

OXFORD

BUILDING LEGITIMACY

Exploring State–Society Relations
in Northeast India



M. SAJJAD HASSAN

BUILDING LEGITIMACY

Exploring State–Society Relations
in Northeast India

This book compares two states in the Northeast with different socio-political trajectories—a relatively orderly Mizoram and a troubled Manipur—in order to understand the sources of political turmoil in the region. Taking the region as a case study, it examines the larger debates on success and failure in state-making.

In discussing the divergent success of the two states in mitigating conflicts, Hassan demonstrates how in Mizoram the process of state-making helped consolidate public legitimacy and the authority of state leaders. He also shows how it strengthened the institutional capability of government agencies to provide services, manage group contestations, and avoid breakdown. At the same time, he illustrates how in Manipur, traditional centres of power—tribal and ethnic associations—gained in authority, compromising the legitimacy of the government and institutional capability of its agencies.

The study highlights the important role, in the context of state breakdown, of the absence of an effective medium to regulate inter-group relationships and manage contestations over power, resources, opportunities, and identity.

Cont'd on back flap

Cont'd from front flap

Rigorously comparative, it explains the sources of disorder in Northeast India by focusing on the nature of state–society relations in the region. While acknowledging the important role of history in structuring this failure of the state system in the region, it suggests ways in which the path dependence can be overcome.

The book will be useful for scholars and students of political science, sociology, tribal and ethnic studies, as also for planners and social activists.

M. Sajjad Hassan is an Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer currently posted in Manipur.

*Jacket painting by Jyoti Bhatt, courtesy
Delhi Art Gallery*

BUILDING LEGITIMACY
*Exploring State–Society Relations
in Northeast India*

M. SAJJAD HASSAN

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS



006291

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

YMCA Library Building, Jai Singh Road, New Delhi 110 001

Oxford University Press is a department of the University of Oxford. It furthers the University's objective of excellence in research, scholarship, and education by publishing worldwide in

Oxford New York

Auckland Cape Town Dar es Salaam Hong Kong Karachi Kuala Lumpur Madrid Melbourne Mexico City Nairobi New Delhi Shanghai Taipei Toronto

With offices in

Argentina Austria Brazil Chile Czech Republic France Greece Guatemala Hungary Italy Japan Poland Portugal Singapore South Korea Switzerland Thailand Turkey Ukraine Vietnam

Oxford is a registered trademark of Oxford University Press in the UK and in certain other countries

Published in India
by Oxford University Press, New Delhi

© Oxford University Press 2008

The moral rights of the author have been asserted
Database right Oxford University Press (maker)

First published 2008

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from Oxford University Press. Enquiries concerning reproduction outside the scope of the above should be sent to the Rights Department, Oxford University Press, at the address above

You must not circulate this book in any other binding or cover and you must impose this same condition on any acquirer

ISBN 13: 978-0-19-569297-6

ISBN 10: 0-19-569297-7

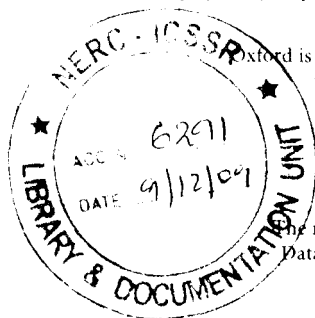
Typeset in Minion 10.5/12.8

by Sai Graphic Design, New Delhi 110 055

Printed in India at Pauls Press, New Delhi 110 020

Published by Oxford University Press

YMCA Library Building, Jai Singh Road, New Delhi 110 001



Contents

<i>Preface</i>	ix
<i>List of Tables</i>	xiii
<i>List of Abbreviations</i>	xv
<i>Note on Terminology</i>	xix

1. Introduction	1
-----------------	---

SECTION I
CRYSTALLIZATION OF THE STATE

2. Contested State Power in Manipur	35
3. Cohesive State in Mizoram	70

SECTION II
MOBILIZING SOCIETIES

4. Fragmentation of Society in Manipur	109
5. Building the Mizo Nation: Include Some, Exclude Some	141

SECTION III
STATE CAPABILITY

6. Unravelling of the State in Manipur	173
7. Resilience of the Mizo State	205
8. Conclusion	233

Appendix I: Methodological Note	266
Appendix II: Political and Social Organizations in Manipur and Mizoram	278
<i>Glossary</i>	291
<i>Bibliography</i>	293
<i>Index</i>	304

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

This work is about instability and violence in Northeast India, and attempts by states and societies in the region to respond to them. That compact region of the country, made up of the 'seven sister' states, has experienced sustained conflicts and breakdown.¹ A seminar paper on the unrest in the region captures the range of the crisis:

Recurring bouts of violence have damaged the whole fabric of civic governance and culture in [the region]. Normal processes of all the three wings of governance have been suspended at best and subverted at worst. The Army has taken over functions of policing in many areas, even as there have been widespread violations of human rights...Communities are at war; valued social relationships have been ruptured; inter-personal as well as intra-community trust has been destroyed, quite often by government and security forces as well as by opposition armed groups...Questions of cultural and national identity, quite often in conflict and competition, dominate the intense public discourse in the region (Agarwal 1999: 2).

A particularly prominent feature of the crisis in the Northeast has been the high incidence of violence. According to official reports, in 2003 there were 1107 militancy-related deaths in the region. The figure came down marginally to 928 in 2004, to 868 in 2005, and to 780 in 2006 (Government of India 2007: 18).² A recent Home Ministry report describes the law and order situation in the region as being 'vitiating', an outcome, it claims, of the activities of the region's insurgent and extremist groups (Government of India 2005a: 34). The report lists 13 such groups active in the region, and adds: 'numerous other militant

groups...are operating in the Northeast' (ibid.: 33). Among the strategies adopted by the government to restore order is 'counter-insurgency', including declaring rebel groups as 'unlawful' and deploying central forces with special powers to neutralize them. The Home Ministry report admits, 'Despite heavy deployment of [Central paramilitary] forces, it has not been possible to meet the demands of the States for additional forces' (ibid.: 35). Other interventions in response to the crisis in the region, the report claims, have been investments in infrastructure, creation of more jobs, and enabling 'good governance and decentralisation'. The government also claims to have shown 'willingness to meet and discuss legitimate grievances of the people' (ibid.: 34). The continuing violence demonstrates that the package of interventions has only managed to keep the lid on the situation. Political order and security, both for the state and citizens, remain elusive. In the pages of this volume, I hope to explore why attaining political order and peace in Northeast India has been such a difficult task.

This introductory chapter is organized in the following manner: In its first part, I begin by defining the problem and outlining the approach I plan to take to study it. I then provide a brief summary of the history of conflicts in the region and in the two cases—Manipur and Mizoram—I take up for detailed study. The second part of the chapter is devoted to specific literature on conflicts in the Northeast, to try to analyse the adequacy of existing arguments for understanding my specific questions. In the third and final part of the chapter, I briefly survey the literature on state building and collapse and examine some recent approaches to studying issues of state capability that provide promising ways to engage with my research problem. I conclude by proposing a statement of my argument to explain sustained contestations and breakdown in Manipur as against success with achieving political order in Mizoram.

THE PROBLEM

In the literature there has been a tendency to treat the Northeast region as a single unit, with common experiences and histories. Most accounts focus attention on the common political economy of the region: the Northeast's significantly higher level of ethnic and linguistic

fractionalization compared to the rest of India;³ the long international borders that the region shares with countries that India has not always had stable relations with;⁴ and the porous nature of these borders, which allow for liberal movement of small arms and drugs (Nepram 2002). There is also a perception that the region is the HIV/AIDS hotspot of the country. The Northeast is a region that is geographically compact, a feature underlined by the partition of British India in 1947 when the region was separated from the rest of the country, but for a precarious 12-mile (19.2 km) corridor. Adverse economic ramifications of the Partition have been felt throughout the region, adding to the sense of shared distress. The history of nation-building in the Northeast is also new, with the region incorporated under colonial rule in the nineteenth century, much later than the rest of India.⁵ The region is also unique in the sense that the colonial state carved out large enclaves here as special autonomous zones for protection of tribal communities, and allowed 'traditional' community codes and practices to predominate there, a policy that has been continued after Independence.⁶

As a result, much of the representation of the region in power centres in Delhi and the consequent policy response are premised on the imagination of a common and unitary Northeast. The Indian state's response to challenges to its nation-building efforts in the region post-Independence has reinforced this monolithic image of the northeast.⁷ The central government has followed counter-insurgency policies that have region-wide implications. It has also created institutions for economic development of the region that again have a regional dimension.⁸ But a closer look at dynamics at work in the region prove that these assumptions might be flawed. Different parts of the Northeast have responded differently to the national state's policy prescriptions, and to social and economic forces generally. Among other things, this is demonstrated in the variance in violence figures within the region (Table 1.1).⁹

As is evident, of the seven states, Assam, Manipur, and Nagaland have shown the greatest propensity to violence. Violence in the region has also sustained over time. Between 1992 and 2004, 5708 persons died in Assam in ethnic and separatist violence, 3606 died in Manipur, 3267 in Tripura, and 2068 in Nagaland.¹⁰ In the years under review, though violence has shown a tendency to generally abate, in Manipur

Table 1.1: Insurgency Violence in Northeast India (2003–6)

Year	Arunachal Pradesh	Assam	Manipur	Meghalaya	Mizoram	Nagaland	Tripura
2003	39	401	205	79	1	86	296
2004	43	315	212	47	4	97	164
2005	20	254	410	24	2	99	60
2006	4	242	311	26	0	147	50
Population (million)	1.1	26.6	2.2	2.3	0.9	2.0	3.2

Source: Government of India (2005a:170; 2007:146), Census of India (2001).

the levels have persisted. But it is not just with regard to violence figures that the region shows a variance. While the Northeast has shown a susceptibility to instability and breakdown, Manipur has been a particularly demonstrative example of these dynamics, a characteristic that has often been commented upon by the local media.¹¹ Manipur has also been known for its frequent and bloody ethnic clashes.¹² The other state that stands out in the region, though for very different reasons, is Mizoram. Organized violence has largely been absent in that state for the past two decades. This is a definite achievement for a territory that was severely affected by prolonged violence beginning in 1966.¹³ An agreement in 1986 between the central government and the rebel Mizo National Front (MNF) successfully restored peace in Mizoram. Though post-conflict Mizoram has experienced its share of group mobilization and ethnic tensions,¹⁴ nowhere has the violence in that state paralleled those in other parts of the region. Mizoram has largely remained, in the words of its incumbent chief minister, 'an island of peace in a sea of turmoil'.¹⁵

Why is this so? Why do we not see in Mizoram ethnic turmoil and breakdown that characterizes politics in Manipur and, indeed, in most other states in the region? Commentators have attributed the violence in the Northeast region to identity politics. The few accounts of Mizoram that there are have interpreted its apparent peace as proof of the absence of identity politics there (Chandhoke 2005). A closer reading of the politics of Mizoram will quickly dispel this notion (Sharma and Baruah 2004). Much of the politics in Mizoram, like that in Manipur, is around the question of identity and nationalism. Political

parties and public organizations in both states have used ethnic identity to mobilize support among their constituents. Yet political mobilization in the two settings has not led to similar outcomes. Some writers have also attributed the restoration of peace in Mizoram to 'the devolution of huge economic largesse from the Central government for socio-economic development' and to the 'deft employment of the inherent integrative capabilities of a national political party'—the Indian National Congress (Jafa 2000). Surely, showering 'economic largesse' has been a staple feature of New Delhi's Northeast policy. As has been demonstrated by some, the strategy may, in some cases, have actually fed into conflicts, often changing its character, usually giving it further lease of life (Baruah 2005: 18; Sahni 2001). Further, the 'integrative capabilities' of the Congress party have not been very successful in states like Manipur that have an equally long 'Congress tradition'. And if it was military victories of the Army against the MNF that played a decisive role in restoring peace in Mizoram (Jafa 2000; Nag 2002: 262–5), why have not similar military advantages led to successes against separatist rebels in Nagaland, Manipur, or Assam? And, crucially, we need to ask: what accounts for the sustenance of peace in Mizoram? Moreover, there is little in the literature to explain the near collapse and the rising spiral of violence in Manipur, or the inability of state and society there to devise arrangements for restoration of peace and order. The accounts that do exist privilege the primordial position: the distinctiveness of Manipur, its geographical isolation, and the narrow ethnocentrism of 'mainland' India (Parrat 2005: 1). Yet these very features did not prevent Mizoram from pulling out of crisis. There is also a methodological point: in the absence of any systematic comparative work on the political economy of the region—most works either take the Northeast as a unit of analysis or resort to single case studies of its states—it is difficult to ascribe any predictive value to the causal factors identified as sources of the region's political disorder.

BACKGROUND

Northeastern India was among the first regions to demonstrate signs of severe political crisis after Independence. Over the years this has translated into organized violence, both separatist and ethnic, and has become an enduring feature of the political landscape of much of the

region. Rebellion broke out first in erstwhile Naga Hills district of Assam in 1949, when the Naga National Council (NNC), under the leadership of Angami Phizo, took to arms and declared an independent Federal Government of Nagaland, opposing claims of the national leadership over lands that Naga tribes inhabited. Violence between NNC cadres and government forces spread in the early 1950s to Naga-inhabited districts of Manipur. The Mizos, inhabiting the then Lushai Hills district of Assam and being similarly apprehensive of 'mainland' India, followed suit. On 28 February 1966 Laldenga, at the head of the MNF, declared an independent Mizoram *sawrkar* (government) and launched an armed rebellion. A famine in 1959 had devastated the Lushai Hills, causing much suffering and destitution. For the MNF, the slow and poor response of Assamese leaders to the famine was the immediate cause for the rebellion. For a few days after the outbreak, MNF cadres had the complete run of the Lushai Hills, having caught the national and state governments, and their security agencies by complete surprise. Central leaders soon handed over the district to the Army, to restore 'normalcy'. Among the instruments used by the Army for this purpose, besides conducting counter-insurgency operations,¹⁶ was Operation Security, otherwise known as the Village Grouping exercise: wholesale relocation of villages from all over the district to camps set up along its main communication routes. While it is difficult to assess the military benefits of the exercise, social and psychological costs of Village Grouping would eventually turn out to be severe.¹⁷

The rest of the region generally held on, avoiding breakdown and organized violence for much of the first couple of decades after Independence. It was only around the late 1970s that contestations began to spiral into severe crises, breakdowns, and rebellions in Assam, Manipur, and Tripura. The early years of the disturbances in Manipur's Metei-dominated central valley region saw the birth of youth organizations, initially using peaceful political means to denounce the attitudes and policies of national leaders towards Metei interests. They later turned to violent means and started targeting government forces. During the 1980s a number of armed groups took birth, all demanding political independence for the state and for keeping 'Manipur for Manipuris'. Economic and political frustrations among the educated youth, emanating mostly from the 'outsider' domination of the bureaucracy and trade and commerce, lay at the root of much of this mobilization.

A crucial aspect of the violent conflicts in the region has been the recurrent bouts of ethnic clashes that have taken heavy toll of civilian lives and have led to large-scale displacements. Around the same time as the birth of militant groups in the Manipur Valley, the National Socialist Council of Nagalim (Isaac-Muivah) (NSCN [IM]), the principal Naga armed outfit and an offshoot of the earlier NNC, was gaining ground in Naga districts of the state. NSCN (IM) called for the creation of Greater Nagalim, and asked for merging Manipur's Naga districts with neighbouring Nagaland. The Kukis, who cohabit the Hills with the Nagas, became apprehensive about their future in a Naga-exclusive Greater Nagalim and organized themselves for their own 'homeland' demands. The face-off between the two communities and the armed outfits seeking to represent them led to the infamous Naga-Kuki clashes of 1992–6 that resulted in over a thousand deaths and extensive destruction of property.¹⁸ Signing of a ceasefire agreement between the central government and the NSCN (IM) in 1997 has helped moderate the insurgent violence in Naga-inhabited districts of Manipur. But Naga mobilization around Greater Nagalim came as a severe jolt to the Metei population, the state's majority group. The ceasefire has exacerbated Naga-Metei ethnic contestations and has helped reinforce separatism among the Meteis. Ethnic violence in the rest of the region has been equally destructive. In Tripura in 1979–80, some 1800 people were killed and over 3600 dwellings burnt in ethnic clashes.¹⁹ Clashes have also taken place between groups in North Cachar Hills and other areas of Assam. Repeated cases of ethnic violence in the Northeast have created a large refugee population. According to one estimate, there were between 150,000 to 200,000 internally displaced persons belonging to different ethnic groups in the region.²⁰ In Assam and Tripura, and in Meghalaya, inter-group ethnic contestations over power, resources, and opportunities have fed into and energized armed separatist movements.

Ethnic violence in the region has existed alongside conflictual inter-group mobilization against agencies of the state as well as against each other. A case in point was the over two-month-long mobilization by Naga public organizations in Manipur in 2005 against state agencies and Metei groups over the issue of Greater Nagalim. Naga groups imposed an 'economic blockade' of Manipur Valley. These organizations were successful in their effort to cut off the state from essential supplies coming in from outside, despite the heavy

deployment of government forces to foil blockade attempts. The state government demonstrated its weakness in countering these challenges to its authority when it acknowledged that it had not been possible to bring in essential supplies so crucial to the state, resulting in acute scarcity of items such as baby food, fuel, and medicines. The central government had to intervene to diffuse the crisis by flying in supplies using military aircrafts. The blockade had itself been a response to what Naga groups felt was a partisan move by political leaders of the state against Naga interests (Routray 2005a). But identity contests are not limited to Manipur, even if they may be more contentious there. 'Public curfews' and blockade of roads and communication links by students and other groups are common to the whole of the northeastern region (see Apurba Baruah 2002 for a discussion).

Public actions by the region's mobilized groups often involve the state's political class and its agencies as their targets. Poor functioning of government offices, the overall poor quality of governance, and perceptions about state leaders' favouring one social group over the other—all instances of state weakness—undergird these mobilizations. There are other aspects to the weakness of the state in Northeast India. While the region as a whole has reasonably good human well-being indicators,²¹ poor performance of government agencies is reflected in the dismal economic management indicators for the region. State governments in the region depend overwhelmingly on the national government for promoting infrastructural and economic development, as well as to support their own maintenance costs.²² Financial capabilities of state governments across the region are also poor. This is due to poor management of finances and poor capacity of government agencies to raise own revenue through taxation. As a result, share of own tax in gross state domestic product (GSDP) during the 1990s was as low as 1.46 per cent in the case of Manipur, 1.30 per cent for Nagaland, 1.94 per cent for Tripura, 3.23 per cent for Meghalaya, and 3.58 per cent for Assam (Government of India 2000). In some cases it has got worse: 1.21 per cent for Manipur and 1.19 per cent for Nagaland between the years 2000 and 2003 (Government of India 2005c: 44). Poor state finances have also led to the Centre having to step in to subsidize most public expenditure, including sustaining the region's large public sector.²³ As a consequence, central budgetary assistance to north-eastern states was as high as 80 per cent, as opposed to 34.3 per cent for all other Indian states in 2002–3 (Sachdeva 2006).

There is also an impression that the region suffers from higher levels of corruption and rent-seeking activity (and leakages from central investment) than the rest of the country, thus compromising the efficacy of much of the central spending in the region (Baruah 2005: 14–15; Sahni 2001).

The situation in the region, then, borders on 'state failure'. A measure of the failure is the more than normal presence of agencies of the central government in administration in the region—an anomaly considering the federal nature of the Indian polity. There has been frequent resort by the Centre to direct rule (called President's Rule in India)²⁴ in the region. But the Centre's overwhelming presence in Northeast India is strong even when popular elected governments are in office. This presence is most palpable in the large deployment of central security forces across the region. Greatly compromising the federal principal is also the role of state governors, imagined in the Indian Constitution as largely ceremonial agents of the central government in the states. In the Northeast, governors hold much substantive authority such as in local governance in tribal areas. In some instances they even have constitutional authority to keep tabs on the law and order situation in their province, thus undermining the autonomy of elected state leaders in the security arena (Baruah 2005: 59–80). Moreover, the dependence of the provincial states on central transfers for both developmental and maintenance expenditure adds to the overwhelming central presence in the region. But central agencies in the region also perform other less strategic functions, such as building district roads. While on the one hand central expansion in the Northeast reflects the inadequacies of provincial government agencies to perform their statutory functions, the tendency to substitute provincial agencies with central ones has itself worked to prevent the agencies of state governments from acquiring requisite capabilities. This has been most pronounced in the field of maintaining security and order, though much the same thing can be said about managing finances, providing social services, and acting as the objective regulator between contending social groups over resources and opportunities.

PREVAILING EXPLANATIONS

What does the literature on the Northeast tell us about its conflicts? Writings on the crisis in the region have mostly used the 'grievance

narrative'. Recently, some accounts have also explored the greed motives of these conflicts. The grievance narrative has emphasized cultural differences between people in the region and those from 'mainland India', and the domineering tendencies of the central state (Parrat 2005: 1). Supposed incompatibilities between cultures have motivated many scholars from the region to question the 'unequal' and 'forced' integration of the Northeast region into the Indian 'mainstream' (Datta 1990). Some works trace the problem in Manipur particularly to its forced integration with India and the master–subject relationship that this integration led to, reinforced by colonial patterns of political, economic, and cultural dominance (Sanajaoba 1988). According to these cultural arguments, centre–periphery dynamics have seriously undermined the integrity of communities in the region and have caused frustrations and fissures in societies that, it is claimed, frequently result in ethnic conflicts (Arambam 2003). While much can be said about the role of central leaders in creating fissures between communities in the region, the cultural argument, reflecting the 'clash of civilizations' thesis, is nevertheless premised on assumptions that have been widely criticized for their flawed understanding of societal incompatibilities. Extending the logic of the cultural argument, it would be easy to fall prey to the fallacy that heterogeneous societies are doomed to conflicts and violence. It has been convincingly demonstrated, however, that it is multicultural societies that may be better insured against violence than those that are more homogeneous.²⁵ Empirical evidence from the Northeast, where, despite the high fractionalization of society, violence has only happened sporadically, supports the case against the cultural thesis.

It is, however, true that the feeling of having been forcibly integrated into the Indian nation-state is an emotion that greatly animates much of the debate and contestations in the region. Similarly, the region's many armed groups have often justified their legitimacy on the need to undo this felt historical wrong. Regional parties and politically active associations too often evoke the pre-colonial autonomous status of their communities, to argue for self-rule, in attempts at political mobilization. Undoubtedly, the history of India's nation-building efforts in the Northeast has been messy. The end of colonial rule proved a challenge to Indian leaders anxious to take over from colonial rule what had until then formed British India. Northeast India with its late

colonial incorporation, patchy attempts at extending the presence of the state, and the region's tenuous cultural and political links to the rest of India proved a bigger challenge. Exclusion of the many communities of the region from political developments in the rest of India, and the absence of the integrating effects of the anti-colonial nationalist movement, did not help matters. As a consequence, the nation-building exercise immediately after Independence proved problematic in Northeast India, with many communities imagining alternative political arrangements for themselves.²⁶ Nation-building practices in the region have thus left a mixed legacy among its people. Grievances over the homogenizing tendencies of national leaders have proven a powerful narrative around which to mobilize nationalist sentiments. These have fed the violence.

Yet considering these grievances to be the causal factors behind the violence and breakdown may be misplaced. To begin with, the nation-building exercise in the Northeast led to varying responses among its social groups: while some began with demanding independence, others were content with self-rule or even separate administrative units. Many of those that began with independence demands also eventually settled for something less—separate administrative arrangements usually. In effect, even though the grievance discourse is an important part of the story of crisis in Northeast India, it essentially remains an incomplete one. The account fails to explain the restoration of peace and absence of violence in some parts of the region, explained away as they are in these accounts as 'the unpredictable fluidity of history' (Nag 2002: 13–14). They are also not helpful in providing a satisfactory explanation for the collapse and spiralling contestations within some societies, when other societies similarly disposed have escaped collapse (Parrat 2005). As with the grievance thesis of violent conflicts generally, it is difficult to be sure whether grievance is the cause or really an aspect of the violence in the region. In a different context, de Soysa (2001) has argued that in conflict zones there is an excess of grievance narrative, making it difficult to identify objective factors leading to conflicts. As the case of Manipur demonstrates, while the merger of 1949 is central to the Meitei sense of alienation from the Indian nation-state, much of the narrative could be interpreted as a case of history being reread to give force to the grievance. Grievance, though important to the onset of violence, poses the problem of separating fact from representation

and may not be very illuminating when the objective is unearthing causal factors.

In line with the shift in analytical emphasis in the conflict literature from grievance and deprivation to economic interpretations of violence, the 'greed thesis' has found resonance in recent writings on violence in Northeast India. These accounts point to the rent-seeking activities of the many militant organizations in the region that make use of the vast networks of collusive arrangements they have established with state agents as well as with formal and informal economic actors (Sahni 2001: 46). These works, claiming that most development funds are captured by anti-state forces, question the devolution of these resources by the Centre, for the economic development of the region. Other accounts have talked of the changing nature of armed nationalist movements in Northeast India. They point to the diversion of large resources earmarked for the region's development and for employees' salaries and contract payments, to rebels through a network of taxation, extortion, commissions, and payoffs. Verghese (1996: 49) had thus concluded that insurgency (in the Northeast) draws on the underworld of narcotics and smuggling as well as on the government exchequer for resources.

While economic interpretations of armed rebellions help understand the nature of these movements better, especially how they may have mutated over time and what sustains them, it would be a folly to ascribe causal mechanisms to these interpretations or to use them for policy responses. As Malone and Nitzscheke (2005: 7) argue, 'casting rebellions simply as criminal endeavour rather than a political phenomenon obscures legitimate grievances and forecloses opportunities for negotiated resolution of the conflict'. As it turns out, most accounts of the 'terrorist economy' of Northeast India do have the state very much in the narrative of the collusive arrangements between rebels and state forces creating opportunities for dividends (Baruah 2005: 14–15; Sahni 2001), thus avoiding a major drawback of the greed thesis: the lack of an institutional component and absence of any conception of 'the state' as an agency that could either trigger or help mitigate violence. It is this aspect of the conflicts that we will come back to later.

An earlier explanation of the instability in the Northeast had focused on the element of unsettling change brought about by the process of

rapid modernization (Singh 1987). B.P. Singh had pointed to fast-paced changes introduced by forces of modernization in the lives of the region's largely traditional communities. According to his account, changes came to communities in the region in the form of new ideas and new institutions, and also in the form of the influx of new people. While the Naga and Lushai Hills districts were the first of the tribal tracts to be opened up by colonial administrators and missionaries, unadministered frontier tracts, now called Arunachal Pradesh, were spared these changes in colonial times, and remained largely so in the years following Independence. The different approaches employed for development in different states in the region, Singh argued, might account for the early onset of conflict in Nagaland and Mizoram, and its absence in Arunachal Pradesh. Singh also claimed that the instability in the region arose from the resistance of 'stateless societies' of the region to the process of state-making itself. He claimed that the state 'was treated as an intruder' in tribal areas because it 'not only appeared larger than the more familiar institutions of family or clan...but also because it demanded greater loyalty and a subordination of tribe and caste interests', something local people found difficult to accept (ibid.: 6).

Recent developments in Arunachal Pradesh, where violence has begun to take roots, cast doubts on this thesis. And in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills of Meghalaya, one of the first tribal tracts in the region to be opened up by colonial rule, it is only now that political contestations are taking a violent form. Moreover some parts of the region, such as Mizoram, have returned to stability, demonstrating that while rapid modernization does have destabilizing influence on communities, the causal link between change and instability might not be so direct. As Huntington (1968: 1) had argued in the context of Third World development generally, political order in changing societies was an outcome not only of socio-economic changes (and consequent mobilization of new social forces), but also of the development of political institutions. He had claimed that the destabilizing effects of heightened political mobilization (due to the mobilization-institutionalization gap) could be countered by developing strong and well-functioning political institutions.

Northeast India provides further evidence that some societies have been able to develop or acquire institutions that help them absorb

shocks arising out of rapid mobilization. In that sense, it might be that political parties in Mizoram, such as the Mizo Union (MU) and later the MNF, as well as social organizations like the Young Mizo Association (YMA) and the different church-based organizations there, have provided Mizo society with anchors to ground itself with, moderating the ill effects of tumultuous change through much of the twentieth century. The programmatic Communist Party of India (CPI) in Tripura may be performing a similar function in that state. Other societies appear to have been less well endowed. The different ways in which communities in the Northeast have responded to changes, therefore, are evidently the outcome of rapid changes, but also of forces of change working along with the resilience of political institutions.

As for the claim about 'stateless societies' resisting state formation, it is evident that the state and the process of state-making are not new to societies in the region. Even tribal communities that have been taken to be stateless, have had traditions of some sort of institutional arrangements that helped distribute power and resources—the very essence of the state. Further, much of the contestation in the region, in the past as in recent times, has been over who controls instruments of the state and what its policies should be. It may be that local resistance was due not so much to the intrusion of state agencies or to the process of state-making per se, but to who controlled the state, that is, where state power lay and what rules of engagement it employed.

It is precisely such issues as elite contestations that some writers have privileged to explain the Northeast's identity wars. Taking an instrumentalist line, these accounts have pointed to the unequal power structure and inter-community competition over resources and symbols, to explain the region's socio-political unrest. The turmoil, claims a commentator, has to do 'with ethnic political aspirations and the effort to protect local territories and resources' (Shimray 2004). Others, arguing that identities shaping conflicts in the region are 'a creation of political necessity and administrative convenience', recognize that conflicts 'have been waged not merely on questions of land, immigration and settlement but also on the overweening fear of loss of identity itself' (Bhagat 2003). Similarly, Singh (1987: 71) has pointed to the elite coalitions made up of the landed class and traditional authorities who control the state apparatus in some of these states, mobilizing ethnic identities to respond to challenges to their authority.

The constructedness of identities and how they form a useful mobilizing tool for the elite in their contests over resources and power has been a common refrain of the modernization literature. While these insights are useful to understand the constructedness of ethnic identities and the processes of ethnic identity mobilization, they still do not go very far in informing us of the processes of breakdown and disorder. The absence of large-scale violence in Mizoram, for instance, does not mean that identity formation and mobilization in that state has been devoid of conflict. Further, Mizoram has its share of inter-group contestations. And yet there had been relatively little violence and breakdown of political order there. Thus, there appears to be more to breakdown and collapse than sustained elite mobilization around identity.

How have these dilemmas been examined in the conflict literature? Robert Bates (1999: 24) has argued that while ethnic tension may be a necessary condition for political violence, it does not constitute a sufficient condition. He demonstrates that it is the relative size of ethnic groups that determines violence—as the size of the largest ethnic group grows, the level of violence (riots, assassinations, civil wars, and revolts) initially goes down, but then rises. Bates (*ibid.*: 26) explains: ‘As the largest ethnic group reaches 50 per cent or more of population, people confront the possibility of permanent political hegemony or exclusion’, thus seeing politics as a zero sum game, making it fundamentally conflictual.²⁷ Does the fractionalization argument hold for Northeast India, and particularly for Manipur and Mizoram? The largest ethnic group in Manipur is that of the Meiteis, making up about 65 per cent of the population; in Mizoram it is the Mizos who account for 70 per cent of the state’s population. Despite the comparable size of the majority community in the two states, the extent of violence and political discord has been very different. Is it the case that it is the relative extent of access to resources and power, rather than relative size, that determines exclusion? I will argue in the following pages that despite a Mizo majority in that state, minority and peripheral groups continue to enjoy a semblance of access to resources and to share in power, a factor that could be preventing conflicts from breaking out.

A more plausible explanation for violent conflicts is provided by Frances Stewart (2000), who has argued that it is not so much the size of the largest group but existence of severe inequalities between culturally defined groups (‘horizontal inequality’) that determines

political instability and violence. The combination of severe inequalities in resource access in political, economic, and social arenas, and marked cultural differences between communities provides a conducive environment, Stewart argues for culture to become a powerful mobilizing agent and to lead to conflicts. While leaders often use ethnicity or religion to unite and mobilize groups to achieve their political goals, mobilization, Stewart claims, is effective only where there are substantial horizontal inequalities. Some analyses of violent movements in India, including those in the Northeast, have claimed that it is the weakening of modern political institutions that accounts for something like horizontal inequalities—incapability of dealing with local religious, and linguistic, caste, and regional concerns—and which leads to sectional contestations resulting in the spiral of community conflicts and violence (Weiner 1989). The shape these breakdowns take, other commentators have argued, depends on how well central authority is institutionalized and how willing ruling groups are to share power and resources with mobilized groups (Kohli 1998: 7). Conflict has been mitigated, it is claimed, in situations where leaders have been accommodative of minority demands.²⁸

Curiously, violence and contestations in the Northeast, taken as a whole, exist (many would argue that they have become endemic) alongside the many experiments with self-rule and political autonomy for the region's peripheral communities; high levels of human well-being (measured by literacy, health, and gender indicators for its communities); and huge central transfers for the economic development of the region. Further, deinstitutionalization of the central polity should have affected all parts of the region in similar ways. Central leaders have themselves shown equal flexibility (or intransigence) in dealing with mobilized groups and rebel organizations from the Northeast. Yet while a definitive peace deal was possible in Mizoram, peace continues to elude Manipur despite the obvious human costs of the violence. Moreover, if it is 'horizontal inequalities' (between the many groups in the state) that lie behind the collapse in Manipur, the most interesting question to ask is: what is it that determines access (or lack of it) to power and resources of culturally defined communities? And why have leaders in Manipur found it so difficult to provide access equally to all, despite a commonsensical understanding that exclusion breeds instability. This

is even as their counterparts in Mizoram have been more successful in pursuing inclusionary policies?

Part of the explanation for the peace in Mizoram has been attributed to the undisputed leadership within MNF ranks helping it clinch a peace deal (that seems to have eluded many other armed groups in talks with the Centre), and the ability of religious and social organizations in the state to demand and work for the restoration of peace (Baruah 2005: 71). Journalistic accounts have often hinted at the supposed cohesiveness of Mizo society to account for the sustenance of peace there. If these are indeed the drivers of peace in that state, questions that we need to focus on, and that may have implications for violence in the rest of the region are: What explains the cohesiveness of Mizo society? What accounts for the synergy between political leaders and social organizations there to work for peace and indeed for a semblance of good governance? Why is society in places like Manipur so fragmented? Why do state leaders in Manipur find themselves so unable to connect with society? Why do they find themselves helpless in the face of pressure from conflicting social groups? And why have Manipur's social organizations not had the same leverage for peace as have social organizations in Mizoram?

BREAKDOWN AS STATE FAILURE

I will argue that rather than looking at the conflicts in the Northeast as merely the rebellions of the marginalized or as inter- and intra-elite contests, or even as 'resource wars', it may be helpful to explore issues around power in societies in the region and the ability of the instruments of the state to provide a legitimate basis of authority. Huntington (1968: 2) had in his earlier work drawn attention to the absence of authority, effective organization, and lack of political competence in many developing countries in accounting for their instability, as has Bates (2004: 5), who asserts that in addressing the sources of disorder, 'the concept of the state provides a natural point of departure'. What advantages are there, then, to problematizing the conflicts in Northeast India as a manifestation of 'state failure'? The concept of state failure draws attention to the inability of 'weak' states successfully to enforce policies and programmes, maintain social and political order, and mobilize resources.

While much of the breakdown in Northeast India is about ethnic violence, it is about much more than just ethnic conflict or separatist violence. The collapse is also about the inability of government agencies in the region to perform their basic functions as analysed by various theories of the state: monopolize legitimate power, protect citizens, and influence social and economic behaviour. The failures of these state institutions may be leading to a situation where, as Zartman (1995: 8) notes in a different context, 'Organisation, participation, security and allocation fall into the hands of those who will fight for it—warlords and gang leaders, often using the ethnic principle as a source of identity and control in the absence of anything else.'²⁹ Thus, it may be that Northeast India's ethnic and separatist conflicts are the outcome of the poor capability of state agencies, in other words, the symptoms of the problem and not the phenomenon itself. Problematizing the phenomenon, then, as state failure, helps us to engage with ethnic contestations and violence, while focusing on their root cause, that is, poor stateness. It also allows us to study both forms of conflicts and violence in the region—ethnic and separatist—under a single conceptual frame.

Empirical observations bear out the framing of the problem as state failure or the poor capability of state agencies. Absence of violence in Mizoram, despite the heightened ethnic mobilization there, refutes the claims of looking at the crisis in terms of ethnic contests—confusing symptoms with cause. And the heightened political mobilization in Manipur supports the claim of looking beyond identity to the working of state agents and institutions in determining political disorder. That state is a site of intense mobilization and counter-mobilization between different groups, of complex ethnic dynamics, and the never-ending violence. But in the background in each case of contestation is the image of state actors and agencies, unable, even unwilling, to intervene to protect citizens, to resolve conflicts, and prevent private members from taking up arms. As a consequence, the state system in Manipur may have become peripheral to the working of society and is left with little legitimacy. Agencies of the state are frequently criticized for their slothfulness, their insensitivity, and their poor capacities. Though Manipur's minority tribal communities have more to complain about than its majority, criticism of how state agencies function is universal. The breakdown in Manipur is as much about the mobilization against the agencies of the state as it is about inter-

community conflicts. Protests, street marches, and *bandhs* (forced closures) are commonplace.

By contrast, the clearest insight that emerges from Mizoram is the positive public perception of state agencies there, and the ability and willingness of state actors to intervene to govern society and resolve disputes. Time and again, state leaders have sought to negotiate with peripheral communities, to diffuse intra-Mizoram tensions. They have established working relationship with them, bringing them into the ruling coalition to share political power. Discussions with academics, as well as with journalists and human rights activists in Mizoram revealed that state agencies there were seen as being able to deliver and be accommodative to group demands. The state in Mizoram enjoys the sorts of legitimacy that agencies of the state in Manipur do not.

A recent collection of works has sought to engage directly with the state to explain the Northeast's 'durable disorders' (Baruah 2005). The argument, closely paraphrasing the author, goes something like this: Much of the ethnic conflict in the region is the outcome of the central state's following public policies promoting self-governance for particular communities that in turn encourage competitive mobilization by other groups not so privileged. These have resulted in cycles of conflicts and the birth of many armed groups, to give effect to ethnic assertion (ibid.: 3–27). The weaknesses of the central state also create conditions for ethnic assertions in the region to take an armed form. Of particular relevance here are the state's excessive reliance on military tactics to respond to rebel threats and its inability to monopolize security. Creating further problems is the central state's disembeddedness from local societies. These failures have prevented the Indian state from acquiring legitimacy among communities in the Northeast, a gap that has often been filled by rebel organizations that are better providers of security for ethnic groups in the region. The central state's reliance on counter-insurgency tactics to restore order has meant that it is, on the one hand, tolerant of the suspension of the rule of law, and on the other, has turned a blind eye to the systematic graft and leakage of development funds by power brokers in the region. Sanjib Baruah (2002: 3) has argued elsewhere that extensive collusive arrangements between state and non-state actors in the region means that leakages also create opportunities for insurgent dividends, helping sustain rebel organizations. These contribute to the breakdown.

While a focus on the role and actions of the central state and its engagements with communities in the region advances our understanding of the breakdown in the region, it still leaves some key questions unanswered. When central interventions in the region have been comparable across states, how has Mizoram managed to come out of collapse and continued to avoid disorder, when other societies—particularly Manipur—have shown a disposition to implosion? What could account for the moderation in competitive mobilization between different groups in Mizoram when inter-ethnic mobilization in Manipur has a tendency to frequently spiral out of control? If it is militant organizations in the region that end up with legitimacy and taxation, and, hence, sustenance, why did events in Mizoram eventually turn out differently? Why did the Centre's counter-insurgency policies in Mizoram and their associated pathologies not create opportunities for the MNF leadership to go down the 'resource war' path? And crucially, what may be preventing rebel groups in Manipur from engaging more seriously with political solutions when that was the solution of choice in the end for MNF leaders?

Baruah may himself be flagging some pointers to these questions when he proposes differentiating between 'the weakness of the Indian state in the region' and 'its strength otherwise', a point he goes on to elaborate:

While mainland Indians are not used to thinking of the Indian state as weak and incapable of providing everyday security to its citizens....in at least many parts of Northeast India, something like the security dilemma is at work, which leads rival ethnic groups to form their own rag tag bands of liberation armies (ibid.: 6).

Evidently, his image of the Indian state is one that is not homogeneous and uniform throughout its territory, but that varies in its capability across regions. There are two aspects to this variability of state capability in the Indian context. One is about the fact that under India's federal system, the central state, in most of its interactions with citizens, does not operate independently, but through and in conjunction with sub-national states. Many of the functions of the state in India, seen from Weberian perspective, specifically, use of coercion, monopoly over legitimate authority and protection of citizens, including their property

rights, as also the bulk of the interventionist role of the welfare state, in terms of provision of health, education, and social security, are the responsibility of the sub-national state.³⁰ Much of the revenue accruing to the state from its citizens also devolves down to state governments. The other, perhaps more significant, aspect to this variability is the supposed autonomy of state agencies from the society around it. As elsewhere, the ability of the state to provide order and good governance is not only an outcome of the capacity of state agencies—meaning its stateness—but also about the nature of the society that it rests on and must connect with. These have a bearing on issues of authority structure in society and state power.

While there definitely is greater central involvement in governance in the Northeast (a demonstration of the weak capacity of the sub-national state structures), equally significant is the role of local societies in empowering (or hindering) the resultant capability of state agencies. Maybe, it is this state–society dynamic that explains the variable functional performance of different states within the region. It might then be useful to take this difference between the central and the sub-national state, and how they connect with society seriously, and factor these into our analysis? In other words, it may be useful to conceptualize the state not as national or sub-national, but one that combines the energies and resources of the national state with structures of the sub-national to connect with and govern societies and demand obedience. That is exactly the state that the average citizen comes in contact with in the region—or elsewhere in the country—one that is made up both of central and provincial structures and actors, and their working together to seek to acquire legitimacy. Analysts faced with similar complexities elsewhere have been mindful of this difference between *exogenous* and *endogenous* forces working on political outcomes. Robert Bates (2005) has claimed that while major forces affecting the development of Africa have originated in the developed world, African states and societies have themselves played significant roles in determining how those forces affect them. For a better understanding of the patterns of development in the South, he argues for paying greater attention to the ‘capacity for autonomous choice’ on the part of local actors and analysing how those choices shape the impact of external environments upon the structures of local societies (ibid.: 8).

A close reading of the political economy of Northeast India bears out the need to see endogenous and exogenous factors interacting with each other in determining political outcomes. A case in point is the response of leaders in Mizoram to violent mobilizations by its Hmar and Bru communities, led by their respective armed groups, the Hmar People's Convention (HPC) and the Bru National Liberation Front (BNLF). Success of peace negotiations with both groups was the outcome, it appears, of the capability and the willingness of political leaders in Mizoram to respond to the crisis. They took the lead in opening peace talks with the armed groups and negotiated powersharing arrangements with them, by making use of the opportunities and incentives that the central state provided for negotiated settlements to the violence.³¹ It could be argued that Mizo leaders were emboldened in these moves by their greater institutional and normative capability, itself an outcome of the Mizo state's embeddedness in a cohesive Mizo society and its autonomy from competing societal pressures. Leaders in Manipur, on the other hand, have felt helpless to respond to demands for better access to power and resources by minority groups, despite repeated prodding to that effect by the central government.³² Could this be an outcome of the tenuous links (and hence legitimacy) that state leaders have with what is a fractured society in Manipur, and their poor autonomy from conflicting social groups? In any case, the inability of political leaders in Manipur to set their house in order has led to the initiative to negotiate inter-ethnic conflicts passing on to national leaders, creating further complications for inter-ethnic relations in the state.

This brings us to the point about the nature and character of 'the state' and its role in determining political outcomes. The centrality of the state to violence and breakdown has been a common theme of mainstream political studies. For Max Weber, the central point about the state was the issue of coercion and the state's claim to monopoly over it. It follows, therefore, that existence of private groups taking up arms would then be an appropriate indicator of political disorder (Bates 2004: 8). Understood this way, political order is achieved when governments refrain from predation and protect their citizen's property rights, and when citizens refrain from the use of arms (ibid.: 11) Thus, it could be said that it is the monopoly over the legitimate use of force that defines the state. The reverse of that situation is 'state failure',

defined as 'the inability of the state to perform its regulatory, legitimization, infrastructure and economic functions' (Jänicke 1990: 8) leading in extreme cases to 'state collapse', when 'the structure, authority, law and political order have fallen apart' (Zartman 1995: 1). In policy terms, then, the central question that analysts have engaged with is how to build the capability of states. They have focused on enhancing the state's *institutional capabilities*, what Francis Fukuyama (2004: 5) refers to as the 'strength' of the state—its capacity to plan and execute policies and to enforce laws cleanly and transparently.

The only problem with this Weberian conception of the state is that it assumes the monopoly of the state (meaning of its agents and instruments) and its centrality in societies. In the post-colonial rush towards nation-state building, it was widely believed that leaders of the newly established states, like their counterparts in the older developed ones, would be able to use the forces at their command to get people to do what they wanted them to do: govern social and economic life, create order, and provide the impetus for growth. However, the outcome of these state-building drives in most transition societies has been less than encouraging. For many political thinkers, the failure of state building in much of the developing world is primarily the result of the flawed assumption of the autonomy of state agencies from their societies. Joel Migdal (1988: xiii) has claimed, for instance, that in developing societies, the state may actually not be the autonomous and the strong agency that it is usually made out to be.³³

To understand institutional changes in developing societies better, Migdal proposes the notion of the 'limited' state, one that is affected by the society in which it exists and whose monopoly cannot be assumed a priori. State-building according to this state-in-society reading is a dialectical process with structures of society affecting the character and capabilities of the state and of politics at the centre, and the state itself moulding and transforming societies to acquire monopoly over obedience. The character and capability of the state, it turns out, is the outcome of this complex two-way dynamic over 'social control'—defined as the state's ability to get people to behave differently from what they would otherwise do. Seen this way, the strength of the state, rather than being a given, is the outcome of the historical contests over authority between different social forces, of which state leaders are just one component. High capability helps state leaders to mobilize

people and get them to pay taxes and make them do the state leaders' bidding. It also enables state leaders to get their population to gain autonomy from other social groups that are in the contention to make rules for society. It is evident that this notion of the state, centring on social control, presupposes a contest between state actors and contending social groups over authority and legitimacy. Social control, in this reading, is a contested commodity, distributed among the many organizations in society, each vying with the other to make rules about how people should behave. The state acquires high social control where it is successful in, among other things, 'implanting state laws in place of fragmented customary or feudal law...to induce people to behave as state leaders wanted them to behave and not according to dictates of local lords' (ibid.: 22).

Comparing state capabilities will then require comparing the *historical emergence* and the 'crystallisation of the state',³⁴ seeing state agencies as one of the many actors demanding legitimacy and social control in the particular society. This implies looking at struggles between state-making leaders and other social organizations to make rules and consolidate authority. What is needed is, to begin with examining the actual way in which the rules of the game have been devised in societies, involving all social organizations that have exercised social control—both formal and informal, state and non-state. In many developing societies much of the process of state-making and its crystallization began with colonialism. This has had implications for the consolidation (or fragmentation) of social control. A common refrain in the nineteenth-century phase of scramble for colonies by the European powers was how they linked up with traditional authorities to rule, and used 'divide-and-rule' policies to prevent those traditional leaders from a possible coordinated opposition to colonial rule. This had the effect of empowering the many customary authorities while fragmenting social control. Post-colonial state-building policies have had their own salutary or adverse effects on social control and, consequently, on state capability, but are generally moderated by past patterns of accommodation and co-optation between state and social actors.

Contests over social control involve state leaders building agencies and political organizations to provide the sole rule system and survival strategies for people in all spheres of their lives, throughout their territory. Recent empirical research demonstrates that building

inclusive state-wide political organizations is perhaps the single most important factor enhancing the capability of state agencies that could also help them withstand contestations and crises, and avoid breakdown.³⁵ Yet organizational achievements can provide state leaders only so much social control. Often, the success of state leaders with authority has depended heavily on creating a *collective consciousness* around a national identity. Successful state-making leaders not only built institutions, established state-wide political organizations, and forged coalitions between groups, they also used a variety of symbols and cultural instruments—language policy, system of formal education, collective rituals, mass media, and modes of collective expressions—to create a master narrative and acquire the legitimacy essential for high social control. Creation of a collective consciousness through mobilizing nationalistic movements has been seen to act as the glue to hold the state together and to tie citizens to each other and to the state (Migdal 2001: 19). This understanding of the evolution of social control and authority rhymes with recent formulations that characterize modern states as containing both organizational and normative components (Kohli 2004: 21).³⁶

Northeast India, with its late colonization and delayed and varying shades of state-making efforts ('settled' areas existing alongside 'excluded', 'partially excluded', and 'unadministered' ones), provides a useful laboratory to analyse these dynamics around the exercise of authority and power, and the interplay of the state and society in determining political outcomes. The historical contestations between state-making leaders and other social groups over social control and the success or failure of state leaders to create a collective identity around the state and legitimize their authority could be seen as being instrumental in enhancing or compromising the strength of the state in the region. This has consequences for the ability of state agencies to perform their basic security and development functions, and the authority of state leaders to structure institutional arrangements, manage group contestations, and avoid collapse. As Hesselbein *et al.* (2006: 2) have argued, it is ultimately the state's territorial monopoly over not mere coercive power but also authority that in conjunction with state-wide inclusive political actions and organization is crucial to resisting the processes of breakdown in times of crisis.

Drawing on these analytical themes, I plan to undertake a comparative study of conflicts and breakdown in Northeast India,

taking the sub-national (implying territory) state as my unit of analysis. Using the 'method of difference', I examine two states—Manipur and Mizoram—the former high on violence and breakdown, and the latter with comparatively low levels of violence. By basing selection of my cases on the dependent variable, I hope to be able to come up with causal mechanisms that would hold over a wider set of cases. The questions I pursue are: What accounts for the political disorder and breakdown in Manipur, and its avoidance in Mizoram? And what does it say about the legitimacy and capability of 'the state' in Northeast India? I frame my dependent variable, that is, violence and breakdown, as state failure, and take a historical institutional approach to studying the processes of state-making, and the contestations and compromises made by the many claimants over state authority, to account for the divergence in the political outcomes. However, I qualify my institutional analysis of state-making by using cultural tools to understand how, in their attempt at consolidating authority, political actors may have mobilized collective identities to connect with society and gain obedience. It is ultimately the institutional arrangements on which the state is premised and the cultural glue linking state actors with social forces that I focus on to understand institutional performance determining breakdown or its avoidance. My principal explanatory variable is state capability, and which I construe as the ability of state agencies to provide their basic security and development functions. My intervening variables are the historical processes of state-making—involving, among other factors, the struggles between different social forces over power and authority; the nature of social structure; political, economic, and social institutions structuring relationships between groups; the manner of political organization; and finally modes of collective identity mobilization. By looking at crystallization of the state historically, and at the strategies and instruments used by state actors and their adversaries in their contests over legitimacy and social control, I hope to identify the processes and mechanisms leading to state failure and collapse, and its avoidance in Manipur and Mizoram respectively.

ARGUMENT AND ORGANIZATION

I propose the following causal mechanism to explain continued breakdown in Manipur as against its avoidance in Mizoram. It was the

divergent colonial and post-colonial state-making practices and state leaders' mobilizing strategies in the two cases that led, on the one hand, to consolidating the state's authority and its positive impact on enabling a cohesive society in Mizoram, and on the other, to a contested and weak authority of state agencies, and the fragmentation of society in Manipur.

In Mizoram colonial policies built on pre-existing state-like tendencies of Sailo chiefs to consolidate the authority of the state, by penetrating society, by incorporating rival social forces within its structures, and by successfully becoming the main provider of rule systems and survival strategies for people. These consolidating tendencies were reinforced in post-colonial times when state-making leaders contested the hold of traditional authorities and undertook a slew of measures that resulted in enhancing the former's social control, while traditional forces that could pose challenges were marginalized. In Manipur, by contrast, political actors—colonial and post-colonial—worked with and accommodated, rather than challenged, rival social groups. This led to the strengthening of the hold of non-state and traditional actors, while it has constrained the legitimacy of those identified with the state. Social control in Manipur stands fragmented and state actors have failed to become the dominant force in society.

Among the key instruments and strategies used by Mizo state-making leaders in their contest with rival social forces were centralized political organizations that facilitated state-wide mobilization of inclusive identities. They also negotiated political alliances and power-sharing arrangements with groups that they failed to incorporate in the Mizo fold. Creation of a grand narrative in Mizoram has helped the state acquire legitimacy and enhance its capability, allowing it to act autonomously from social forces and decisively to govern society and manage conflicts. The MNF rebellion in 1966 could be seen as an attempt by the excluded sections among the Mizos to gain access to state power. The upheaval helped broaden the social basis of the new state, woven around Mizo identity mobilization, and made the authority structure so much more stable. On the other hand, Manipur's experience with state-making led to a weak and contested authority structure, and also to the salience of multiple identities. A highly fragmented social structure there reinforced the salience of multiple identities. The introduction of democracy sparked off a scramble for state-making by the elite representing different social groups. They

invested in and worked through community-specific political organizations, deploying narrow identities to mobilize support over sectional interests. These trends spiked the growth of state-wide political organizations that could have helped to pursue inclusionary policies. They also set the tone for multiple and spiralling group conflicts in Manipur.

Consolidation of the authority of the state and state-making leaders' success with mobilizing inclusive identities has resulted in the evolution of a Mizo state that is embedded in society while its leaders can remain largely autonomous from social groups that could constrain their authority. This has contributed to upholding the capability of the state, enabling its agencies to perform their basic security and development functions. As a result, statutory institutional arrangements in place have been successful in withstanding shocks and managing contestations. The better social control of state leaders compared to their rivals' was, in conjunction with other factors, also crucial for restoration of peace in Mizoram. The continued sustenance of Mizoram's peace will, however, depend on state leaders' commitment to state-wide inclusionary policies and practices. In Manipur, the state's poor social control has led, on the one hand, to the poor downward reach of the state, and on the other, to the continuing fragmentation of its society. State leaders often find themselves powerless and with little legitimacy in society. This has had negative consequences for state capability, to perform statutory functions. Poor state capability has prevented leaders from either reforming institutional arrangements or taking decisive steps to resolve group contestations through coalition making. Rival social groups, many of them armed, have proliferated seeking to exercise coercive powers. Poor capacity of state agencies to act as objective regulators of group contestations has led to these conflicts frequently leading to breakdown.

The rest of the volume is organized in the following manner: I explore the historical process of state-making in Manipur and Mizoram in Chapters 2 and 3 respectively (Section I). In Chapter 4 I explore identity mobilization in Manipur, followed by a similar exploration in the case of Mizoram (Chapter 5). These two chapters make up Section II. In Section III I conduct the test of state capability by systematically comparing how agencies of the state in Manipur (Chapter 6) and

Mizoram (Chapter 7) perform in terms of their basic functions. In the Conclusion (Chapter 8), I try to draw some lessons for the research in terms of the overall argument, as well as the manner in which the research findings open out to larger issues around state-making, state capability, and collective identity construction and mobilization, and how they can help to better inform policy responses to the crisis in the Northeast.

NOTES

1. Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, and Tripura.
2. These include rebels, government forces, and civilians killed in separatist and ethnic clashes, and that involved one or the other rebel group. According to the Census of India (2001), the total population of the Northeastern region is 38 million.
3. The Northeast makes up a mere 4 per cent of India's population. Yet it accounts for 58 of the 114 languages and 100 of the 600 tribes listed by the Census of India (2001).
4. These include China, with which India fought a war in 1962, Bangladesh, and Myanmar. National leaders have often accused the last two of sheltering rebel groups from Northeastern states.
5. Assam passed into colonial control in 1833. A colonial presence was established in the Naga Hills in 1876. Manipur and the Lushai Hills were annexed in 1891. Large tracts of Arunachal Pradesh, bordering China, continued to remain unadministered and unpenetrated by the state, down to 1947.
6. Earlier called Excluded Areas and Partially Excluded Areas, these enclaves have now been carved out as Autonomous District Councils (ADCs).
7. The armed rebellion by a section of the Nagas, starting in 1949, and that by the Mizos in 1966 were the first of these challenges. The resultant counter-insurgency infrastructure established by the central state has proliferated to cover most parts of the region.
8. Such as the Shillong-based North Eastern Council set up in 1972 and the Central Ministry of Development of Northeastern Region (M-DONER) in 2001.
9. There are, on the whole, two sources of data on the violence in the Northeast: that of the central government, provided by the Ministry of Home Affairs (available at http://mha.gov.in/annual_reports.htm), and the ones provided by the Institute of Conflict Management, or ICM (available at <http://www.satp.org>). According to its own admission, the ICM data is 'compiled from news reports and is provisional'. There are significant discrepancies in

data provided by the two sources. I have mostly used the home ministry data.

10. These figures have been tabulated by the author from data provided by the ICM, available on its website (www.satp.org)
11. A piece in a local daily noted: 'We are at the peak of (violence) cycle...and mayhem has become the order of the day' ('Belling the Cat', *Imphal Free Press*, Imphal, 11 November 2004).
12. Prominent among these is the Naga–Kuki, Metei–Pangal, and Kuki–Paite clashes in the 1990s, with their heavy toll of life (see Parratt 2005 for details), and the simmering Naga–Metei tensions today.
13. A piece captioned 'Brave New Phase of Mizoram' described the change in the following words: 'Mizoram has tasted and savoured peace for seventeen years now. After two decades of insurgency and its related sufferings, peace has been sweet indeed' (*Telegraph*, Guwahati, 22 August 2003).
14. Groups such as the Maras, Chakmas, Hmars, and Brus have, at various times, demanded better access to opportunities and resources. In 1997 a large number of Brus fled the state for neighbouring Tripura, alleging violence by Mizo social organizations such as the YMA and Mizo Zirlai Pawl (MZP). These organizations have also been known to target other non-Mizo communities, particularly immigrants from Assam and from Myanmar.
15. *Telegraph*, Guwahati, 22 August 2003.
16. Those included, among other measures, clamping dusk-to-dawn curfew and restrictions on movement of civilian population throughout the district. These controls were lifted only in 1972 (See 'Counter Insurgency at its Best', *Hindustan Times*, New Delhi, 27 June 1978).
17. For an account of the impact of Village Grouping on the lives of the people, see Nunthara (1981).
18. For a discussion see Parrat (2005: 176–8).
19. Refer backgrounders for details: <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/states>.
20. The US Committee of Refugees in its World Refugee Survey 2003 quoted in *The Times of India*, Guwahati, 2 July 2004. Other reports confirm the large number of conflict induced displacement, particularly in Assam, Manipur, and Tripura. See Hussain (2005).
21. Compared to the all-India literacy rate of 65.38 per cent the literacy rate in the Northeast stands at 68.77 per cent. Infant mortality rate (IMR) in Manipur was 25 (per 1000 births) and 23 in Mizoram, while the national rate was a high 68 (Government of India 2006a: 4–5).
22. Of special significance in this regard was the 'North East Package' worth some \$2.23 billion for improving the region's physical and social infrastructure. See Ahmad (2000). One of the principal tasks of the central M-DONER set up to coordinate development interventions for the region is to ensure that all central departments spend at least 10 per cent of their annual resources in the region (Government of India 2006a: 8).

23. The ratio of state government employees to the total population in the 1980s was 1:17 in Nagaland, 1:20 in Mizoram, and 1:29 in Tripura, compared to the all-India figure of 1:113 (Verghese 1996: 340). In Manipur, in 1999, as much as fifth of the total population was directly dependent on the public sector for its livelihood (Lahiri *et al.* 2002: 32).
24. Article 356 the Indian Constitution authorizes the central government to assume direct rule of a state where it is satisfied that a case of 'failure of constitutional machinery' has arisen (Constitution of India, p. 155., <http://lawmin.nic.in/coi.htm>).
25. See, for example, Collier and Hoffer (2001), and Bates (1999).
26. See for a discussion, Syiemlieh (1989).
27. Also see Collier and Hoffer (2001) for similar conclusions, though different interpretation.
28. For a similar argument see Chandhoke (2005).
29. For a similar argument concerning sub-Saharan Africa, see Addison and Murshed (2001).
30. Functions of the state in India are divided between the Central List, the State List, and the Concurrent List. Police, judiciary, and social security, all figure in the State List, so do much of the taxation functions. (Constitution of India, <http://lawmin.nic.in/coi.htm>). It could be argued that the central state has effectively taken over many of these functions in much of the Northeast. While on one hand this reflects state failure, it is also a dynamic that is a function of the central state's interaction with the sub-national states.
31. It has been claimed that Mizo leaders strongly declined offers of central leaders to help resolve intra-Mizoram conflicts, retaining the initiative in their own hands.
32. Illustrative here is the long-standing demand for bringing the Autonomous District Councils in the state's hill districts under the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. This would greatly enhance the powers and autonomy of these bodies of local administration for the tribals, something that is strongly opposed by Metei groups.
33. A point confirmed by Fukuyama (2004: 30) when he links institutional development to the structure of the particular society.
34. This phrase is borrowed from Migdal (2001: 26).
35. For a forceful example of this argument, see the comparative study of four African states by Hesselbein *et al.* (2006).
36. Fukuyama (2004: 91) says something similar when he suggest going beyond organizational and institutional competencies to emphasize the role of cultural factors, of norms, and values, and crucially of leadership in determining institutional performance.