 and 46 per cent, respectively; it is only 12 per cent in the Tagin.
21. The Adi, who have been divided into 29 tribes, are the second largest group with a population of about 2.4 lakh in 2011. About 28 per cent of the Adi are now Christian. The share of Christians among many Adi communities is much larger than this average.
22. The Mishmis, including the Idu, Miju and Degaro, have a population of about 44 thousand. Nearly 59 per cent of the population of this group is Hindu and another 36 per cent are ORPs following diverse faiths like Intaya, Nani Intiya, etc. Christians form about 4 per cent of their population; in 2001, there were only about 50 Christians in this whole group.
23. The Khampti group of tribes have a total population of 17 thousand, of whom 16.4 thousand are Buddhist.
24. The Singpho have a population of 5.6 thousand of whom 5.4 thousand are Buddhist.
25. The Deori have a population of 5,365 of whom 5,289 are Hindu.
26. The Tangsa group, which includes 28 tribes, has a population of 36 thousand. Christians now form 59 per cent of their population. The share of Christians in 1991 was near 29 per cent. There were 32 per cent Hindus among them in 1991; the share of Hindus now is less than 10 per cent. The ORPs then formed 26 per cent of their population; there are hardly any ORPs among them now.
27. The Wancho have a population about 57 thousand. More than 95 per cent of the Wancho are now Christian. In 1991, 22 per cent of them were Hindu, 45 per cent ORPs and 29 per cent Christian. The nearly complete Christianisation of the Wancho has been accomplished in just about 2 decades.
28. The Nocte have a population of about 35 thousand. Nearly 67 per cent of them are Christian. In 1991, there were less than 10 per cent Christians among them. At that time 38 per cent of them were Hindu and 49 per cent ORPs.

29. Christianity, thus, has made deep inroads into the Nyishi, Nissi and Nishang in the western and in the Tangsa, Wancho and Nocte in the eastern parts of Arunachal Pradesh. The Adis in the middle have become nearly 28 per cent Christian. But Monpas of Tawang and Siang and Khamptis of Lohit region have continued to abide by their Buddhist commitment and the Mishmis of Dibang-Lohit region have continued to be Hindu.
31. The rise of Christianity has been largely to the loss of the diverse tribal faiths and practices of the numerous tribes of Arunachal Pradesh, all of which are now in danger of being swamped with the uniformity of Christianity.

Notes

¹ <http://blog.cpsindia.org/2016/02/religion-data-of-census-2011-xiii.html>

² <http://blog.cpsindia.org/2016/01/religion-data-of-census-2011-xii-rns.html>
<http://tribal.nic.in/WriteReadData/CMS/Documents/201212010320573486328File1045.pdf>

⁴ http://www.censusindia.gov.in/Tables_Published/SCST/dh_st_arunachal.pdf

Mahabharat Retold with Scientific Evidences

Saroj Bala*

Abstract

Entire ancient history, revealed through Vedas and Epics, is capable of being reconstructed scientifically with accuracy by making use of modern scientific tools and technologies, which include planetarium software. The astronomical references of Rigveda could be observed in the sky between 7000 BCE and 5000 BCE, whereas those of Ramayan could be observed sequentially around 5100 BCE. The astronomical references of Mahabharat pertain to the sky views observed sequentially between 3153 BCE and 3102 BCE. For arriving at these dates, following approach and methodology were adopted –

- More than one lakh *slokas* contained in nine volumes of *Mahabharat* (Parimal Publications) were scrutinized and astronomical references were extracted sequentially. Only those which were found in Critical Edition as well were identified for sequential dating. All translations were redone with the help of Sanskrit scholars and referring to dictionaries as some of the traditional translations were found to be not fully correct.
- Astronomical references from Sabha Parva, Vana Parva, Udyog Parva, Bhishma Parva, Shalya Parva, Shanti Parva, and Mausala Parva have been dated sequentially by making use of planetarium software (Fogware). The internal consistency of astronomical dates with the text of *Mahabharata* was ensured. Astronomical dates calculated by almost all the scholars during

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the last 130 years were analysed with respect and genuine efforts were made to provide the missing links and to make the dating more comprehensive.

- Vana Parva of *Mahabharat* reveals that in *Mahabharat* days asterisms were being counted from Rohini as equinox was on that. Astronomically there is precession of equinox by one degree in 72 years. Today Spring equinox is in the third quarter of Purva Bhadrapad Asterism; thus equinox has moved by more than 5.25 nakshatras (Krttika, Bharani, Asvini, Revati, and Uttara Bhadrapada) since this reference in *Mahabharata*. This means that more than 5040 years (960×5.25) have passed. This took our research period for dating of Mahabharata references to 4000 BC – 3000 BC).
- A more accurate translation of all the relevant *slokas* of chapters 2 and 3 of Bhishma Parva, had enabled such accurate depiction of sequential sky views, which should be able to set at rest all controversies regarding the dating of *Mahabharat* war. Sky view of 19th December, 3139 BC, depicting *Magh Shukla Saptami*, a day before Bhishma's demise and of September 14, 3139 BC, depicting all astronomical references of Bhishma Parva observed six hours before the solar eclipse of Kartik month are most exclusive, which do not get repeated on any other date; not even around 3067 BC, 1792 BC or 1472 BC.

Eleven sequential sky views covering a period of 52 years from 3153 BC to 3101 BC have been generated, using planetarium software, which exactly match the descriptions in Mahabharat, are internally consistent and sequentially accurate. Evidences from archaeology, archaeobotany, palynology, oceanography, remote sensing and genetic studies have corroborated this date sequence of events recorded in *Mahabharat*. The kingdoms which supported Pandavas and Kauravas during *Mahabharat* war, have been plotted on the map, which reveals that entire Greater India was involved in this war. This map also certifies the existence of *Bharatvarsha* as a Nation with defined boundaries for more than 5000 Years.

List of some important sequential sky views generated along with the dates on which these are recorded as observed at the time of important events narrated in *Mahabharat* is as under (These will be actually displayed through PPT making use of planetarium software) -

Date	Reference	Description of Event/Sky view
Oct. 20, 3153 BC, 10:25 hrs. / Hastinapur (Meerut)	<i>Mahabharat</i> Sabha Parva 2/80/29	Solar eclipse observed when Pandavas were leaving Hastinapur for 13 years of exile after losing in the game of dice. War started after 14 years appx.
Aug. 31, 3139 BC; 11:10 hrs. / Hastinapur	Bhishma Parva 6/2/23	Lunar eclipse followed by solar eclipse within 14 days; foreboding widespread destruction before war
Sep. 14, 3139 BC 22:15 hrs. / Hastinapur	Bhishma Parva 6 /2/23 & 6/3/28-32	Solar eclipse observed within 14 days (13th <i>tithi</i>) of lunar eclipse. On next <i>Amavasya</i> , <i>Mahabharat</i> war actually started.
18:30 hrs. / Hastinapur	Bhishma Parva. 6/3/14 -18	Just six hours before the eclipse all the positions of stars and planets described in Udyog Parva and Bhishma Parva could be observed in the sky.
Sep. 25, 3139 BC	Udyog Parva 5/83/6-7	Lord Krishna leaves for last peace mission in Kartika month, Revati Nakshtra.
Oct. 3. 3139 BC Hastinapur	Shalya Parva 9/34/5-6, Udyog Parva 5/142/17-18	After failure of Krishna's peace mission, Balram leaves for pilgrimage in Pushya Nakshtra. 3-4 days later, Krishna tells Karna that war could begin on next <i>Amavasya</i> .
Oct. 13, 3139 BC 6:15 hrs. / Hastinapur	Udyog Parva 5/142/17-18	<i>Amavasya</i> within 13 days of Kartik Purnima, moon near Jyeshtha (Scorpius/vrishchika) – war started after the failure of Sri Krishan's last peace mission.
Nov. 14, 3139 BC 06:50 hrs. / Kuruksheetra	Shalya Parva 9/34/5-7	With Shalya's fall, war came to an end on 31st October. Duryodhan went into hiding in Dvaipayana lake. Pandavas could locate him only after 12-13 days. Balram comes back after 42 days in Shravana Nakshatra.

Dec. 19, 3139 BC 07:20 hrs./ Kurukshetra	Anushasan Parva 13/167/26-28	Duryodhana gets killed in Gada yuddha with Bhim. Occurrence of Winter Solstice on Magh Shukla Saptmi. Next day on Magh Ashtami was Bhishma's demise. This was 68th day after beginning of the war on 13th Oct.
March 3, 3102 BC 10:30 hrs. / Dwarka	Mausala Parva 16/2/18-19	Solar Eclipse on 13th <i>tithi</i> after Purnima again in the 36th year of war indicating; annihilation of Yadavas and destruction of Dwarka, proving Gandhari's curse true
Jan. 22, 3101 BC Delhi 10:47	Sabha Parva 2/1//19-91; Dasagitika/3	Spectacular assemblage of Sun, Moon & Five Planets around Aries when Kali era Began 37 years after the <i>Mahabharat</i> war

Note: References are from *Mahabharat* of Parimal Prakashan (2008 Edition) translated by M. N. Dutt, edited by Dr. Ishwar Chandra Sharma and Dr. O. N. Bimali; all these are also included in critical edition 'The Mahabharat' by Vishnu S. Sukthankar.

Keywords

Saroj Bala, Shri Krishna, Shri Ram, Mahabharat, Bhagvadgita, Ramayan, Pandu, Pandavas, Kunti, Yudhishtir, Bhim, Arjun, Nakul, Sahadev, Kuru, Draupadi, Kauravas, Dhritarashtra, Gandhari, Duryodhan, Bhishma, Dronacharya, Dr. A. P. J. Abdul Kalam, Sukthankar,

Hastinapur, Indraprastha, Kurukshetra, Dwarika, Matsya Desh, Kamyaka forest, Gandhamadan Parvat, Ekchakra Nagri, Rakhigarhi, Bhirrana, Kunal, Sarasvati, Lahuradeva, Jhussi,

Sabha Parva, Vana Parva, Udyog Parva, Bhishma Parva, Shalya Parva, Shanti Parva, Stri Parva, Anushasan Parva, Mausala Parva,

Tithi, Nakshatras, asterism, planets, equinox, sky-view, planetarium software, astronomical, solar eclipse, lunar eclipse, archaeology, archaeobotany, palynology, oceanography, remote sensing, genetic studies, Gandiv, astras, sastras, Mace, Terracotta

Gandhara, Kamboja, Matsya, Surasena, Kuru, Panchala, Avanti, Chedi, Vatsa, Kasi, Kosala, Malla, Magadha, Vriji, Anga, Asmaka, Yadus,

Did Lord Krishna actually recite the profound philosophy of Gita to Arjun from the battlefield of Kurukshetra? Did the land of Kurukshetra actually turn red with the blood of millions of warriors who were killed during that historic war? If yes, then where, when and in which year?

About 5200 years back Vichitravirya, the son of Raja Shantanu, was coronated as the king of Hastinapur. He was married to Ambika and Ambalika, two daughters of King Kashiraj. Vichitravirya thereafter died very soon. In order to save the Kuru Dynasty from extinction and with the permission of mother Satyawati, Ambika bears a son through Sage Vyas who is named as Dhritarashtra whereas Ambalika bears a son named Pandu.

Since Dhritarashtra was blind from birth, he was considered unfit for the throne; therefore, Pandu is coronated as the king of Hastinapur. For this reason, Dhritarashtra nurtured resentment against Pandu from the very beginning. King Pandu expanded the boundaries of Kuru kingdom through multiple victories but thereafter, he handed over the Throne to Dhritarashtra and went to live the life of an ascetic along with his two wives Kunti and Madri. King Pandu was blessed with five sons – Yudhishthir, Bhim, Arjun, Nakul and Sahadev. Dhritarashtra was married to Gandhari who gave birth to many sons; the eldest was named Duryodhan.

Maharishi Dronacharya was appointed as the teacher for both Kuru and Pandu princes. For doing well in every competition, Pandava princes were generally appreciated which generated a lot of jealousy in the hearts of Kuru princes. For this very reason, Duryodhan attempted to kill Pandu princes through deceit but all such attempts remained unsuccessful. Since Yudhishthir was the eldest of Pandu and Kuru princes and was also very accomplished, talented and admired by the public, he was declared as the Crown Prince of Hastinapur.

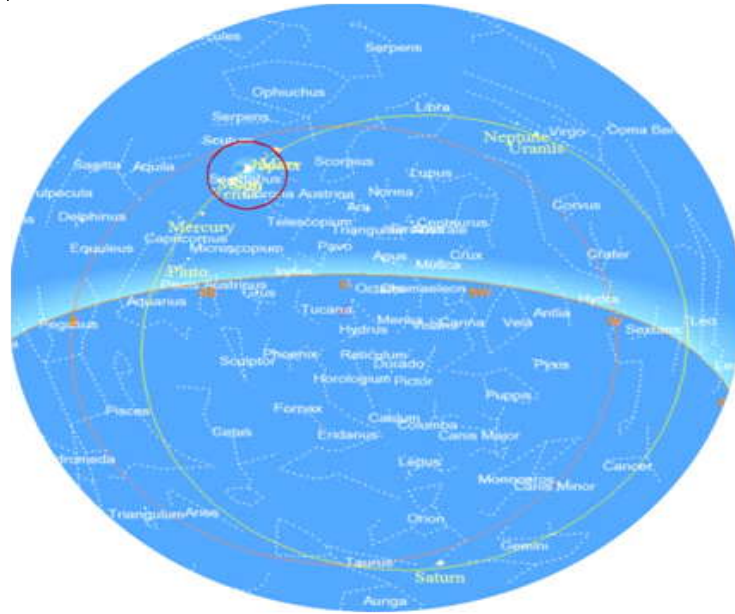
Out of jealousy and frustration, Duryodhan and his maternal uncle Shakuni hatched a conspiracy to send all Pandavas to Varanavat and then burn them alive in Lakshagrih i.e. a house built with highly inflammable material by Purochan. However, Pandavas saved their lives by escaping through a tunnel along with mother Kunti. They reached Ekchakra Nagri and started living with a Brahmin. After some years, Pandavas went to participate in the Swayamvara of Draupadi, the princess of Panchala. Her brother, Dhrishtadyumna had announced that anyone who shoots the target with the five arrows through the five holes of the Yantra over which the target was kept would have Draupadi as his wife. Arjun won the archery contest and won Draupadi as

his wife. On reaching Ekchakra Nagri, Arjun announced to his mother that he had won the “prize,” Kunti told him to share that prize with his brothers, without seeing Draupadi. Like an irrevocable vow, her statement, even by mistake, could not be undone, so all five brothers married Draupadi, the daughter of King Drupada.

Back in Hastinapur, Dhritarashtra had declared Duryodhana as the Crown Prince presuming that all Pandava brothers had died along with their mother Kunti in Varanavat Lakshagrih. After learning about Pandava’s victory during Draupadi Swayamvara, Dhritarashtra invited them to Hastinapur along with their mother Kunti and wife Draupadi. On being persuaded by Bhishma Pitamah and King Dhritarashtra, Duryodhan handed over the deserted region of Khandav Van as half the kingdom to Yudhishthira, who accepted the offer in the hope of averting a war. Thereafter, with the help of Vishvakarma and Maya Danav, the Pandavas built a great city named Indraprastha along with its grand palace.

Duryodhan could not digest this prosperity of Pandavas; he invited them to a game of dice with the intention of winning their kingdom through deceit. Yudhishthira lost everything, his wealth, his kingdom and even Draupadi in this game of dice. Duhsasan dragged Draupadi in to Kuru Darbar, Karna, still stinging from his rejection at the *swayamvara*, called her a harlot who serviced five men. Enraged at this treatment of his wife, Bhim vowed that he would one day drink Duhsasan’s blood and break Duryodhan’s thigh. The wicked Kauravas even tried to disrobe Draupadi in front of the entire Raj Darbar, but her honour was saved by Lord Krishna who miraculously created lengths of cloth to replace the ones being removed.

After having lost in the game of dice, the Pandavas were required to go into exile for 12 years, and live incognito in the 13th year; if discovered by the Kauravas, they would be sent into exile for another 12 years. As they were leaving Hastinapur, there were many ill omens and a solar eclipse was also seen as per references in Sarga 80 of Sabha Parva (2/80/29). This eclipse was seen on 20th Oct. 3153 BC (10:25 hrs) from Hastinapur (29° N, 77° E) –



The Pandavas first went to Kamyaka forest, where Lord Krishna, King Drupad, and Draupadi's brother Dhristadyumna expressed their outrage at the humiliation of Draupadi in Kuru Court and they all pledged revenge and reinstatement of Dharmaraja Yudhishtir on the throne. Thereafter, Pandavas moved into Dvyaitavana and built their hermitage, where Rishi Markandeya consoled them by narrating the story of *Ramayan*; comparing sufferings of Yudhishtir with that of Lord Ram, sacrifices of his four brothers with those of Lakshman and troubles of Draupadi with those of Sita. Draupadi and Bhim were sore and angry and made every effort to provoke Yudhishtir to take revenge from Kauravas but were unable to convince him.

Pandavas, thereafter, returned to Kamyaka forest. After a briefing from Sage Vyasa, Yudhishtir told Arjun "all four branches of weaponry have been mastered by Bhishma, Drona, Kripa, Karna and Ashvathama, who being on the side of Duryodhan have made him invincible. Therefore, only celestial weapons obtained from Indra can provide us victory." Great warrior Arjun quickly left with the resolve to secure

these weapons. He crossed the Himalayas, and thereafter he crossed Gandhamadan Parvat and obtained the divine weapons with the blessings of Lord Indra and Lord Shiva. Bright, brilliant and even more powerful Arjun came back and narrated the story of his adventures to Yudhishtira. They all moved back to Dvaitavan, where Duryodhan and Karna came to enjoy the sight of Pandavas living in miserable conditions. But instead, Karna was defeated by Gandharvas, who also captured Duryodhana. On being so ordered by Yudhishtira, Pandavas defeated Gandharvas and rescued Duryodhana. Duryodhan boiled with anger at this humiliation.

Thereafter, one day king Jayadratha, husband of Duryodhan's sister Dushala, came suddenly and forcibly abducted Draupadi in his chariot. Bhim and Arjun chased him, defeated him and rescued Draupadi. Back in the hermitage, Rishi Markandeya consoled Yudhishtir by narrating the story of abduction of Sitaji by Ravana; Lord Ram had killed Ravana and rescued Sitaji. Rishi Markandeya assured that troubles of Yudhishtir would also soon be over and he would rule as the king of Hastinapur.

During these twelve years of exile; there were many more adventures and many alliances were also made for a possible future battle. According to the conditions of the game of dice, the thirteenth year, which the Pandavas were to spend in disguise had now arrived. They went to the court of King Virata of Matsya Desh. Yudhishtir presented himself as a poor Brahmin, his brothers and Draupadi as wandering servants; they all found refuge at the court of King Virata. Towards the end of the 13th year of living incognito and presuming that Pandavas might be hiding in Viratanagar, Duryodhan launched an attack on Virata's kingdom. The king entrusted his troops to his young son who needed a chariot driver. Accepting Draupadi's suggestion, prince Uttara took Arjun as his charioteer; Arjun defeated Duryodhan's forces and repulsed the attack on Virat's kingdom.

After this Victory, the true identity of Pandavas got revealed. Consequently, King Virata offered his daughter Uttarâ's hand to Abhimanyu, son of Arjun through Subhadra, sister of Lord Krishna. The wedding was celebrated in style; the Kings from all over the Indian sub-continent assembled in Viratanagar to attend this marriage. Apprehending that Duryodhan would not give back their kingdom to Pandavas, this occasion was also used to build alliances for augmenting military power in case war became inevitable.

Duryodhan refused to give their kingdom back to them, claiming that Arjun was identified one day before the completion of 13th year but

neither Bhishma Pitamah nor Guru Drona agreed with him. Duryodhan even rejected Lord Krishna's proposal of giving them only five villages. The war thus became imminent and all efforts made to prevent the war had failed. There are several references to dhoomketus, ulkapats, eclipses which forebode widespread destruction. There is a reference to a very inauspicious lunar eclipse on Kartika Purnima followed by a solar eclipse on the 13th day in *Sarga* two and three of Bhishma Parva (6/2/23, 6/3/14-18). This lunar eclipse was seen from Hastinapur (29°N, 77° E) on 31st August 3139 BC (11:10 hrs) on the first Purnima of Kartika month –



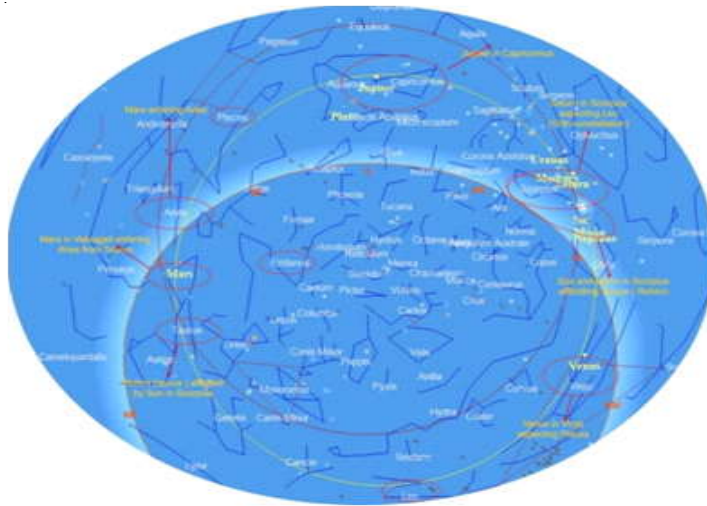
On 14th September 3139 BC, on Kartika Amavasya day a solar eclipse was also observed from Hastinapur. This was the 13th lunar *tithi* as there was *tithi kshaya* on 1-2 September and at the time of solar

- 6/3/14 – *Mangal* (Mars) is comfortable (i.e. magh) entering its own house i.e. *mesha* (Aries) in *Vakra-gati* (in backward motion) as it was in Taurus before 13th Sep 3139 BC. *Brihaspati* (*Jupiter*) is in *Shravan Nakshtra* (in Capricornus). Sun's offspring Shani (Saturn) is (in Scorpius) and is thus aspecting *Bhagham* i.e. *Uttar Phalguni* (in Leo) which is the 10th constellation from Scorpius and is therefore in full aspect of Saturn.

- 6/3/15 - Shining brilliantly, the planet Shukra (Venus) is aspecting Poorva Bhadrapada and thereafter Uttara Bhadrapada (both in Pisces). On 14th Sep 3139 BC, Venus is situated in *kanya* (Virgo) and is thus aspecting 7th constellation from its location i.e. *Meena Rashi* (Pisces).

- 6/3/17 - Both Sun and Moon are located in Scorpius, therefore they are afflicting *Rohini* (located just opposite in Taurus). *Parush Graha* i.e. *Shukra* (Venus) is located between *Chitra and Swati* Asterisms and is thus located between *Kanya* (Virgo Constellation) and Tula (Libra).

- 6/3/18 - Brihaspati i.e. Jupiter (Pavak Prabha) is going around *Shravana* in Brahmraashi i.e. *Makar Rashi* (Capricornus); whereas *Vakra/Lohitang* i.e. *Mangal* (Mars) in *Vakra-anuvakra gati* (backward-forward motion) is looking stable/static.

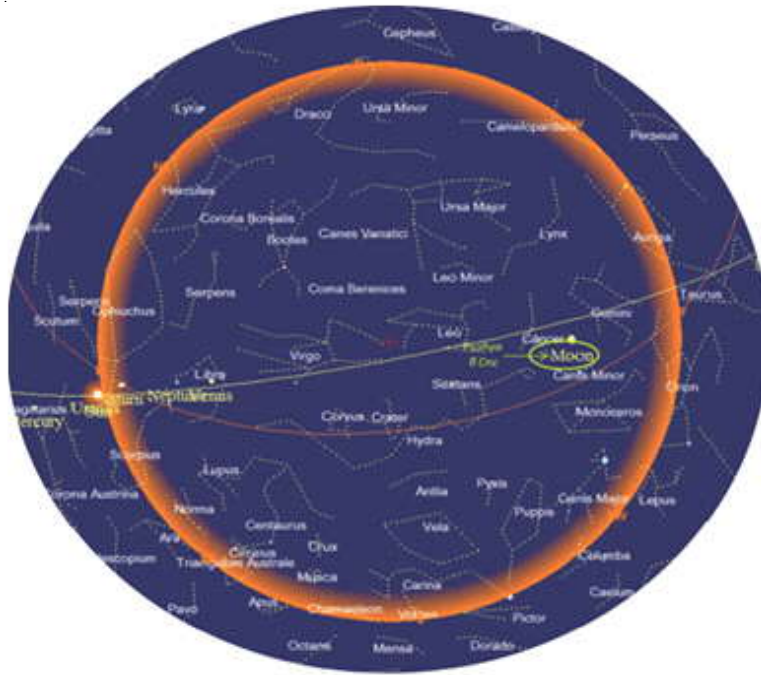


This sky-view is exclusive and it does not get repeated in/around 3067 BC, in 1792 BC or in 1478 BC; for this reason the date of the war in 3139 BC appears to be almost indisputable. There is lunar eclipse on first Kartik Purnima on 31 Aug 3139 BC followed by a solar eclipse on 14th Sep 3139 BC, which had occurred on the 13th lunar *tithi* after the lunar eclipse; all the above stated planetary positions could be observed six hours before the solar eclipse.

Eleven *Akshauhini Sena* of Duryodhan and *Seven Akshauhini Sena* of Yudhisthira had by now assembled in Kurukshetra. Duryodhan wanted to start the war in Pushya Nakshtra i.e. 3rd October, 3139 BC However, in the meantime, in the month of Kartika, after the end of the autumn season (Patjharh) and beginning of the winter season (*Hemant Ritu*), Shri Krishana left Dwarka for Hastinapur on his last peace mission in Rewati Nakshtra (5/83/6-7). See the sky-view on 25th September 3139 B.Cat 6:20 AM from Dwarika (23°N, 69°E), in the month of Kartik –

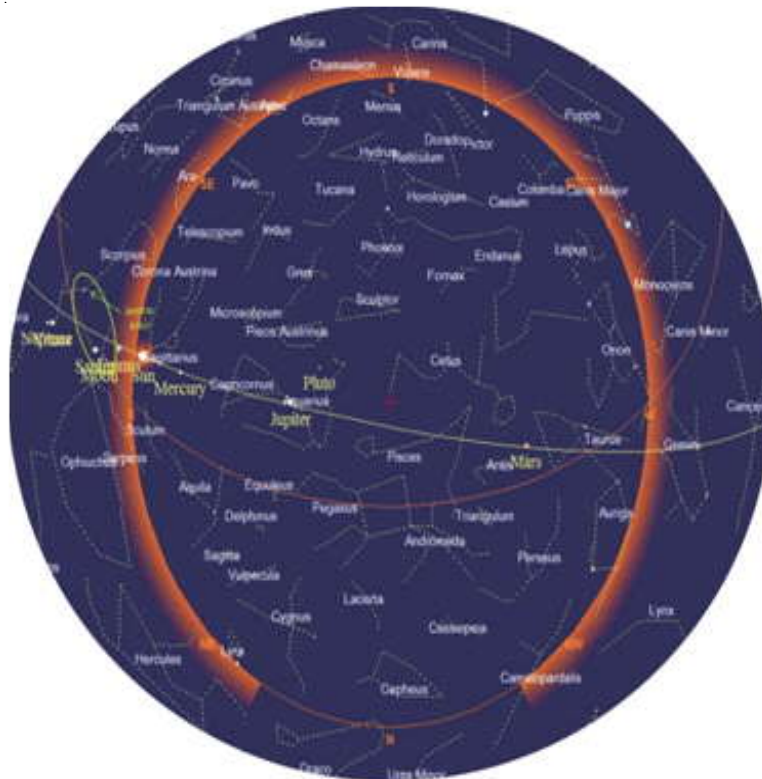


After reaching Hastinapur, Lord Krishna tried to persuade Duryodhan to make peace with Pandavas but Duryodhan said: “I can sacrifice my life, my kingdom, my everything, but I can never live in peace with the Pandavas.” Consequently, the peace mission failed and the war was just going to begin. Not wanting to take sides, Balram left for 42 days of pilgrimage in *Pushya Nakshtra (Moon in Cancer)* i.e. on 3rd Oct. 3139 BC and was to come back after 42 days in *Shrawan nakshatra (5/142/17-18 & 9/34/5-6)*. See the sky-view of 3rd October, 3139 BC from Hastinapur (29° N, 77° E), when Moon was in Pushya nakshatra –



The forces of Duryodhan and of Yudhishthir stood opposite to each other in Kurukshetra; ready to fight the most devastating war in the history of mankind! As suggested by Lord Krishna, the war actually started on Jyeshtha *Amavasaya* day of Margshish month, when Moon

was near Jyeshtha in Scorpius (5/142/17-18), which happened to be on 13th October, 3139 B.C. See the sky-view of this historic day!



Eleven divisions of Duryodhan's army and seven divisions of Yudhisthir's army stood face to face in the battle ground of Kurukshetra. Arjun requested Lord Krishna to take his chariot in the middle of Kuru and Pandu armies. After seeing his near and dear ones, like Bishama Pitamah and Guru Drona, Arjun broke down and abandoned his *Gandiv Dhanush* (Bow). At this juncture, through Arjun, Lord Krishna passed on to the World the great philosophy of *Bhagavad Gita*. He asked Arjun to do his *Karma* by fighting the war in order to protect *Dharma*. He also added that the soul is eternal and indestructible, only the body is perishable.

The time of this *Gita-updesh* must have been sometime before the beginning of war on 13th October 3139 BC. It was the month of Margshish in winter season when the Sun was in Dakshiyān. We Indians still wait for the assurance given by Shri Krishna during Gitopdesh –

yadā yadā hi dharmasya glānirbhavati bhārata |
abhyutthānamadharmasya tadātmānaṃ sṛjāmyaham || (4.07)

Meaning – Whenever and wherever there is a decline of *Dharma* i.e. virtue and true religion languishes whereas irreligion and sin predominates, O descendant of Bharat, I manifest myself in different eras to establish the superiority of *Dharma* by annihilating the miscreants and protecting the pious and the noble.

We still console ourselves at the death of a near and dear one by remembering what Lord Krishna had said –

nainaṃ chindanti śastrā Gi nainaṃ dahati pāvakaḥ |
na cainaṃ kledayantyāpo na śomayati mārutaḥ || (2.23)

Meaning – The soul can never be cut into pieces by any weapon, nor can it be burnt by fire. The soul cannot be moistened/submerged by water, nor it can be withered by wind. The soul is eternal and indestructible.

karmanya evadhikaras te ma phalesu kadacana |
ma karma-phala-hetur bhur mā te sango ‘stv akarmani ||2-47||

Meaning – Your concern is only with the actions, never with their fruits. Let not the fruits of actions be your motive. Perform your righteous duties without being attached to their results.

Our belief system still centres around *karma yoga, jnana yoga and bhakti yoga*, the three paths out of which individuals could make a choice.

The war began on 13th October, 3139 BC, with Bhishma Pitamah as the Commandar-in-Chief of Duryodhan’s army. Military science was much developed; a four division army comprising infantry, horse riders, elephant riders and rathis were built in nine steps. The weapons used included astras (missiles like chakras and arrows), sastras (swords, spears and axes), dandayuddha (mace and musala) and yantrayuddha (firearms like sataghni and bhusundi). Some such weapons, which are considered to be more than 5000 years old, have been found during excavations in the relevant geographic locations. Every day there used to be different kind of battle-array. At least eighteen types of *vyuharachnas* (trap formations) are described in the Epic.

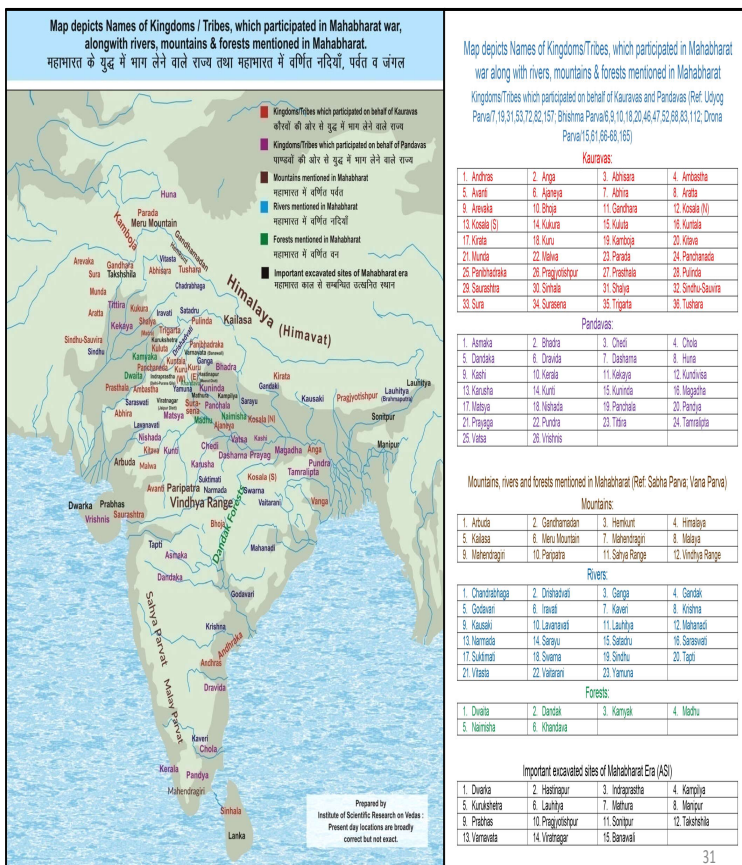
Under the command of Bhishma Pitamah, Kuru army fought fierce battles and killed very large number of warriors of Pandava's side during the first nine days. The Pandavas visited Bhishma Pitamah by night on the ninth day and sought his blessings. He advised them to place Shikhandi in the front line as Bhishma would not attack a woman. On the 10th day, placing Shikhandi in front of him, Arjun succeeded in showering thousands of arrows on Bhishma Pitamah, which practically put him on the bed of arrows. Bhishma Pitamah was now waiting for the beginning of Utrayan for his *mahaprayan* (Journly of Death).

On the 11th day of the war, Guru Drona took over as the Commander-in-Chief of Duryodhan's forces. Through his clever *chakravyuh formation* (circular trap formations) he succeeded in killing Abhimanyu when Jaidrath engaged Arjun in a diversionary battle far away. However, on the 15th day Dhrishtadyumna succeeded in killing Dronacharya by severing his head. On the 16th day, Karna took over as the Commander-in-Chief of Duryodhan's forces but on the 17th day of war, the wheel of Karna's chariot got stuck in the mud. Just at that time Arjun shot an arrow which instantly killed Karna in the battlefield.

On the 18th day, Shalya came to fight as the Commander-in-Chief of Duryodhan's Kuru forces but got killed at the hands of Yudhisthir by mid-day. Thus on the 18th day, the war came to an end but Duryodhan hid himself in the waters of Dvaipayana Lake; he was making plans to take revenge from Pandavas after his recovery. The Pandavas launched the search operation; after several attempts, they finally succeeded in locating him on the 14th day. On being challenged by Pandavas, Duryodhan came out of the lake to fight mace battle with Bhim. Just at that time Balram came there in Shrawan Nakshatra after 42 days of pilgrimage and he desired to see the mace battle between his two disciples (Shalya Parva 9/34/5-7). See the sky-view from Kurukshetra (30° N 77° E) of 14th November, 3139 BC, when Moon was near Shrawan in Capricornus.

On being hit by Bhim on his thighs, Duryodhan collapsed and Pandavas went away leaving him behind in pain. Kritverma, Kripacharya and Ashvatthama were grief-stricken looking at the plight of Duryodhan. They decided to take revenge from Pandavas. In the middle of night, when the entire Pandava sena and all the five sons of Draupadi were in deep slumber, they killed Dhrishtadyumna and five sons of Draupadi by striking them with their shastras. Thereafter, they killed all other remaining warriors by putting the camp on fire. Ashvatthama even tried to destroy the womb of Uttara but Lord Krishana saved her pregnancy. This child in Uttara's womb, named Parikshit, later on became the king of Hastinapur, when Pandavas went for *Swargarohan*.

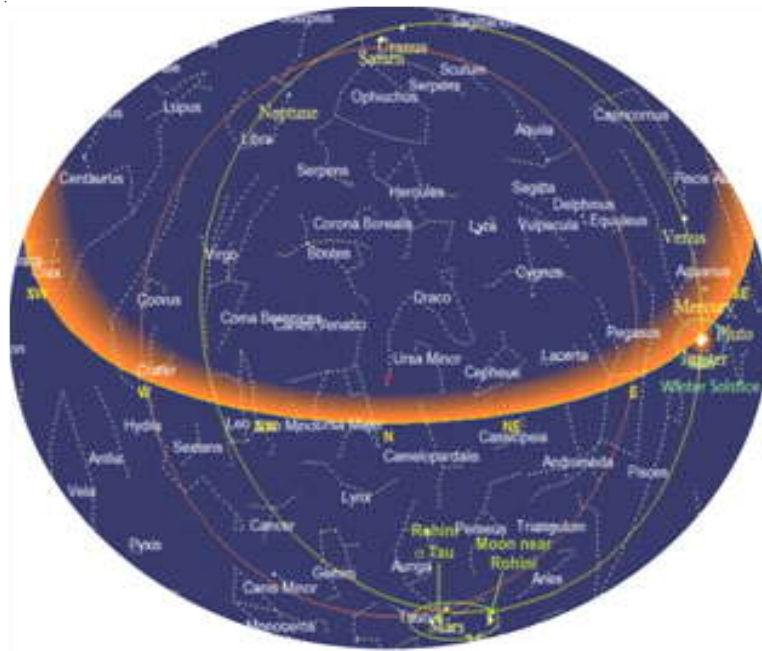
Map depicting kingdoms which participated in Mahabharat War



After the end of Mahabharat War, Yudhishtir was coronated as the king of Hastinapur. Grief-stricken, he was very reluctant to accept the kingship. He performed the funeral rites of the deceased kings and warriors and took several steps to console the grieving females.

Lying on his bed of arrows, Bhishma Pitamah was waiting for the Sun to begin its Northward journey (Uttarayan). That day arrived on 19th December 3139 BC, when it was Saptmi of the lighted fortnight in the month of Magha and Moon was in Rohini Nakshtra (in Taurus), as per the references in Anushasana Parva (13/167/26-28) and in Shanti parva (12/47/3) of Mahabharat. See the sky-view from Hastinapur (29°

N, 77° E) of 19th December, 3139 BC at 7.20 AM, when Sun had just started its northwards journey; Moon was near Rohini and it was Magh Shukla Saptami. This is also a unique date and sky-view which does not get repeated in/around 3067 BC, 1792 BC or 1478 BC.



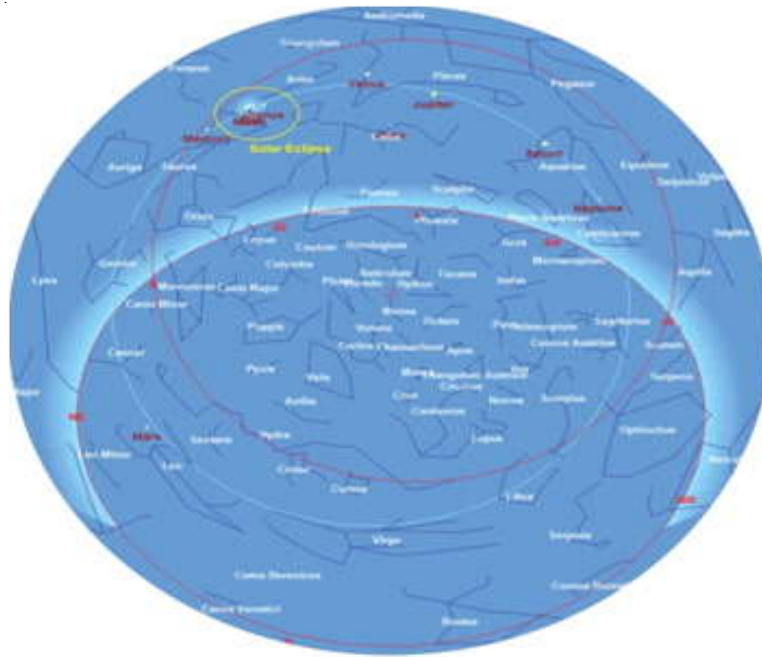
19 December, 3139 BC, 7:20 hrs., Hastinapur, 29°N, 77°E; Winter Solstic

King Yudhishtir arrived on Magh Shukla Saptami and bowed before Bhishma Pitamah who enlightened him about the basic principles of Rajdharma, Mokshdharma, Daandharma and Shantidharma. Thereafter, every surviving member of the family met Pitamah. The very next day i.e. on 20th December 3139 BC, Bhishma left for his heavenly abode and this day is celebrated as Bhishma Asthmi till date.

Thereafter, Yudhishtir got fully involved in the welfare of the *Praja*. After some time he conducted *Ashvamedha Yagya* and gave huge amount of wealth in charity. Lord Krishna had also got fed up with wars and battles, therefore, was in search of peace. So he went

and settled in Dwarika along with Yadavas, Gopis and war-widows.

Thirty-six years were spent in peace but thereafter the signs of destruction all around again became visible. Around that time, a solar eclipse was seen from Dwarika which also occurred on an *Amavasya* on the 13th lunar tithi after Purnima as per references in the Mausala Parva. See the solar eclipse of 3rd March 3102 BC (at 10:30 AM) from Dwarika (23° N, 69° E), which could be seen right from the time of Sunrise to Sunset.



Solar eclipse March 3, 3102 BC, 10:30 hrs., Dwarka <22°N, 69°E>

Thereafter, there was destruction all around in Dwarika. Yaduvanshis were killing other Yaduvanshis. Balram had died by drowning in the sea, Vasudev also left for his heavenly abode; Yadav race was at the verge of extinction. After some time, the entire city of Dwarika was devoured by the Sea. On receipt of a message from Lord Krishna, Arjun had left for Dwarika. However, in the meantime a poisoned arrow mistakenly shot by

a hunter pierced the heel of Lord Krishna, who thereafter left for celestial region.

Arjun performed the last rites of many kinsmen and took the survivors along with him. He made Vajra the king of Indraprastha and settled other survivors in smaller kingdoms. After hearing about the destruction in Dwarika and about Mahapryan of Lord Krishna, Yudhishthir decided to renounce the world. He coronated Parikshit, son of Uttara and Abhimanyu, as the king of Hastinapur. After donating huge amount of wealth in charity, he left for Swargarohan heavenly journey accompanied by his four brothers and Draupadi.

Around this time a spectacular assemblage of Moon and five bright planets along with the Sun was seen on the eastern horizon in Aries and Pisces on 22nd January, 3101 BC. This striking sight at dawn must have come down as a legend associated with the beginning of Kali Era i.e. Kaliyug –



Let us have one look again at the map of *Bharatvarsha* of Mahabharat times, given on page 97. *Bharatvarsha* was a nation with defined boundaries 5000 years back, when its territories included the modern day India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Turkamenistan, Tibet, Bangladesh etc. Excavations have been carried out in many of the principalities and kingdoms plotted in this map, which had participated in the Great War. From the archaeological evidence from these sites, it has been concluded on the basis of C-14 dating that these political principalities and kingdoms were well established by the second millennium BCE, though the settlements started at many of these sites much earlier; for example:

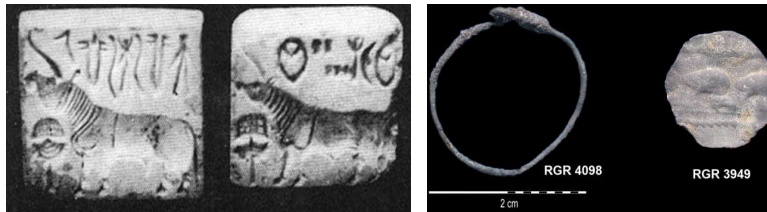
- I. Sarai Khola and Pushkalavati (Charsadda) in **Gandhara**
- II. BMAC and Gandhara Grave Culture sites in **Kamboja**
- III. Bairat, Gilund and Ojiana in **Matsya**
- IV. Mathura, Sonkh and Noh in **Surasena**
- V. Hastinapura, Hulas and Alamgirpur in **Kuru**
- VI. Ahichchhatra, Atranjikhera, Kannoj and Kampilya in **Panchala**
- VII. Ujjain, Kayatha, Nagda, Ahar in **Avanti**
- VIII. Eran and Tripuri in **Chedi**
- IX. Kaushambi and Jhusi in **Vatsa**
- X. Rajghat-Sarai Mohana in **Kasi**
- XI. Ayodhya, Sravasti, Lahuradewa, Siswania in **Kosala**
- XII. Rajdhani, Narhan, Sohgaora in **Malla**
- XIII. Rajgir, Chirand and Juafardih (Nalanda) in **Magadha**
- XIV. Vaisali and Lauriya Nandangarh in **Vriji**
- XV. Champa and Oriup in **Anga**
- XVI. Adam and Inamgaon in **Asmaka**

Kingdom of Kurus i.e. Hastinapur was near upper Ganga plains, Krishna's Mathura was on the banks of Yamuna and the war was fought in Kurukshetra of Sarasvati region. The excavations carried out in these areas have also established the direct connection of Mahabharat references with 3000 BC. These include excavations at Rakhigarhi, Bhirrana and Kunal in the Sarasvati valley and Lahuradeva and Jhussi etc. in Ganga region, from where terracotta, beads, jewellery, metals, weapons etc. have been excavated, the radio-metric dates of which go back to the time bracket ranging between 5000 - 2500 BC.

See pottery, mirror, necklace, silver and beads excavated from Rakhigarhi in Saravati and Drishadvati belt near Hissar of modern day Haryana.



Early *Harappan* pottery, copper mirror, beads' necklaces, seals and silver ornaments excavated from Rakhigarhi, 5000 - 2500 BC



See the arrow heads, lapis lazuli, bangles and beads etc. excavated from Bhirrana in the area adjacent to Rakhgarhi.



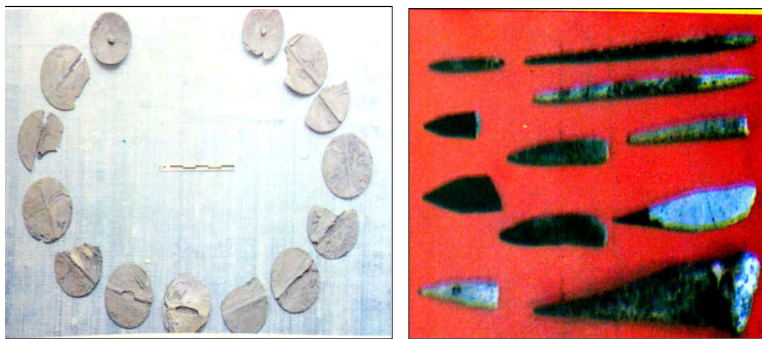
Copper Bangles, beads, Lapis Lazuli and Shell necklaces, copper arrowheads, Chert blades and Core from Bhirrana, 7000 - 2500 BC



In fact the entire region, at multiple sites, has yielded similar kind of artefacts, which are dated more than 5000 years old. Have a look at those excavated from Kunal, near Kurukshetra.



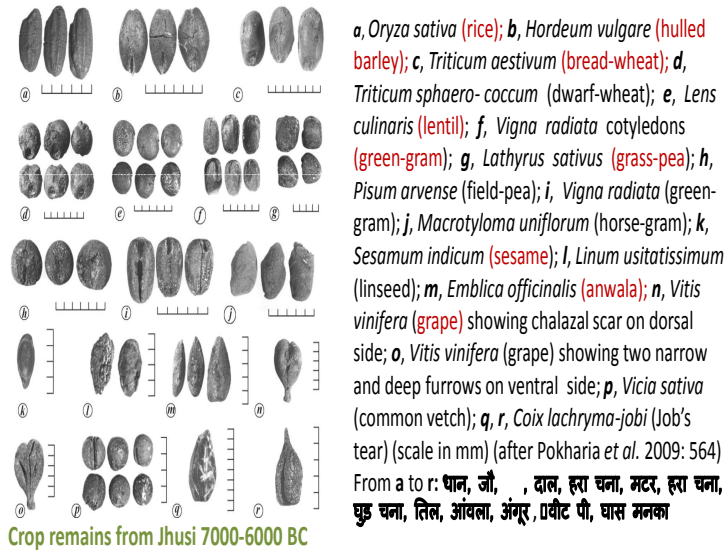
Terracotta pottery painted with two colours, Silver spiralled bangles , Painted terracotta pitcher, Silver necklace and Copper arrowheads from Kunal, Haryana, 5000 - 2500 BC



In middle Ganga Plains, the most important excavated sites include Koldihwa, Lahuradeva, Jhusi, Tokwa and Hetapatti etc., which have revealed an uninterrupted history of cultural development in this region from 7000 BC till date. More than 5000 year old plants have been found in these areas, many of which find reference in *Mahabharat*.

Crops in Middle Ganga Plain / मध्य गंगा मैदान का फसला

Koldihwa (6500 BC) कोपाइहवा	Lahuradeva (7000 BC)	Lahuradeva (5000-3000 BC)	Jhusi (7000-6000 BC) झुसी
<i>Oryza sativa</i> (Cultivated rice) कृष-धान	<i>Oryza rufipogon</i> (Wild rice) and <i>Oryza sativa</i> (Cultivated rice)	<i>Oryza sativa</i> (rice); <i>Triticum aestivum</i> (bread-wheat); <i>Triticum sphaero-coccum</i> (dwarf-wheat); <i>Hordeum vulgare</i> (hulled barley); Lentil (<i>Lens culinaris</i>); Nuts of mugawort	<i>Oryza sativa</i> (rice) <i>Hordeum vulgare</i> (hulled barley); <i>Triticum aestivum</i> (bread-wheat); <i>Triticum sphaero-coccum</i> (dwarf-wheat)



In view of the above said scientific evidences, we can safely conclude that *Mahabharat* refers to the historical events of the remote past. The *Mahabharat* war was actually fought about 5150 years back in 3139 BC. Just before that war, Shri Krishna had actually passed on to the world, through the instrumentality of Arjun, that *adbhut jnana* of *Bhagavadgita*.

Keeping in mind the discriminations and distortions prevailing in India during modern times, let us remember and follow what Lord Krishna said in 4/13 of *Bhagavadgita* –

cāturvarṇyaṃ mayā sṛṣṭam guṇakarmavibhāga! |
tasya kartāramapi māṃ viddhyakartāramavyayam || (4.13)

Lord Krishna said that four *varnas* had been created by God Almighty, based on the *guna* i.e. qualities and *karma* i.e. actions/functions of individuals. Thus, the four *varnas* had nothing to do with the birth or with the modern day caste system. Dronacharya was a Brahmin but fought like a kshtriya; Karna was discriminated against by Bhishma but befriended by Kuru king Duryodhan. Eklavya was discriminated against by Drona but was mentored by Jarasandha. Sudama was a Brahmin but was very poor, whereas Drona was a Brahmin but humiliated by King Drupada. Thus, discrimination was not caste-based but more complex, which reflected the selfish motives and baser or nobler instincts of individuals.

However, over the years these four *varnas* got linked to birth and gave rise to caste-system. Slowly social evils like untouchability, inequality, caste-based discrimination started taking deep roots, which have played havoc with our country and its social fabric. To remove these vices, we shall have to revert to the true teachings contained in our ancient Vedas and Epics. We shall have to cleanse these from the distortions, which were interpolated subsequently after India was enslaved by external forces. Let us all resolve to build India in which no one is discriminated against and all are treated with love and respect.

In the words of Dr. A. P. J. Abdul Kalam, “In India the core culture goes beyond time. It precedes the arrival of Islam; it precedes the arrival of Christianity.....It is when we accept India in all its splendid glory that, with a shared past as a base, we can look forward to a shared future of peace and prosperity, of creation and abundance. Our past is there with us forever. It has to be nurtured in good faith, not destroyed in exercises of political one-upmanship.”

Bibliography/Gratitude

For writing this Paper, I have benefitted from the books & articles of

The following Authors:

A K Gupta	J F Jarrige	R Saraswat
A K Pokharia	J R Sharma	Rajgopalachari C.
A R Chaudhry	John Marshall	Rakesh Tewari
A P J Abdul Kalam	K D Abhyankar	Ramtej Pandey
Ajay Mitra Shastri	K L Joshi	Sadguru Jaggi vasdev Ji
Ashok Bhatnagar	K L Seshagiri Rao	Swami Ramsukh Das

Ayengar R N	K N Dikshit	S Kalyanaraman
Banmali O N	K S Sarswat	S N Chaturvedi
B K Bhadra	K S Valdiya	S P Gupta
B Narhari Achar	K V R S Murty	S R Rao
B P Radhakrishna	K V Krishna Murthy	S Sorensen
B R Mani	Kamlesh Kapur	S Sukthankar
Barthwal H	Kapil Kapur	Sriram Sharma
Bhagvadatta Satyashrva	Kenneth Kennedy	Sri Sri Ravi Shankar Ji
Bhagwan Singh	Kulbhushan Misra	Subhash Kak
C M Nautiyal	M G Yadav	Subramanian Swamy
Cavalli-Sforza	Maitreyee Deshpande	V D Misra
Chanchala Srivastava	Manjil Hazarika	V H Sonawane
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Gurcharan Das	Pushkar Bhatnagar	Yogesh Chandra
Gyaneshwar Chaubey	R Nigam	Yuktanand Swami
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Ishwar Chandra Sharma	R S Bisht	Many more

Pakistan and Cross-Border Terrorism**

Bimal Pramanik*

Jayanta Kumar Ray, National Research Professor of India, presents socio-political and religious images of international terrorism before the readers in his new book – *Cross-Border Terrorism: Focus on Pakistan*. He has shown how various rogue elements, like state and non-state terrorist actors, work independently or together to spread the web of terrorism around the world.

Except for introduction and concluding observations, the book is divided into four main chapters. The preface and introduction of the book are extremely interesting because they contain some very thought provoking elements. In the preface, Prof. Ray narrates and analyzes the observations of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, a leading secular figure, freedom fighter, and the former Education Minister of India, towards the future of Pakistan and the Arab World. The author proves that Azad was more than perfect about his perception of Islam as he rightly predicted about the potential socio-political turmoil in Pakistan, broadly South Asia, and the Arab world. Rise of the Islamic State (IS) and the expansion of terrorism are the best indicators of the praiseworthy farsightedness of Azad because it clearly captures the present day global problem – international terrorism.

In the introduction, the author discusses about the rise and growth of Islamic terrorism in the Middle East, mainly Saudi Arabia, and South Asia, mainly Pakistan. In that context, Ray also explains how Pakistani extremists enjoyed financial grants from Saudi Arabia. Ray

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** Author: Jayanta Kumar Ray, New Delhi, Sipra, 2016, xviii + 294 + index pp., \$49.75 (hardback), ISBN 9788175418424

nicely captures the origin of jihadi culture in Pakistan and describes how Pakistan turned into a sanctuary of terrorism. Although the author states that 'Islamic Terrorism' would have been the proper title for this book, his liberal outlook, which he receives from the culture of India and Hinduism, restrained him from using the title 'Islamic Terrorism.' Strikingly, hard facts of his subsequent chapters demonstrate that the title 'Islamic Terrorism' for this book would have been more appropriate because the history of Islam is based on torture over the non-Muslims.

In the second chapter, Ray analyses the process of rise of Taliban in Afghanistan and Talibanization of Pakistan. This chapter shows, although terrorism was becoming a global phenomenon, the United States was careless about the likely consequences of Islamic terrorism until it experienced the horrible event of 9/11. A series of terrorist attacks took place on the U.S. embassies in the various corners of the world, which were powerful indicators of the growing strength of the emerging terrorist organizations, and revealed the vulnerability of the United States that broadened the path of 9/11. Nevertheless, America is no less responsible for 9/11 as it failed to meet the minimum security arrangements for any potential terrorist attack. Ray's brilliant analysis captures the dilemma of American decision making process. Analyzing the 9/11 Commission Report, he shows that almost in every month, intelligence reports warned about the possible terror attack on the U.S.; even a report on Al Qaeda in June 2001 warned that the looming attack could be "very, very, very, very" devastating" (pp.58-59). Nevertheless, America astonishingly failed to stop the catastrophe of 9/11.

Chapter three of the book deals with the turbulent phase between 9/11 and the killing of Osama Bin Laden (OBL) on 1-2 May 2011. 'War on Terror' followed by 9/11 changed America-Pakistan relations in a great way. Despite its unwillingness and facing severe domestic protests, Pakistan was constrained to join the American camp in War on Terror because of its own compulsions. Perhaps, the harshest statement of Richard Armitage, the Deputy Secretary of States, that if Pakistan stands for the terrorists, it "should be prepared to be bombed back to the Stone Age" forced Pakistan to join the U.S. side. Ray criticizes America's faith in Pakistan in the mission of terror hunt as Pakistan contributed nearly nothing in this mission. Subsequently, on 26 November 2008, India experienced the horrible incident of 26/11 Mumbai terror attack, which substantially undermined India-Pakistan relations. The tension between India and Pakistan reached its zenith after 26/11. However, Pakistan did not change its mindset and remained

the chief patron of Islamic terrorism. Interestingly, the killing of Bin Laden by the U.S. Navy Seals in Abbottabad on 1-2 May 2011 proves that India's claim - Pakistan is a terrorist state – is correct. Thus, the double standard of Pakistan was unmasked to the international community through the Abbottabad incident.

In chapter four, Ray discusses the period between the Abbottabad incident and the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan in 2014. The author rightly pointed out that Pakistan was well aware about the presence of Laden in Abbottabad, and without the assistance provided by Pakistan, Laden could not have stayed in Pakistan for a long time. Followed by the killing of Laden, U.S.A. decided to withdraw its troops from Afghanistan in 2014. Perhaps, U.S. had no other option but to withdraw because it could no more rely on Pakistan in counter-terrorism activities. According to Ray, “since 2005, three successive heads of the ISI – Ashfaq Parvez Kayani, Nadim Taj and Shuja Pasha – extended protection to OBL in Abbottabad where even a command and control centre for terrorists operated regularly under OBL's superintendence” (p.142). The statement proves how compassionate is Pakistan towards global terrorism. Considering Pakistan's heartfelt affinity to the terrorists, Ray rightly suggests an impossible remedy of better Indo-Pak relations that peace can be established between India and Pakistan only if Pakistan restrains itself from supporting terrorism. Nevertheless, the author expresses his aspiration for better Indo-Pak relations under the Modi rule in India.

Chapter five focuses on the writings of renowned Islamic scholars, like M.A. Khan, Ali Sina and Anwar Shaikh, who express their critical views towards Islam and its prophet, which tell us that from the very beginning, Islam was intolerant towards other religions. They also condemned Islam and Muhammad for endorsing genocide, rape, plunder, and destroying several Jewish tribes. Writings of these Islamic scholars help us to understand the natural connection between Islam and its extreme hatred to all other religions, which strengthen the argument that the title of the book could surely be 'Islamic Terrorism,' and no matter whether a majority of Muslims endorse terrorism or not.

In the final chapter, the author covers a bigger canvas of international terrorism drawn from Nigeria to Libya. He observes that the most striking similarity of the worldwide terrorist organizations is that all of them want to establish global Muslim dominance. The foresight of the author is praiseworthy, as he rightly predicts that Central Africa can be a fertile breeding ground for the next generation terrorist

organizations, because the lack of governance has now turned there into reality. Thus, he warns that malgovernance can be a dangerous cause of expansion of terrorism. He also analyzes how grim terrorist activities of IS are spreading worldwide and posing challenges to the United States-led anti-IS coalition. Ray nicely explains that there are several Pakistans inside the Pakistan state, and Pakistani people are no more benefited from this multiple Pakistan, but are seriously injured. Moreover, he explains how Pakistan-sponsored terrorism is damaging India's security. The author advocates a more active role of India in combating terrorism in South Asia. Furthermore, he observes that the collaboration between India and China is needed for counter-terrorism. Again, Ray's foresight deserves praise because the present tug of war between India and China regarding the ban on Maulana Masood Azhar, supremo of Jaish E Mohammad (JeM) and an international terrorist, proves that Indo-China cooperation is indeed very crucial to stop terrorism—at least in South Asia. He suggests that through the promotion of liberal ideas in the Muslim world, peace and order can be maintained worldwide.

The book—*Cross-Border Terrorism: Focus on Pakistan*—came timely when the entire world is worried about Islamic terrorism. Prof. Ray has gone through extensive primary and secondary sources, from reports in newspapers to the 9/11 Commission Report. He has addressed an important issue with expertise and clarity.

Garo *Songsarik* Religion: Belief in Immortality of Soul and Reincarnation

Rajesh M. Marak*

1. Introduction

Religion is constituted by a fundamental set of beliefs, values and ritual practices generally agreed upon by a group of people. These set of beliefs concern the cause, nature and purpose of the universe, and involve devotional and ritual observances. It also often contains a moral code governing the conduct of daily human affairs. Most of the religions have a strong view point and ultimate concern regarding life and death. Nearly all the religions dwell on belief in after life, reincarnation, heaven, hell and soul. So religion is a major part of life, death and salvation/liberation.

Historically, every ethnic group had its own beliefs and culture, comprising its religion. Similarly, Garo tribal people in Meghalaya have their own religion called *Songsarik*, from the time immemorial. Their first High Priest, called *Songsarik*,¹ used to perform oblations, exhort *NuruMandeDema Resu*, the descendants of Garo, to unfailingly have faith in God, love one another, co-exist harmoniously and lead righteous lives. *Songsarik* is the law giver and diviner who made revelation of God's messages to mankind. Hence, Garo religion derived its name *Songsarik* from their first High Priest. Their religious belief consists of forms of conduct, many of which have a ritualistic origin, which play a great part in their daily spheres of activities. These are associated with their festivals, rites of the passage; birth, marriage, death etc. In retrospect, like any other religions, the origin and evolution

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of *Songsarik* in the broader perspective of beliefs and rituals focused around postulated supernatural beings and forces, and also religious thinking as a non-adaptive cognitive byproduct, as argued by some theorists like Lee Kirkpatrick (2005). Some religions claim to be universal, believing their laws and cosmology to be binding for everyone, whereas some others are intended to be practiced only by a closely defined or localized group. In many other instances, religion has been associated with public institutions, such as education, hospitals, family, government, and political hierarchies. Religion obliges respect for what is believed to be sacred, reverence for the God, and obligations of man.

Religion is considered as one of the earliest social institutions of mankind and is found in all the societies of the past and the present. But the concept of religion differs from society to society and from individual to individual. But in *Songsarik* context, religion means *dakbewalandniam*, the natural way of life or conduct and law as well, relating to their most prominent agricultural activities. *Dakgipa Rugipa*, *Nokgipa Biambi*, the Supreme Lord, is imagined to be always associated with their daily life. His presence is believed to be felt both in living and non-living things in different forms and shapes through respective lesser spirits, for instance, *Misi Saljong*, who is worshipped as a provider and supplier of mankind, and *Goera*, the god of thunder and lightning. *Songsariks* believe in the existence of multitude of malevolent lesser spirits. For namely, *Saljong*, *Nostu – Nopantu*, *Goera*, *Kalkame*, *Nawang*,² etc. and benevolent spirits, namely, *Asima-Dingsima*, *Susime*, *Tongrengma*,³ etc. The survival and protection of life and properties completely depend on the grace of *Dakgipa Rugipa*, *Nokgipa Biambi*. That is the reason why truthfulness and honesty is the first priority for *Songsarik*. The notion of life of Garo people reflects more on socio-religious life.

2. Immortality of Soul and Reincarnation

Belief and practices of *Songsarik* religion, and life after death is very strong and people of this faith wish every departed soul be reborn or reincarnated in the same motherhood⁴ and same village. A belief in life after death and transmigration of soul is incorporated into the myths and funeral practices of Garos. The deceased is believed to move to *Balpakram*, the land of the spirits, in the company of other departed spirits and come back again in the form of reincarnation. The eastern religions such as Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism advocate

reincarnation as a part of next life; they have a common belief on immortality of soul and rebirth after death inspite of their differences in some aspects. Islam and Christianity, the two most dominant religions in the world; deny reincarnation but accept Salvation as a reward for the righteous in the heaven and punishment in hell for the wicked. The belief on the subject of death and the life hereafter is the key to *Songsarik* religion. The principle of reincarnation is a cornerstone of *Songsarik* people.

Bertrand Russell argued that mysticism expresses an emotion, not a fact; it does not assert anything, and therefore can neither be confirmed nor contradicted by Science, as at mystics are unable to separate emotional from scientific validity. He further observed: “as men grow more reflective there is a tendency to lay less stress on rules and more on the state of mind; this comes from two sources – philosophy and mystical religion; we are all familiar with passages in the prophets and gospels, in which the purity of heart is set above meticulous observance of law. Human beings are, by nature, uncomfortable, or rather terrified to live in the missing gap between mysticism and conscience. The *Songsarik* religion too is relatively not different from its counterparts in many aspects. The concept of rebirth cannot be so easily brushed aside, since the belief is so deeply ingrained in the minds of the people for generations. It is the belief that one has lived before and will live again in another body after death because souls are considered as immortal.⁵ The body perishes, but the soul does not. Faithful’s of the *Songsarik* believe in the existence of infinite numbers of souls, like in Jainism.

3. Soul and Consciousness

Soul is a conscious substance. Consciousness is the essence of the soul.⁶ Consciousness is of the soul and not of the body. Consciousness has been assumed as a sign of the existence of the soul. Man is a soul wearing physical body.

4. Reincarnation and Reward

Reincarnation is the religious concept that the soul or the spirit, after biological death, can begin a new life in a new body. In religious context, reincarnation took place either as a human or as an animal depending on the moral conduct in the previous life’s actions. For this reason, reincarnation is considered as reward as well as punishment⁷ in

the concept of *Songsarik* religion. According to oral tradition, it is believed that the soul of the person who commits suicide by hanging will be reincarnated in the form of a beetle.⁸ The death caused by an elephant or a tiger will reincarnate in the form of the animal which caused the death. *Songsarik* people are fond of pointing out that the notion of being reborn as an animal should give us more insight into our cruel treatment of animals. The oral tradition also states that human being learns knowledge and skills from the nature,⁹ so killing wild animals and cruelty to them are discouraged; they affirm that all the souls, either of animals or human beings, are gifted by Almighty God. Therefore, the soul of a murderer is condemned to reside at *Balpakram*, the land of the spirits, for seven generations before returning to human form. If a man commits immoral actions, he may be reborn as an animal or insect as a punishment. In neither of the above cases, the spirit will be reborn again in human form which is regarded as the highest good and usual end of rituals.¹⁰ The greatest blessing, that a *Songsarik* person is looking forward to is reborn as a human being in his original *manok*, own house, and then *ma''chong*, family unit. Rebirth into the same mother's womb is a discipline by which we can perfect ourselves. The belief and practices of reincarnation are completely based on past memories, emotions, and even physical injuries in the form of birthmarks that are examined and confirmed by the family, relatives and society. In spite of some acknowledgeable positive values in such traditional belief and practices inherited from the ancestor, in the eye of the rationalist, it may be considered something rousing to human emotions beyond the realm of conscience.

5. Reincarnation, Signs and Karma

The moralists or the advocates of mysticism took the debate on reincarnation to a more serious level viz., in the work of psychiatrist, University of Virginia Professor, Ian Stevenson. It says that over the years Professor Stevenson collected thousands of cases of children in India and elsewhere who talked about their "previous lives." According to him: "many seemed quite accurate and sometimes the child had marks or birth defects that corresponded closely to those of the deceased person that the child claimed to have memories¹¹ of a previous life and these memories are subsequently corroborated by people who knew the person, the child claimed to have been in that life. Professor Stevenson concluded that memories, emotions, and even physical injuries in the form of birthmarks could be transferred from one life to another—

specifically, the birthmarks. Professor Stevenson also argued that certain abnormalities observed in medicine and psychology—for example, phobias and phobias observed in early infancy—could not be fully explained by genetics or the child’s environment and that the transfer of personality from past lives provided a possible explanation (although Stevenson could not say what type(s) of physical process might be involved for the personality transfer to take place) either.

While reincarnation has been a matter of faith in some people from an early date, it has also frequently been argued for on principle, as Plato does when he argues that the number of souls must be finite because souls are indestructible,¹² Benjamin Franklin held a similar view. Sometimes such convictions, as in Socrates’ case, arise from a more general personal faith.

The Hindu doctrine of *karma* (action) makes rebirth a necessity.¹³ Hinduism indoctrinates that the soul is intrinsically pure. The soul goes through transmigration in the cycle of births and deaths. *Karma* produces a result which must be experienced either in this or in future life. Great philosopher Plato believes in the immortality of soul and its transmigration. For Plato, soul is divine. Soul has knowledge of forms and therefore, it is pure and eternal. Another notable philosopher of the West, Immanuel Kant too has accepted the immortality of soul on the ground of morality.

6. Reincarnation and Evidences

What is so captivating about exploring past lives? Learning to recall one’s own memories helps validate the indestructibility of the soul and brings about the certainty that they have all of the time at their disposal to learn what they need. The person who can reveal about his past life action is illustrated as an example from Dewansing Rongmithu Sangma’s *Jadoreng (The Psycho Physical Culture of the Garos)*:¹⁴

There was a girl in an A’chik family at village Mansang in Garo-Khasi Hills border area under Meghalaya state. While she was reading in the final year class at Lower Primary School, she projected and engrafted her *Jabirong* (soul) in the newly formed matured human body in the womb of a woman of Ampang sib at village Siju-Artika in the South Garo Hills district. The freshly formed human body was male.

After due parturition, the mother and the baby were doing well. While the infant was growing up, the girl became alarmingly thin, lean and skinny. It seemed that life was about to ebb away out of her body

any moment. Neither correct diagnosis of her wasting physical condition was made nor was the rite of *Jaoka*, recall of strayed psyche, ever performed over her nor was an effective kavach (talisman) tied upon her body for inhibition of migration of her *Jabirong*. In a course of a few years, she fell ill, got worsened and died, while the boy, her bifurcated other-self, remained wide awake. In the death of the girl, the growing boy had consciously laid a side of his previous earthly tenement. While wide awake, the boy clairaudient heard the mourning wails of the parents, relatives and friends and clairvoyantly saw funeral rites over her body and its final disposal.

As the alternating round of seasons passed, this boy, name Pelga Sangma, had grown up to manhood and married a girl from a neighbouring village. He paid a friendly visit to the Mangsang on 7th July 1951.¹⁵

Although, Pelga Sangma had never been to Mangsang, he could give out vivid description of the topography, the terrain and the environments of the village exactly and could correctly remember the names of his previous parents and relatives.¹⁶ Strange enough, although as a boy, Pelga Sangma never attended school, the psychically continuing acquirements and the rudimentary knowledge, which he gained in his previous life as a school girl, still persisted in his mind and in the girl's handwriting, he could write well. And as his acquirement in his previous life, as a school girl, he could also read well in his mother tongue in the Roman script.

Secondly, Alasing R. Sangma¹⁷ of village Rongmithu, P.S. Rongjeng, East Garo Hills, Meghalaya, while a young star of about nine years of age, got his *Jabirong* (soul) consciously projected and engrafted in the newly-moulded matured human body in the womb of a Kachari woman of a small village near Dolgoma in Goalpara District, Assam. The freshly-formed human body was female.

After due parturition, the mother and the girl baby were doing well. As the girl was growing up well, Alasing R. Sangma led a dual life as his own original self as well as a Kachari girl in the neighbouring state of Assam, around 50 kilometers away. Without no one teaching him, he could understand and speak the Kachari language fluently.¹⁸

Alasing R. Sangma's dual life began to tell adversely on his physical condition. He grew lean, thin, haggard-looking and much emaciated. Everybody, who saw him, thought that he would not live longer. Nevertheless, his run-down physical condition was correctly diagnosed by his parents and relatives and the needful sanctity of *Jaoka*, the recall

of Strayed Psyche, was duly performed over him, which was superbly successful.

Alasing R. Sangma's strayed *Jabirong* having been re-called, the Kachari girl, his bifurcated other-self, fell seriously ill by the precise identical time, got worsened and died within a few days. While, wide awake, Alasing R. Sangma clear-audience heard the mourning wails of the parents and relatives over the dying girl and clairvoyantly eye witnessed funeral rites over her body and its final disposal.¹⁹ In the death of the Kachari girl, his other-entity, Alasing R. Sangma has consciously tasted something of the mystery and the glory of death. These are still an unexplored realities in the mystery, an issue neither could science establish in terms of evidence nor established religions account for. In spite of its superstitious nature, the mystery is an unexplored reality. However, believing in religious mystery and mysticism is extremely related to Garo people.

7. Conclusion

The Orthodox School of Indian Philosophy, *Advaita Vedanta* states that soul (*atman*) is featureless and non-attached awareness. It is self-evident and reveals itself in every conscious act. It is identical with *Brahman* (God), the foundational reality. Realization of the unity of all souls means liberation from the series of births.²⁰ It is the constant presence of the soul that guarantees the continuity of the same individual through a series of lives. Understanding the abstract nature of the soul is widely held to be a factor contributing to release from rebirth. As the mind grows more reflective, *Nyaya Vaisesika* states that souls are non-physical and non-conscious principles of identity that develops its powers of remembering the past, anticipating the future, conceiving the distant, and discerning the inner causes, it gradually oversteps the bounds of space and time. Similarly, it explains the ability to remember and capacity to synthesize the present variety of experiences into a unity.²¹ So one may reasonably hope that there is future life after death, when the intellect will attain its full development and completely transcend the limits of space and time. This demand of the intellect is called "vaticination of the intellect" according to Dr. Martineau.

As in all other mysticism, scientifically, there are no sufficient evidences to support the *Songsarik* belief in immortality of soul and rebirth; it is only after-life theory that has not any evidence to support

it. Similarly, there is not a scrap of evidence to prove the existence of heaven and hell. Scientifically, such beliefs and practices are considered as superstitions.

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Studying Khasi-Jaintia Society: A Perspective

Babhador Khongdup*

In the Encyclopedia of Social and Cultural Anthropology, the term tribe has been referred to as 'a political unit larger than a clan and smaller than a nation or people,' especially with reference to indigenous population.¹ In tribal life, the principal links for the whole society are based on kinship. Lineages, clans and other social groupings tend to be the main corporate units, and they are often the principal units for land ownership, for defense, for economic production and consumption.² In case of almost every tribal society of northeast India kinship plays an important role in social, political, and economic sphere. Similarly, in the Khasi-Jaintia society kinship plays a significant role too, especially when it comes to political aspect, where only members or kith and kin of the ruling groups could enjoy some privileges which are not available to the non-ruling groups. In the latter again there is differentiation in the society. Khasi-Jaintia people can be traced on the picturesque hills of Meghalaya which rise from the narrow valley of the Brahmaputra River on the one side and the plains of the Surma on the other. They follow matrilineal system of descent. However, the administration of the state was in the hands of the male members of the society. In the Khasi- Jaintia society, the political culture emerged from within the social culture.

This paper analyses the Khasi –Jaintia society from the perspective of social history. A survey of literature dealing with the neglect of the studied group in the paper has been provided in the first part of the paper. The second part of the paper situates social history approach

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used in the paper and the discussion on the non-ruling group of the Khasi-Jaintia society; highlighting their role, responsibilities, duties, and functions in the society.

I

A number of books on the Khasi-Jaintia society deal with the upper strata of the society *i.e.* the ruling elite, the aristocrats, the founding clans, etc. However, these books do not focus specifically on the life and condition and the contribution of the subjects or *raids*³ along with others in the society. Colonial writers⁴ like B.C. Allen, W. W. Hunter and A.J.M. Mills provide information about the area and boundaries of Khasi-Jaintia Hills, climatic condition, the circumstances that led to the British occupation of the Khasi-Jaintia Hills, etc. But they did not talk about the non-ruling groups. P.R.T. Gordon in his book has discussed about the porters carrying potatoes to the markets and has also stated that a significant number of people earned their livelihood in this way.⁵ I. M. Simon's work⁶ along with geographical set-up, origin of the people, history and culture, economy, administration and developmental activities, communication also throws important light about the citizens differentiating between 'natural' subjects and 'conquered' subjects.

Among Indian writers if J. B. Bhattacharjee mentions about the original clans and the immigrant clans.⁷ Soumen Sen gives useful information dealing with the Khasi-Jaintia people regarding its history, agriculture, society, religion, social stratification and state formation. Sen without giving the details has mentioned the division of the society into the following categories; the ruling elite, the aristocrat, the masses in general (*khian kur* – the commoners's clan); besides a few serfs and slaves to be placed in the lowest ladder.⁸

Hamlet Bareh⁹ stated that the true citizens paid no regular tax except, *ki khun shnat* (literally tributary children) or *ki khun soh Syiem* (non-bonafide or emigrant) who were bound to pay *ka pynshok* a sort of around protection fee to the State authority.¹⁰ He has also mentioned about the plain inhabitants who were known as the *ki khun ki raiot* and they have to pay taxes and perform other acts of allegiance to the State.¹¹ Similarly, B. Pakem¹² stated that the original clans exercised more power and authority within their respective *Raids*; whereas the *Khian Kur* or commoner clans who were outsiders, were reduced to the lower ranks including the slaves (*Ki- Broo*) in the society.¹³

S. N. Lamare provides very useful information regarding the

religion, economy, political institutions, and cultural life of the people. He made a mention that the Jaintia society was divided into three groups- (a) the political rulers with rights of ownership on land (b) the founding clans with their rights on land and to political offices and (c) the late comers or the people from other areas better known as *Khian Kur*. He briefly stated about the condition of these people (late comers) who were given the right to use and occupy the land under a *raid* or *elaka*, accompanied with the right to participate in political affairs, but no right whatsoever in occupying political offices.¹⁴

From the above we can say that though the writers have mentioned about the differentiation in the society between the ruling and the non-ruling groups, details on the latter is not available there, as they used the traditional approach of history writing in their researches. To study them, the Social History approach seems to be most befitting one. Social history involves two broad subject areas that conventional history has largely ignored. First, it deals with ordinary people, rather than the elite. Secondly, social history also talks about the history of ordinary activities, institutions, and modes of thought, since they all form part of the society and culture.¹⁵

II

In the Khasi-Jaintia traditional institutions leadership was vested in persons belonging to certain original founding clan or clans (*Kurs*).¹⁶ In the Khasi-Jaintia society several villages often joined together to constitute a commune and several communes joined together and constituted a *Hima* (loosely translated as a state) which was administered by a chief called *U Syiem* aided by a *Durbar* or an assembly of select representatives of the people. A member of the *Durbar* was known as *myntri*.¹⁷

In the case of the Khasi Hills the office of the *Syiem* continues to function till today, whereas in Jaintia Hills, the office lost its importance in 1835 soon after the British annexation and possession of the land. The traditional chief both in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills came from the original or founding clans who were considered to be the earliest settlers of the land, and so they were recognized as the 'ruling clans' within the land under their jurisdiction. On this basis the privileges granted to them entailed the right to set up candidates for the office of traditional chiefs.

In the Khasi-Jaintia Hills, immigrants or late-comers were treated as commoners. They could aspire for any elective/selective post, which

perserves of the original founding clans. Of course, during the time of election they were granted the right to vote. The original or founder member of a particular area turned to become the political group, the rulers, with the right of ownership of the land and the late comers were granted only the right of use and occupancy of the land as well as the right of political participation without the right to political office.¹⁸

The emergence of the state from its indigenous tribal base was not without considerable social stratification. Among the Jaintias, there is some form of stratification in the field of social relationship where the *Kmai-Kur*, the larger or the original clans enjoyed more political rights than the *Khian Kur* or the smaller clans, who were mostly immigrants from neighbouring areas.¹⁹ The menial works were the responsibility of these clans while the officials were appointed from the original clans and the use of better land was their privilege.²⁰ The *Khian Kur* or commoner clans who were outsiders were reduced to the menial jobs such as sweeping and preparing mat-carpeting for the meeting of the *Raid* council, preparing smoking pipes (*hookah*) or areca nuts and betel leaves for the *Daloi* and the councillors sitting in the council and in disposing of dead bodies which were brought to the cremation grounds.²¹

The influential section of the society made attempts to control both resources and production which ultimately got institutionalized in the structure of state. This may take the form of claims over land and revenue accompanied by using the labour of others to work on the land. The influential sections through both enhanced agrarian production and coercive powers were in a position to extract an unprecedented quantity of surplus.²²

The chief occupation of the Khasi-Jaintia people was agriculture. So it is apparent that land was very important in the socio-economic structure of the state. Like in other parts of the country where land is the primary source of livelihood and its ownership is the well accepted indicator of the socio-economic status of the farmers, this norm equally applied to the Khasi hills. Each village in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills has its own known land, in which rights of private ownership are recognized. The inherent belief of the Khasis is that the custom has exempted them from payment of revenue on land, as such, because the land belongs from the beginning of time to the people, not to the ruler by whatever name he may be called. This is a fact which none can deny.²³

There are mainly two categories of land in the Khasi society: 1) *Ri Raid* land 2) *Ri-Kynti* land. The *Ri Kynti* lands are lands set apart from

the time of the founding of the state for certain clans upon whom were bestowed the proprietary, heritable and transferable rights over such lands. They also include any part of *Ri Raid* lands which at later times were bestowed upon a person or a family or clan for certain yeoman service rendered to the state. The same rights devolve on Khasis to whom such lands are disposed of by the original owners by way of sale, transfer on receipt of full consideration for the same.²⁴

The leading family of clans or *Bakhrav* came to an area, claimed and occupied land, and later distributed the land under their control among their family members. In course of time, by virtue of continued possession or cultivation, these families claimed absolute right of ownership over the lands which consequently formed their *Ri Kyntis*. It is equally possible that the *Bakhravs* sometimes usurped lands belonging to other clans and held them by virtue of conquest.²⁵

The occupation of land is quite different when it comes to the people who are not from the same *Raid* (called *soh shnong*) as compared to the original inhabitants of the *Raid* (*traï shnong*). The non *raid* people cannot have the same privileges as the original or the founding clan when it comes to land ownership system. He can have the right of use and occupancy which a native member of the *raid* has only when he submits himself to the jurisdiction of the village *raid* and is accepted and recognized as one of it.²⁶ To some extent they can enjoy their right only in those lands which they have purchased. The non-ruling/non-founding group or clan cannot have the right to claim land in the Khasi Hills even though they have stayed there for a very long period of time. Their children can be called *traï shnong*; can claim to be original inhabitants only when they got married to the people from that particular village or *Hima* and automatically the children born out of this relationship came to be known as the '*traï shnong*'.²⁷

The member of the state can cultivate peacefully without having to pay the state any taxes. The *Syiem* used to collect *khajna* (taxes) or land lease from non-members of the state or *khun soh Syiem* or *raiot*. For instance they would tax them in activities like wood cutting, fishing, extracting limestone, collecting sandstone, pebbles, etc., and other forest and mineral products of the state. This is done mainly because the *Syiem* would get more revenue which serve as a kind of pension for him and a very small amount was used for the benefits of the state.²⁸

However, the case is different when it comes to a non-Khasi (*U Mynder*). He is allowed to own lands subject to certain conditions that subject him to the laws of the land. A chief or *sordar* of a *raid* or

headman of the village has no authority to allow a non-Khasi the right of use and occupancy of *ri raid* land by way of issuing *pattas*, realizing land revenue or land rent from him. It is only the Durbar *hima* which is competent to grant or refuse such right. Even then he will not have the full rights of citizenship. He may have it only after generation when his descendants have taken to a Khasi way of life, custom and have merged with in the Khasi society.²⁹ Usually only the *Dorbar hima* could grant or refuse such rights to non-Khasi subjects.³⁰ But with the coming of the British rule, the communal control on land weakened.³¹

A member of the *raid* can buy and sell land according to her/his wish. But when it comes to a non-member, he cannot buy permanently or to cultivate the land unless the *raid* accepted him as a member of the *raid* or he performs all the customs which will make him as a member of the *raid*.³²

The economic differentiation in the Khasi-Jaintia society can be noticed in the form of market tolls where members of the non-state has to pay to the chief of a particular state on whose land the market or *hats* are held. Besides *pynshok* (protection fee) and *bairung* (entry fee) the later Khasi immigrants,³³ who were distinguished as *Khun Soh Syiem* and *Khun Shnat*, were bound to pay market tolls also. These served as the principal source of income of the chiefs in almost all the Khasi States. As the Khasis were great traders these made larger markets fairly valuable.³⁴

Besides agriculture, there are some other leisure works of the people like hunting and fishing. There had been religious side, as before hunting, worship was offered to the gods or local deities, like *U Ryngkew U Basa* and *U Basa ki mrad*.³⁵ Even in this activity the non-ruling groups would have to go through the *Lyngdoh niam* who are the members of the ruling groups for performing certain religious rites and ceremonies to *U bLei Lyngdoh*, *bLei Muluk* or *bLei Jaka* (territory deity),³⁶

There were certain other socio-cultural norms and values which favoured the ruling group like at the cremation. The construction of the pyre, locally called the *Kpep*, depend on the standing or status of the deceased. Usually among the Khasis, there is the *Thang dieng-tylli*, which is a cremation for the poor and the not-so-rich people. The second type, called *Thang-baiwait*, is done to those whom the village does not consider as one of their own or a person unknown to the village. The third type of cremation is the *Thang-Lyntang*. This is special for the elderly and the respectable people in the village and is conducted with great pomp and celebration.³⁷ Here the differentiations

can be seen clearly between the ruling and the non-ruling group.

Another aspect of Khasi society where the custom to differentiate between offices the ruling and non-ruling groups was in the law of inheritance. The Khasi laws of inheritance follow the female line where the daughters got the share but not the son, with the exception of the War Khasi, as Khasi society practices matrilineal custom from the mother alone.³⁸ However, a Khasi women if she got married to an outsider (non-Khasi) and if she follows his custom that is to take his title, she losses all her claim on ancestral property.³⁹

Festivals also had politics and the distinction from the clothing to the ornaments, to the standing position and to the royal symbols such as the royal lady/girl under the royal umbrella. Even the girl child of the royal family used to stand alongside with her sister or cousin sister. Festivals are invariably celebrated with pomp and gaiety. The major festivals observed are; *Ka Shad Sukmynsiem*, *Ka Shad Nongkrem* or *Pomblang Syiem*, *Behdienkhlam*, etc.⁴⁰ There are certain rituals which are meant only for the *Syiem* and not for the *Bakhrav* nor of the whole *Hima* Khyrim. And it is for this reason they call it as '*Ka Niam Ki Syiem*' – religion of the chiefs.

During the festival, the people used to bring goats known as '*bLang-nghuh-Syiem*' as a gesture of respect to the *Syiem* and also to make the festival lively. These goats which were brought by the people were slaughtered without performing any religious rituals.⁴¹ On the fourth day of the festival the people can take part in it fully, but only after the '*shad nohkjat*' by the daughters of the *Syiem Sad* and other female members of the *Syiem* clan who are unmarried with the *Bakhrav* or *myntri* at sunrise. This means the opening dance on the side of the *Syiem*. After that all the people from the *hima* like *ki khun hajar* and *ki khun soh-syiem* who belong to another *hima* can take part in the Nongkrem dance.⁴²

Another festival of the Khasi-Jaintia people, in which stratification can be clearly seen is the *Behdeinkhlam* festival of the Jaintia. Before the commencement of the festivals the *Basans* would go to the houses of the first settlers at Jowai to collect funds for the expenses to be incurred in ceremony called '*Knia Khang*.' In this festival the people have to fell a tree called '*Dein Khlam*' by the *Kmai raid*, and another by the '*Khon raid*' called '*Khong*' which could be bigger than the '*Dien Khlam*.' On the next day before the '*Khong*' is carried home by the '*Khon Raid*' a religious ceremony is performed. And only a member of the '*Khon Raid*' can take part in the taking home of the '*Khong*.'⁴²

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